

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Marion Berkley: A Story for Girls, by Elizabeth B. Comins

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Marion Berkley: A Story for Girls

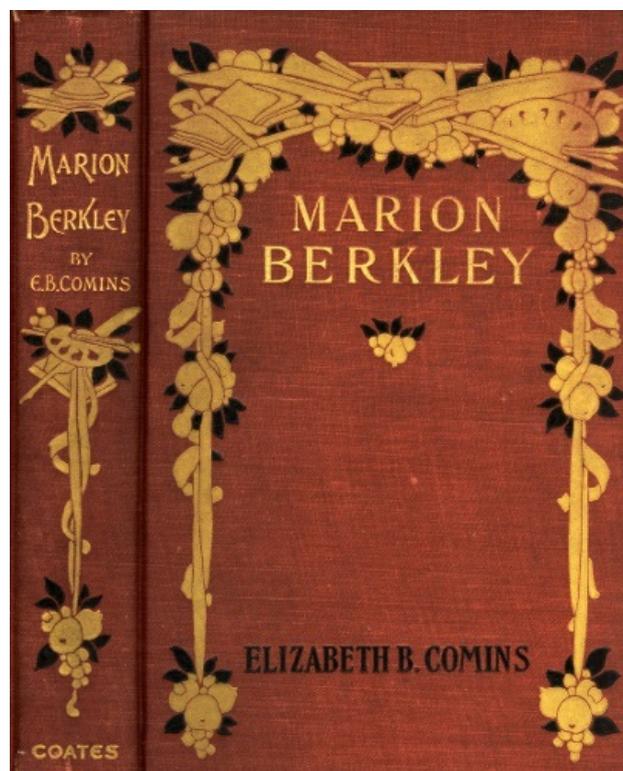
Author: Elizabeth B. Comins

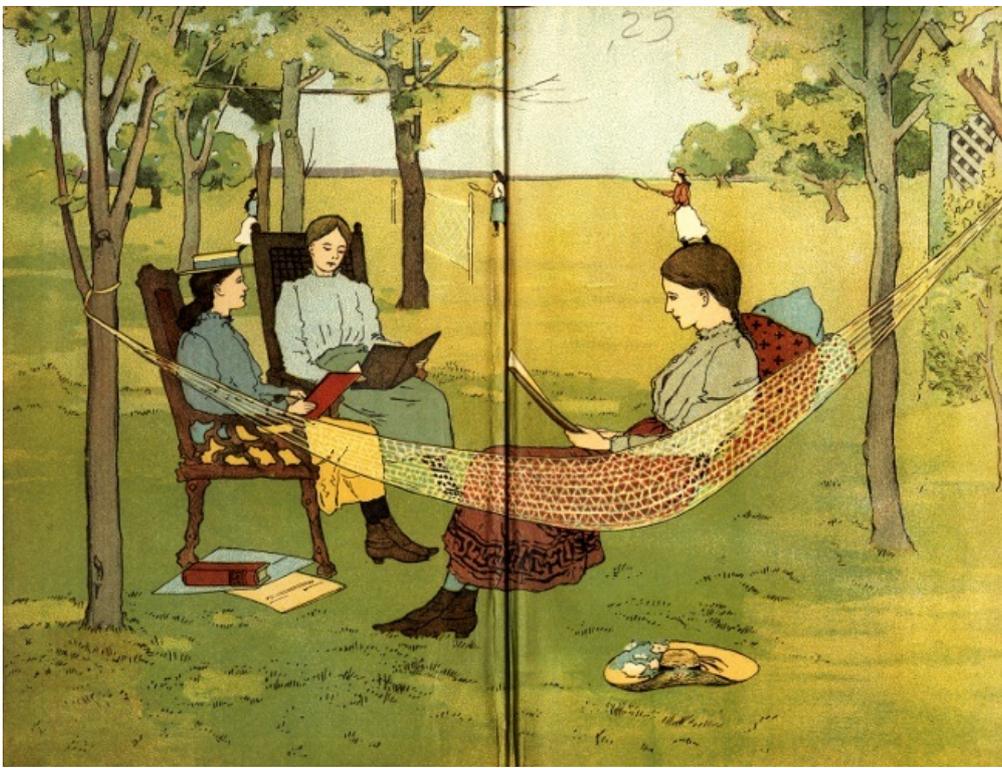
Release date: December 1, 2012 [EBook #41524]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Juliet Sutherland, Mary Meehan and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MARION BERKLEY: A STORY FOR GIRLS ***





MARION BERKLEY

A STORY FOR GIRLS

BY ELIZABETH B. COMINS

PHILADELPHIA
HENRY T. COATES & CO

Copyright, 1870, by A. K. Loring.

TO
MY TWIN SISTERS
THIS BOOK
IS MOST AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED.



THE TWO BOUQUETS.

MARION BERKLEY.

CHAPTER I.

EN ROUTE FOR SCHOOL.

"Come on, Mab! the carriage is round; only fifteen minutes to get to the depot."

"Yes, I am coming. O mamma! do fasten this carpet-bag for me. Dear me! there goes the button off my gloves. Was there ever any one in such a flutter?"

"Never mind, dear; it is too late to sew it on now. Here is your bag; come, we must not stop another moment; there is Fred calling again."

"I say, Mab," shouted the first speaker from the bottom of the stairs, "if you're coming, why don't you come? I shan't leave until you bid me good-by, and I know I shall lose the ball-match. You do keep a fellow waiting so eternally long!"

His sister was downstairs, and had her arms around his neck before he had finished speaking, and said to him, in a tone of mock gravity, "Now, Frederic, don't get excited; always follow my good example, and keep cool. There now!" she exclaimed, as she gave him a hearty kiss; "be off. I forgot all about your ball-match, and all the amends I can make is to hope the Isthmians will beat the Olympics all to pieces."

"Come, come," called Mrs. Berkley from the inside of the carriage, "we have not a moment to lose."

"Good-by, Hannah. One more kiss for Mab, Charlie. Good-by, all;" then to the coachman, as she whisked into the carriage, "Drive on, John, just as fast as you can."

The carriage-door was shut with a snap; off went the horses, and Mrs. Berkley and her daughter were soon at the Western depot, where the latter was to take the cars for B—, a little New England town, where she attended boarding-school. They were very late at the depot, and Mrs. Berkley had only time for a fond kiss and a "Write often, darling," when the bell rung, and she was forced to leave the car, feeling a little uneasy that her daughter was obliged to take her journey alone. Just as the cars were starting, Marion put her head out of a window, and called to her mother, "O mamma! Flo is here; isn't that jolly? No fear now of—" The last part of the sentence was unintelligible, and all Mrs. Berkley got was a bright smile, and a wave of the hand, as the train moved out of the depot.

"Now, Flo, I call this providential," exclaimed Marion; "for, I can tell you, I did not relish the

prospect of my solitary ride. Just hand me your bag, and I'll put it in the rack with my budgets. This seat is empty; suppose we turn it over, and then we shall be perfectly comfortable. Now I say this is decidedly scrumptious;" and she settled herself back, with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Why, Mab, what made you so late? I had been here fifteen minutes before you came, all on the *qui vive*, hoping to see some one I knew; but I never dreamed you would be here. I thought you were going up yesterday with the Thayers."

"I did intend to; but Fred had a sort of spread last night for the Isthmians, so I stayed over. I expect Miss Stiefbach will give me one of her annihilators, but I guess I can stand it. I've been withered so many times, that the glances of those 'eagle eyes' have rather lost their effect."

"Well, I only wish I had a little more of your spirit of resistance. What a lovely hat you have! Just suits your style. Where did you get it?"

"Why, it's only my old sun-down dyed and pressed over, and bound with the velvet off my old brown rep. I trimmed it myself, and feel mighty proud of it."

"Trimmed it yourself!—really? Well, I never saw such a girl; you can do anything! I couldn't have done it to save my life. I only wish to gracious I could; it would be very convenient sometimes."

And so the two girls rattled on for some time, in true school-girl fashion; but at last they each took a book, and settled back into their respective corners. Before very long, however, Marion tossed her book on to the opposite seat; for they were coming to Lake Cochituate, and nothing could be lovelier than the view which was stretching itself before them. I do not think that half the people of Massachusetts realize how beautiful this piece of water is; but I believe, if they had seen it then, they surely must have appreciated its charms.

It was about the middle of September, and the leaves were just beginning to turn; indeed, some of them were already quite brilliant. The day was soft and hazy,—just such a one as we often have in early autumn, and the slight mist of the atmosphere served to soften and harmonize the various colors of the landscape. The lake itself was as clear and smooth as polished glass, and every tree on the borders was distinctly reflected on its clear bosom; while the delicate blue sky, with the few feathery clouds floating across it seemed to be far beneath the surface of the water.

Marion was at heart a true artist, and had all a true artist's intense love of nature; she now sat at the window, completely absorbed in the scene before her, her eye and mind taking in all the beauties of form, color, and reflection; and as the cars bore her too swiftly by she uttered a sigh of real regret.

Perhaps there will be no better time than the present for giving my young readers a description of my heroine. My tale will contain no thrilling incidents, no hairbreadth escapes, or any of those startling events with which ideas of heroism are generally associated. It will be a simple story of a school-girl's life; its fun and frolic; its temptations, trials, and victories.

Marion Berkley was a remarkably beautiful girl; but she owed her beauty chiefly to the singular contrast of her hair and eyes. The former was a beautiful golden color, while her eyes, eyebrows, and lashes were very dark. Her nose and mouth, though well formed, could not be considered in any way remarkable. When in conversation her face became animated, the expression changed with each inward emotion, and her eyes sparkled brilliantly; but when in repose they assumed a softer, dreamier look, which seemed to hint of a deeper nature beneath this gay and often frivolous exterior.

Mr. Berkley was very fond of his daughter. He had a large circle of acquaintances, many of whom were in the habit of dining, or passing the evening, at his house, and it pleased him very much to have them notice her. Marion was by no means a vain girl; yet these attentions from those so much older than herself were rather inclined to turn her head. Fortunately, her mother was a very lovely and sensible woman, whose good example and sound advice served to counteract those influences which might otherwise have proved very injurious.

And now that I have introduced my friends to Marion, it is no more than fair that I should present them to her companion. Florence Stevenson was a bright, pretty brunette, of sixteen. She and Marion had been friends ever since they made "mud pies" together in the Berkleys' back yard. They shared the same room at school, got into the same scrapes, kept each other's secrets, and were, in short, almost inseparable. Florence had lost her mother when she was very young, and her father's house was ruled over by a well-meaning, but disagreeable maiden-aunt, who, by her constant and oftentimes unnecessary fault-finding, made Florence so unhappy, that she had hailed with delight her father's proposition of going away to school. For three years Florence and Marion had been almost daily together, being only separated during vacations, when, as Florence lived five miles from Boston, it was impossible that they should see as much of each other as they would have liked.

About four in the afternoon, the girls reached their destination; rather tired out by their long ride, but, nevertheless, in excellent spirits. Miss Stiefbach, after a few remarks as to the propriety of being a day before, rather than an hour behind time, dismissed them to their rooms to prepare for supper, where for the present we will leave them.

CHAPTER II.

SCHOOL.

Miss Stiefbach and her sister Christine, were two excellent German ladies who, owing to a sudden reverse of fortune, were obliged to leave their mother-country, hoping to find means of supporting themselves in America. They were most kindly received by the gentlemen to whom they brought letters of introduction, and with their assistance they had been able to open a school for young ladies; and now, at the end of seven years, they found themselves free from debt, and at the head of one of the best boarding-schools in the United States.

Miss Stiefbach, the head and director of the establishment, was a stern, cold, forbidding woman; acting on what she considered to be the most strictly conscientious principles, but never unbending in the slightest degree her frigid, repelling manner. To look at her was enough to have told you her character at once. She was above the medium height, excessively thin and angular in her figure, and was always dressed in some stiff material, which, as Marion Berkley expressed it, "looked as if it had been starched and frozen, and had never been thawed out."

Miss Christine was fifteen years her junior, and her exact opposite in appearance as well as in disposition: she was short and stout, and rosy-cheeked, not at all pretty; but having such a kind smile, such a thoroughly good-natured face, that the girls all thought she was really beautiful, and would feel more repentance at one of her grieved looks, than they would for forty of Miss Stiefbach's frigid reprimands. And well they might love her, for she certainly was a kind friend to them. Many a school-girl trick or frolic had she concealed, which, if it had come under the searching eyes of her sister, would have secured the perpetrators as stern a rebuke, and perhaps as severe a punishment, as if they had committed some great wrong.

Miss Stiefbach's school was by no means what is generally called a "fashionable school." The parents of the young girls who went there wished that their daughters should receive not only a sound education, but that they should be taught many useful things not always included in the list of a young lady's accomplishments.

There were thirty scholars, ranging from the ages of seventeen to ten; two in each room. They were obliged to make their own beds, and take all the care of their rooms, except the sweeping. Every Saturday morning they all assembled in the school-room to darn their stockings, and do whatever other mending might be necessary. Formerly Miss Stiefbach herself had superintended their work, but for the last year she had put it under the charge of Miss Christine; an arrangement which was extremely pleasing to the girls, making for them a pleasant pastime of what had always been an irksome duty. After their mending was done, and their Bible lesson for the following Sabbath learned, the rest of the day was at their own disposal. Those who had friends in the neighborhood generally went to visit them; while the others took long walks, or occupied themselves in doing whatever best pleased them. There were of course some restrictions; but these were so slight, and so reasonable, that no one ever thought of complaining, and the day was almost always one of real enjoyment. Miss Stiefbach herself was an Episcopalian, and always required that every one, unless prevented by illness, should attend that church in the morning; but, in the afternoon, any girl who wished might go to any other church, first signifying her intention to one or the other of the sisters.

Some of Miss Stiefbach's ancestors had suffered from religious persecutions in Germany, and, although she felt it her duty to have her scholars attend what she considered to be the "true church," she could not have it on her conscience to be the means of preventing any one from worshipping God in whatever manner their hearts dictated.

CHAPTER III.

MONSIEUR BÉRANGER.

It was the half-hour intermission at school; and Marion and Florence had taken Julia Thayer up into their room to give her a taste of some of the goodies they had brought from home with them. Their room was one of the largest in the house, having two deep windows; one in front, the other on the side. The side window faced the west, and in it the girls had placed a very pretty flower-stand filled with plants; an ivy was trained against the side, and a lovely mirandia hung from the top. The front window had a long seat fitted into it, and as it overlooked the street it was here that the girls almost always sat at their work or studies.

"Now, Julie," began Marion, "which will you have, sponge or currant?"

"Why, you are getting awfully stingy!" exclaimed Flo; "give her some of both."

"No, she can't have both; it is altogether too extravagant. This is my treat, and you need not make any comments."

"Well, if I can't have but one, I think I'll try sponge."

"Sensible girl! you knew it would not keep long. There, you shall have an Havana orange to pay you for your consideration."

"Please, ma'am," said Flo, in a voice of mock humility, "may I give her some of my French candies?"

"Yes, if you'll be a very good girl, and never interfere again when I am 'head-cook and bottle-washer.'"

The girls sat round the room chatting and eating; Flora and Julia were on the bed, when Marion, who was at the front window, jumped up on the seat, and called out: "O Flo! Julie! do come here! Just look at this man coming down the street. Such a swell!"

The two girls rushed precipitately to the window, and they all stood looking out with intense interest.

"I do declare, he is coming in here! Who in the world can he be? How he struts!" said Marion. "What a startling mustache! I do wonder who in the world he is."

"Allow me to see, young ladies; perhaps I can inform you," said a calm voice directly in their ears; and, turning, they beheld Miss Stiefbach. She had entered the room just as they began their comments, and now stood directly behind them. Florence and Julia fell back in dismay, and for a second a look of amazement passed over Marion's face; but it was only a second, for she instantly replied to Miss Stiefbach, in the same eager tone she had used when speaking to her companions: "Jump right up here; you can see him better, for he is underneath on the steps."

Miss Stiefbach looked at her aghast, and for once she was overpowered. She, the calm, the dignified, the stately Miss Stiefbach—jump! It was too much. If a glance could have transfixed her, Marion would have been immovable for life. Miss Stiefbach's usually pale face was flushed to a burning red, and her voice was choked with suppressed excitement, as she said, "Young ladies, you will go at once to the school-room. Miss Berkley, report to me in my study, immediately after the close of school;" and she sailed out of the room.

When she was gone, the girls stood and looked at each other, not exactly knowing whether to laugh or cry; but Marion decided for herself, by sitting down on the floor, and bursting into a fit of uncontrollable laughter. Florence held up her finger warningly, "Hush-sh-sh! Mab, she'll hop out from under the bed, like as not; do come downstairs."

"O girls! girls! that look!" shouted Marion. "Oh, I shall die! She was furious. Won't I catch it?"

"O Mab, how did you dare? It was awfully impudent."

"I know it, and I'm sure I don't know what made me say it. I never stopped to think; it just popped out, and I would not have lost that scene for anything;" and Marion went off again into one of her laughing-fits.

"O Mab, do stop!" said Julia, rather impatiently; "you'll get us into a pretty scrape."

"Well, I won't laugh another bit, if I can help it; come on!" and, jumping up, Marion ran downstairs, the others following her, into the school-room; when, what was their astonishment to see before them "the swell," who had been the cause of all their trouble, standing talking to Miss Stiefbach. They went quietly to their seats, wondering what would happen next. Marion whispered to Flo, "The new French teacher; a man, as I live, and not very old either. Won't we have fun?"

"Young ladies of the first class in French go into the anteroom, where M. Béranger will examine you. Miss Christine, accompany them, and preserve order." As Miss Stiefbach said this in her usual calm tones, Marion's recollections were almost too much for her; but she had a little laugh all to herself, behind the cover of her desk, as she took out her books.

The former French teacher had been a little, quiet woman, who had allowed herself to be ruled over by her pupils; but she had gone back to France, and Miss Stiefbach had secured the services of M. Béranger, who was recommended to her, both for his complete knowledge of his own language, and for his high moral character. The latter was indeed to be considered, for many foreigners, calling themselves professors, often prove to be mere worthless adventurers, knowing very little themselves of what they attempt to teach others, and being in other respects unfit for respectable society.

The young ladies were in quite a little flutter of expectation, as they took their seats, for Mr. Stein, their old music-teacher, was the only gentleman teacher of the establishment, and he was decidedly different from this rather elegant-looking Frenchman. M. Béranger came in, bowed in a dignified manner, took his chair, and at once began questioning the girls as to what they had studied, how far they were advanced, etc. Marion, who was ready for anything, and thought she might as well have a little more fun for the scolding that she knew was in store for her, tried hard to get up a little excitement; pretending not to understand when M. Béranger spoke to her; replying to all his questions in English, notwithstanding his repeated ejaculations of "Mademoiselle, je ne vous comprends pas du tout; parlez Français." But Marion would not "parlez Français," disregarding the beseeching looks of Miss Christine, and either made no reply, or obstinately spoke in English. For some time M. Béranger took no notice of her conduct, but went on questioning the rest of the class; assuring the timid by his polite, considerate patience, and

quietly correcting the mistakes of the more confident. At last, however, as Marion asked him some trifling question, he looked her directly in the face, and simply replied, "M'lle Berkley, si vous parlez l'Anglais, il faut que je vous mette dans la classe des petites filles."

Marion looked at him a moment, in doubt whether he could be in earnest; but there was no mistaking that calm, determined look. Two things were before her: to rebel, and go down to the lower class in disgrace, or to yield gracefully to what she knew to be right. She chose the latter, and replied, "Monsieur, je pense que je resterai ici." As she said this, there was a slight flush of shame on her cheeks, and she bent her head with a little gesture, which seemed to beg pardon for her rudeness. At any rate, M. Béranger so understood it, and he ever afterwards entertained a secret respect and admiration for M'lle Berkley.

That night, in her own room, Marion thus explained her singular conduct: "You see, Flo, I wanted to find out, in the first place, what sort of stuff he was made of; whether he was to rule us, or we him, as we did poor little mademoiselle; and I found out pretty quickly. He came here to teach, not to be made game of. In two weeks, I expect to have the true Parisian accent, and to have entirely forgotten all the English I ever knew. Bonne nuit, ma chère;" and Marion turned over, and was asleep in five minutes.

CHAPTER IV.

MARION'S SENTENCE.

Immediately after the close of school Marion betook herself to the private study of Miss Stiefbach. This was a small room back of the drawing-room, fitted up very cosily and comfortably, and which no one but the sisters ever entered, except on state occasions, or under circumstances like the present. It must be confessed that Marion did not feel very comfortable as the door closed behind her, and Miss Stiefbach, who was sitting at her desk, turned round, motioning her to be seated. Marion knew she had done very wrong, and was really sorry for it, for, although none of the scholars could be said to have much affection for Miss Stiefbach, they all held her in the most profound respect, and no such direct attack upon her dignity had ever been made within the memory of any of the present pupils.

Miss Stiefbach cleared her throat, and commenced speaking in her most impressive and awful voice. "Miss Berkley" (the fact that she addressed Marion in this very distant manner proved at once that she was very angry), "your conduct to me this day has been such as I have never seen in any young lady since I became the head of this establishment, and I consider it deserves a severe punishment. The remarks which I overheard this morning, as I entered your room, were enough in themselves to have merited a stern rebuke, even if they had not been followed by a direct insult to myself. I am surprised indeed, that any young ladies brought up in refined society should have made use of such expressions as '*swell*' and—and—other words of a like nature." It was evidently so hard for Miss Stiefbach to pronounce the word, even in a tone of intense disapproval, that Marion, despite her uneasiness, could not help being amused; but no trace of her feelings could be seen in her face; she sat before her teacher perfectly quiet,—so quiet, that Miss Stiefbach could not tell whether she was deeply repentant or supremely indifferent.

"I have decided," resumed Miss Stiefbach, "that as M. Béranger was indirectly connected with the affair, you shall apologize to me before the whole school, and in his presence, on the next French day, which will be Friday. I should not have subjected you to this mortification, if you had shown any willingness to apologize to me here; but as you seem entirely insensible of the impropriety of your conduct, I consider that the punishment is perfectly just."

Marion rose; for one second her eyes had flashed ominously when her sentence was delivered, but it was the only sign she gave of being surprised or otherwise moved. Perceiving that Miss Stiefbach had nothing more to say, she left the room as quietly as she had entered it. Several of the girls were standing at the study door waiting for her to come out, for the whole story had by this time become pretty freely circulated, and every one was impatient to know the result of the interview. Marion passed them without a glance, and without speaking, but with the most perfect *sang froid*, and went directly upstairs to her room. But once there her forced composure gave way, and, throwing herself on the bed, she burst into a passion of tears.

Florence, who had been anxiously waiting for Marion to come up, knelt down beside her, smoothing her hair, calling her by all their fond, pet names, and doing everything she could to soothe and quiet her, but never once asking the questions that were uppermost in her own mind, for she knew that, as soon as this first hysterical fit of weeping was over, her friend would tell her all. She waited some time, until she became almost frightened, for Marion's sobs shook her from head to foot, and she seemed unable to control herself.

Suddenly Marion sprang up, and exclaimed in the most excited, passionate tones, "Florence! Florence! what do you think she is going to make me do? Think of the most humiliating thing you can!"

"Indeed, my darling, I cannot guess," replied Flo, while she had hard work to restrain her own tears.

"I have got to apologize to her before the whole school, and before M. Béranger next Friday. Oh! I think it is abominable. She wouldn't have made any other girl do it, but she knows how proud I am, and she thinks now she'll humble me. Oh, it is too hard, too hard to bear!" and Marion threw herself back on the pillow, and sobbed aloud.

Poor Florence was completely overpowered. Distressed as she was for her friend, and furiously indignant with Miss Stiefbach, she hardly dared to comfort and sympathize with her, except by caresses, for fear of increasing her excitement, and she could only throw her arms round Marion's neck, kissing her repeatedly, and exclaiming again and again, "I wish I could help you!—I wish I could help you!"

But after a while the violence of Marion's grief and anger subsided, but left its traces in a severe headache; her temples throbbed fearfully, and her face and hands were burning hot.

Florence wet a cloth in cold water, and laid it on her head, and, knowing that Marion would prefer to be alone, she kissed her quietly, and as her eyes were closed was about to leave the room without speaking, when Marion called her back, exclaiming, "Don't tell the girls anything about it; they'll find it out soon enough."

"No, dear, I won't mention it, if I can help it. You lie still and try to get to sleep. Don't come downstairs to supper. I will excuse you to Miss Christine, and bring you up a cup of tea."

"No! no! no!" excitedly repeated Marion; "do no such thing. I wouldn't stay up from supper, if it killed me to go down; it would only prove to old Stiffback how deep she has cut, and I mean she shall find it will take more than *she* can do to humble me. Be sure and let me know when the bell rings. I don't think there is much danger of my going to sleep; but for fear I should, you come up before tea,—won't you?"

Flo promised, and giving her another kiss, and advising her again to lie still and go to sleep,—a thing which she knew it was impossible for Marion to do,—she left the room.

Left to herself Marion became a prey to her own varying emotions. Pride, anger, and mortification were rankling in her breast. When she thought of the coming disgrace which she was to endure, she sobbed and wept as if her heart would break; and then the image of Miss Stiefbach, with her calm, cool face, and deliberate manner, seeming so much as if she enjoyed giving such pain, rose before her mind, and she clenched her hands, and shut her teeth together, looking as she felt, willing to do almost anything to revenge herself.

In her inmost heart she had been truly sorry for having spoken so impertinently to her teacher, and she had gone to the study fully prepared to acknowledge that she had done wrong, and to ask pardon for her fault. But Miss Stiefbach, by presupposing that she felt no regret for her conduct, or any desire to apologize, had frozen all such feelings, and roused all the rebellious part of the girl's nature.

For some time Marion tossed restlessly from side to side; but at last, finding it impossible to quiet herself, much less to sleep, she got up, bathed her face, and prepared to arrange her disordered hair.

To her excited imagination, it seemed almost as if she could hear the girls downstairs discussing the whole matter. Every laugh she heard she believed to be at her expense, and she dreaded meeting her companions, knowing full well that her looks and actions would be the subject of general comment.

Throughout the school Marion was not a general favorite; almost all the girls admired her, but there were few who felt that they really knew her.

She was acknowledged by almost all her companions to be the brightest and prettiest girl in the school, and was apparently on good terms with all of them; but that was all. Many who would have liked to know her better, and who would have been glad to make advances of intimate friendship, felt themselves held back from doing so, by a certain haughty, reserved manner, which she at times assumed, and by her own evident disinclination for anything more than an amicable school-girl acquaintance.

Marion was quick to perceive the petty weaknesses and follies of these around her, and her keen sense of the ludicrous, combined with a habit of saying sharp, sarcastic things, often led her to draw out these foibles, and show them up in their most absurd light.

No one knew her faults better than Marion herself, and she was constantly struggling to overcome them; but her pride and strong will led her to conceal her real feelings, and often when she was at heart angry with herself, and ashamed of her wilful, perhaps unkind, behavior, she would assume an aspect of supreme indifference, effectually deceiving every one as to what was really passing in her mind.

She kept her struggles to herself. No one but her friend Florence and Miss Christine knew how sincerely she longed to conquer her faults, and how severe these struggles were.

The knowledge of them had come to Miss Christine by accident. One day Marion had said something unusually sharp and cutting to one of her companions, but had appeared perfectly unconscious of having done anything unkind, and had gone to her own room humming a tune, with the most perfect nonchalance.

Miss Christine shortly after followed her, wishing to talk with her, and show her the folly and wickedness of persisting in such conduct. She had found her door closed, and, knocking softly and receiving no answer, she gently opened it, when what was her astonishment to find Marion stretched upon the floor, weeping violently. She went to her, and, kneeling down beside her, called her by name. Marion, thus surprised, could not conceal her grief, or summon her cold, indifferent manner, and, leaning her head on Miss Christine's shoulder, she sobbed out her sorrow, shame, and repentance.

Never since had Miss Christine in any way alluded to the event, or by any means tried to force herself into Marion's confidence; but this glimpse into her heart had showed her what she might otherwise never have known, that Marion saw and regretted her own faults and failings, and was resolved to conquer them. From that time a secret bond of sympathy was established between pupil and scholar, and though no word was spoken, a mild, reproachful glance from Miss Christine, or her hand laid gently on Marion's shoulder, had often checked a rising exclamation, or cutting sarcasm, which, no matter how sharply it might have struck its victim, would have rebounded with greater and deeper pain to the very heart of Marion.

At home Marion had little or nothing to call forth the disagreeable qualities of her disposition. Surrounded by love and admiration on every side, the darling of her mother, and the pride and glory of her father, to whom she appeared almost faultless, it was no wonder that she found it hard to get on smoothly when thrown among a number of girls her own age, many of whom, jealous of her superior beauty and intelligence, would have been glad of any opportunity of getting her into trouble.

Then it was that the worst side of her nature showed itself; and she was shocked when she discovered how many faults she had which she had never thought of before.

Her sharp, sarcastic speeches gave her father infinite amusement when she was at home; but there her remarks rarely wounded any one; but at school she made her words tell, and she knew that her tongue was her greatest enemy.

But towards the younger girls Marion was always kind and good-natured. No one ever told such delightful stories, or made such pretty paper-dolls, or drew them such lovely pictures as Marion Berkley, and it was always a mystery to them why the "big girls" did not all love her.

Downstairs poor Florence had been having a hard time. When she first made her appearance in the library there had been a general rush towards her, and she was greeted with a perfect volley of questions, which it needed her utmost ingenuity to parry.

She knew Julia Thayer had a right to know all, for she had been personally concerned in the matter, besides being, next to Flo, Marion's dearest friend; but she saw that she could not tell her without further exciting the curiosity of the other girls, and she was forced to take her book, and appear to be deeply interested in her studies. But, although her lips monotonously whispered page after page of history, she knew no more about her lesson than if she had been reading Hindoostanee.

What was her astonishment when she heard close beside her Marion's voice, asking, in a perfectly natural tone, "Did Miss Christine say six pages of English History, or seven?"

Florence gave a quick glance at Marion's face, and saw that, although she was a little pale, she showed no signs of the storm that had so lately disturbed her. Neither did she throughout the evening appear other than bright and cheerful, effectually silencing by her own apparent ease any surmises or questions in which her companions might have indulged, and they all supposed that she had received a severe reprimand, and that there the matter would end.

But all agreed with Sarah Brown, who exclaimed, "How Miss Stiefbach had ever swallowed that pill so easily was a perfect mystery!"

CHAPTER V.

THE APOLOGY.

"Well, Flo, I've hit it!" exclaimed Marion to Florence, as they were sitting together in their room Thursday afternoon.

"What do you mean?—hit what?"

"Why, I mean I've hit upon a plan; no, not exactly a plan;—I have decided what my apology shall be."

"Oh!" said Florence, "do you know just what you are going to say?"

"No, not precisely; that is, I have not yet settled upon any exact form of words, but I have got my ideas together, and I really think it will be something quite out of the common line."

Florence looked up inquisitively, for Marion's face or voice by no means expressed the repugnance which she had heretofore shown whenever she had spoken of the coming apology. In fact she looked rather triumphant, and a little, amused smile played about the corners of her mouth, as she bent over her work.

"Now, Mab," exclaimed Florence, "I know you are up to something! Do tell me what it is that evidently amuses you so much?"

"Oh, nothing particular," replied Marion; but in a tone which said plainly enough that there was something very particular indeed.

"Now, Mab, you needn't tell me!"

"That is exactly what I don't mean to do," provokingly replied Marion.

"Oh, don't be disagreeable! You know I am positively dying with curiosity; so out with it!" and Florence tossed her own work on to the bed, and, catching hold of Marion's canvas, threw it behind her, as she established herself on her friend's lap.

"Well, I'm sorry, my dear; but if your life depends on my telling you anything particular to-day, I am afraid you will come to an early grave."

Florence laid her hands on Marion's shoulders, and looked steadily into her eyes. Marion met the look with a confident, amused smile, and exclaimed, "Well, Flo, you look as sober as a judge. I really believe you think I meditate murder; but I assure you Miss Stiefbach's life is in no danger from my hands."

"I'll tell you just what I do think, Marion. I believe you are going to refuse to apologize, and if you do, you will be worse off than you've been yet;" and Florence really looked as serious as if she were trying a case in court.

"No, Flo, you needn't trouble yourself on that score. I mean to apologize before the whole school, and M. Béranger to boot,—just as old Stiffy ordered."

"Well, I am glad of it! Not glad that it *must* be done, you know; but I was afraid you would try to get rid of it in some way; and I know that would make matters worse."

"No, I don't mean to get rid of it; I shall do it in the most approved style. Come, get up, miss; you're awfully heavy!"

Florence jumped up, considerably relieved, but still a little suspicious of her friend's intentions. At that moment Julia Thayer came into the room.

"O girls! you here?" she exclaimed. "I've been hunting for you everywhere."

"Well, I don't think you hunted much; we've been here ever since lessons were done," replied Marion.

"Take a seat, Miss Thayer, and make yourself at home," said Florence.

"Thank you, I was only waiting to be asked. Now, Marion, do tell me; have you decided what you are going to say to-morrow?"

"It is no use asking her; you can't get anything out of her. I've just tried my best."

"What! don't you mean to tell us, beforehand?"

"No."

"Not a word? not a syllable? Well, I do declare! I tell you what it is, Flo, she means to astonish us all by some wonderful production."

"I suppose most of the girls *will* be astonished, for I don't believe they know there is to be any apology at all."

"No, I don't think they suspect it," said Julia. "So much for knowing how to hold one's tongue."

"Well, Julia, I guess this is the first time you could be accused of that," laughingly replied Flo.

"That is a libel! Who held their tongue about Aunt Bettie's doughnuts, I should like to know?"

"Another rare instance," mischievously put in Marion; "put it down, Julia, you'll never have another chance."

"But, girls, what do you mean?" cried Julia, in a deprecating tone. "Do you think I run and tell everything I know?"

"No, dear, not a bit of it," replied Flo; "you are not quite so reserved as Marion, but I never heard any one accuse you of telling what you ought to keep to yourself, or, as the boys say, of 'peaching.'"

"There, Julia, don't look so forlorn, for mercy's sake!" exclaimed Marion. "You are so delightfully easy to tease; but I confess it was a very poor reward for your silence of the past two days, which (she added with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes) I know must have almost killed you."

Julia and Florence both laughed outright at this rather equivocal consolation, and at that moment the supper-bell rang.

Friday morning every girl was in her seat precisely as the clock struck nine; for it was French day, and consequently only the second appearance of M. Béranger, and the novelty of having him there at all had by no means worn off.

He entered the room, shortly after, and, having politely wished Miss Stiefbach and her sister good-morning, was about to pass into the anteroom, when Miss Stiefbach detained him.

"Excuse me, M. Béranger, but I must trouble you to remain here a few moments."

M. Béranger bowed with his usual grace, and Miss Stiefbach continued:—

"I regret to say (she did not look as if she regretted it at all) that a circumstance of a most painful nature has lately taken place in this school. One of my young ladies has done that which makes me deem it necessary to exact a public apology from her. As you were indirectly concerned in the matter, I think it proper that the apology should be made before you. Miss—"

"But, madame," hastily interrupted the astonished Frenchman, "I cannot imagine; there must be a meestake—I am a perfect stranger; if you will have the goodness to excuse me, I shall be one thousand times obliged;" and the poor man looked as if he himself was the culprit.

"It is impossible, monsieur," decidedly replied Miss Stiefbach; "one particular clause of her punishment was, that it should be made in your presence. Miss Berkley, you will please come forward."

During the above conversation a most profound silence had reigned throughout the room; the girls, with the exception of the initiated three, had looked from one to another, and then at the group on the platform, with faces expressive of the most intense astonishment, proving how wholly unsuspecting they had been; but as Marion's name was pronounced a light broke in upon every one, and all eyes were turned upon her as she left her seat.

Miss Stiefbach stood with her hands folded over each other in her usual stately attitude. M. Béranger looked infinitely annoyed and distressed, and twirled his watch-chain in a very nervous manner. Miss Christine had retired to the extreme end of the platform, and was trying to appear interested in a book; but her face had a sad, pained look, which showed how fully her sympathies were with her pupil.

Florence Stevenson buried her face in her hands; she could not bear to witness her friend's disgrace. Marion advanced quietly up between the rows of desks, and as she stepped upon the platform turned so as to face the school.

She never looked lovelier in her life; a bright color burned in her cheeks, and her eyes, always wonderfully beautiful, glowed with a strange light; but the expression of her face would have baffled the most scrutinizing observer. Calm, quiet, perfectly self-possessed, but without a particle of self-assurance, she stood, the centre of general observation.

Presently she spoke in a full, clear voice: "Miss Stiefbach, as M. Béranger evidently does not know how he is concerned in this matter, perhaps I had better explain the circumstances to him."

Miss Stiefbach bowed her consent, and Marion, turning towards the bewildered Frenchman, thus addressed him:—

"M. Béranger, last Wednesday morning, as I, with two of my companions, was in my room, which is in the front of the house, my attention was attracted towards a gentleman who was coming down the street, and I immediately called my two friends to the window that they might get a good view of him. Our interest was of course doubly increased when we saw the gentleman enter this garden. His whole appearance was so decidedly elegant (here M. Béranger, who began to see that he was the subject of her remarks, colored up to the roots of his hair) that we could not help giving our opinions of him, and I applied to him the word 'swell,' which in itself I acknowledge to be very inelegant; but my only excuse for using it is, that in this case it was so very expressive."

M. Béranger, despite his embarrassment, could hardly conceal a smile, while a suppressed murmur of amusement ran round the room. Miss Stiefbach looked hard at Marion, but her face was composed, and her manner quietly polite; she was apparently perfectly unconscious of having said anything to cause this diversion.

"While we were talking of him, Miss Stiefbach entered the room, and must have, unintentionally of course, overheard our comments, for the first intimation we had of her presence was this remark, which she made standing directly behind us: 'Young ladies, allow me to see; perhaps I can inform you.' And now occurred the remark which it was so exceedingly improper in me to make, and which justly gave so much offence to Miss Stiefbach." (Here Marion turned towards her teacher, who, as if to encourage her to proceed, bowed quite graciously.) "I was standing on the seat in the window, and consequently had the best view of the gentleman. In the excitement of the moment, regardless of the difference in our ages, and only remembering that we were impelled by one common object, I asked her to *jump* on to the seat beside me. Miss Stiefbach, for that rudeness I most sincerely ask your pardon. It was wrong, very wrong of me; I should have stepped aside, thus giving you an excellent opportunity of gratifying your desire to look at what is

rarely seen here,—a handsome man."

The perfect absurdity of Miss Stiefbach's jumping up in a window with a party of wild school-girls, for the sake of looking at a handsome man, or indeed for her to look at a man at any time with any degree of interest, could only be appreciated by those who were daily witnesses of her prim, stately ways. It certainly was too much for the gravity of the inhabitants of that school-room.



MARION APOLOGIZES.

M. Béranger bit his lip fiercely under his mustache; Miss Christine became suddenly very much interested in something out in the back yard; and the school-girls were obliged to resort to open books and desk-covers to conceal their amusement.

Marion alone remained cool and collected, looking at Miss Stiefbach as if to ask if she had said enough.

Miss Stiefbach's face was scarlet, and she shut her teeth tightly together, striving for her usual composure. The sudden turn of Marion's apology, which placed her in such a ridiculous light, had completely disconcerted her, and she knew not what to do or say.

If Marion's eyes had twinkled with mischief; if there had been the slightest tinge of sarcasm in her tone, or of triumph in her manner, Miss Stiefbach would have thought she intended a fresh insult; but throughout the whole her bearing had been unusually quiet, ladylike, and polite. There was no tangible point for her teacher to fasten on, and, commanding herself sufficiently to speak, Miss Stiefbach merely said, "It is enough; you may go to your seat."

Even then, if Marion's self-possession had given way, she would have been called back and severely reprimanded. But it did not; she passed all her school-mates, whose faces were turned towards her brimming with laughter and a keen appreciation of the affair, with a sort of preoccupied air, and, taking her books from her desk, followed M. Béranger into the anteroom.

At recess the girls with one impulse flocked round her, exclaiming, "Oh! it was too good; just the richest scene I ever saw."

"What do you mean?" coolly replied Marion.

"Why!" exclaimed Sarah Brown, an unencouraged admirer of Marion's, "the way you turned the tables on Miss Stiefbach."

"Indeed, Sarah, you are very much mistaken; I simply apologized to her for a great piece of rudeness."

And Marion turned away and ran upstairs to her own room, where Florence and Julia were already giving vent to their long pent-up feelings in only half-suppressed bursts of laughter.

As Marion made her appearance it was the signal for another shout; but she only replied by a quiet smile, which caused Julia to ejaculate in her most earnest manner, "I declare, Marion, you don't look a bit elated! If I had done such a bright thing as you have, I should be beaming with satisfaction."

"Well, Julia, I don't think I *have* done anything so very smart. To be sure I have had my revenge, and the only satisfaction I've got out of it is to feel thoroughly and heartily ashamed of myself."

"Marion Berkley, you certainly *are* the queerest girl I ever did see," exclaimed Julia.

But Florence, who knew her friend best, said nothing, for she understood her feelings, and admired her the more for them.

Marion had been determined to make her apology such as would reflect more absurdity on her teacher than on herself, and in that way to have her revenge for what she rightly considered her very unjust punishment. She had succeeded; but now that her momentary triumph was over, she sincerely wished that it had never occurred.

The next day she went to Miss Christine, and told her just how she felt about it, and that, if she advised her to do so, she would go to Miss Stiefbach and ask her forgiveness. But Miss Christine told her, that, although she heartily disapproved of her conduct, she thought nothing more had better be said about it, for Miss Stiefbach had only been half inclined to believe that Marion could *intend* a fresh impertinence.

And so there the matter ended; but Marion could never fully satisfy her own conscience on the subject.

She wrote a long letter to her mother, telling her the whole thing from beginning to end; and received one in reply, gently, but firmly, rebuking her for her conduct.

But the next day came four pages from her father, full of his amusement and enjoyment of the whole matter, and highly complimenting her on what he called "her brilliant coup d'état."

No wonder Marion's better nature was sometimes crushed, when the inward fires which she longed to extinguish were kindled by a father's hand.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NEW SCHOLAR

"O girls, the new scholar has come!" shouted little Fannie Thayer, as she bounced into the library one afternoon, where some of the older girls were studying.

"Do hush, Fannie!" exclaimed her sister Julia; "you do make such an awful noise! Of course you've left the door open, and it's cold enough to freeze one. Run away, child."

"But, Julia," remonstrated Fannie, as her sister went on reading without taking any notice of her communication, "you didn't hear what I said,—the new scholar has come."

"What new scholar?" inquired Florence Stevenson, looking up from her book. "This is the first I have heard of any."

"Why, don't you know?" answered little Fannie, glad to have a listener. "Her name is—is—Well, I can't remember what it is,—something odd; but she comes from ever so far off, and she's real pretty, kind of sad-looking, you know."

"What in the world is the child talking about?" broke in Marion. "Who ever heard of Miss Stiefbach's taking a scholar after the term had begun?"

"I remember hearing something about it, now," said Julia. "The girl was to have come at the beginning of the quarter; but she has been sick, or something or other happened to prevent. I believe she comes from St. Louis."

"I wonder who she'll room with; she can't come in with us, that's certain," said Marion, with a very decided air.

"Why, of course she won't," replied Florence; "we never have but two girls in a room. Oh! I know, she will go in with little Rose May; see if she doesn't!"

"Well, I tell you, I am sorry she's come!" ejaculated Marion. "I hate new scholars; they always put on airs, and consider themselves sort of privileged characters. I for one shall not take much notice of her."

"Why, Marion," exclaimed Grace Minton, "I should think you would be ashamed to talk so! She may be a very nice girl indeed. You don't know anything about her."

"I don't care if she is a nice girl. She ought to have come before. It will just upset all our plans; the classes are all arranged, and everything is going on nicely. There are just enough of us, and I say it is a perfect bother!"

"I really don't see why you need trouble yourself so much," broke in Georgie Graham, who was always jealous of Marion, and never lost an opportunity of differing with her, though in a quiet way that was terribly aggravating. "I don't believe you will be called upon to make any arrangements, and I don't see how one, more or less, can make much difference any way."

The entrance of Miss Christine prevented Marion's reply, and she immediately took up her book and became apparently absorbed in her studies.

"O Miss Christine," they all exclaimed at once, "do tell us about the new scholar." "Is she pretty?" "Will she be kind to us little girls?" "How old is she?" and many other questions of a like nature, all asked in nearly the same breath.

"If you will be quiet, and not all speak at once, I will try and tell you all you want to know. The name of the new scholar is Rachel Drayton. She is about sixteen, and I think she is very pretty, although I do not know as you will agree with me. She seems to have a very lovely disposition, and I should think that after a while she might be very lively, and a pleasant companion for you all; but at present she is very delicate, as she has just recovered from a very severe illness brought on by her great grief at the death of her father. They were all the world to each other, and she was perfectly devoted to him. She cannot yet reconcile herself to her loss. He has been dead about eight weeks. Her mother died when she was a baby, and the nearest relation she has is her father's brother, who is now in Europe. Poor child! she is all alone in the world; my heart aches for her."

Miss Christine's usually cheery voice was very low and sad, and the tear that glistened in her eye proved that her expressions of sympathy were perfectly sincere; if, indeed, any one could have doubted that kind, loving face. As she ceased speaking, there was a perfect silence throughout the room, and those who had felt somewhat inclined to side with Marion felt very much conscience-stricken.

Marion, however, continued studying, not showing the slightest signs of having had her sympathies aroused.

Miss Christine continued: "I hope, girls, you will be particularly kind to Miss Drayton. She must naturally feel lonely, and perhaps diffident, among so many strangers, and I want you all to do everything in your power to make it pleasant for her. You in particular, Marion, having been here longer than any of the others, will be able to make her feel quite at home."

"Indeed, Miss Christine, you must excuse me. You know taking up new friends at a moment's notice, and becoming desperately intimate with them, is not my forte."

"Marion," replied Miss Christine, in a quiet, but reproving tone, "I do not ask you to become desperately intimate with her, as you call it, or anything of the kind. I merely wish you to show her that courtesy which is certainly due from one school-girl to another."

Marion made no reply, and Miss Christine sat down and commenced talking to the girls in her usual pleasant manner. It was her evident interest in everything which concerned them, that made her so beloved by her pupils.

They all knew that they could find in her a patient listener, and a willing helper, whenever they chose to seek her advice; whether it was about an important, or a very trifling matter.

There was some little bustle and confusion as the girls laid aside their books, and clustered round Miss Christine with their fancy-work, or leaned back in their chairs, glad to have nothing in particular to do.

"Miss Christine!" exclaimed little Rose May, "I do wish you would show me how to 'bind off.' I keep putting my thread over and over, and, instead of taking off stitches, it makes more every time. I think these sleeves are a perfect nuisance. I wish I hadn't begun 'em!"

"Why, you poor child," laughingly replied her teacher, "what are you doing? You might knit forever and your sleeves would not be 'bound off,' if you do nothing but put your worsted over. Who told you to do that?"

"Julia Thayer did; she said knit two and then put over, and knit two and then put over, all the time, and it would come all right."

"Now, Rose, I didn't!" exclaimed Julia. "I said put your stitch over, you silly child! I should think you might have known that putting your worsted over would widen it."

"I know you *didn't* say put your stitch over," retorted Rose; "you just said put over, and how was I going to know by that? I think you're real mean; you never take any pains with us little ones; I don't—"

"Hush, hush, Rose! You must not speak so," said Miss Christine, laying her hands on the child's lips; then, turning to Julia, she said, "If you had taken more pains with Rose, and tried to explain to her how she ought to have done her work, it would have been much better for both of you."

"Well, Miss Christine, she came just as I was thinking up for my composition, and I didn't want to be bothered by any one. As it was, she put all my ideas out of my head."

Miss Christine's only reply was a shake of the head and an incredulous smile, which made Julia wish she had shown a little more patience with the child.

"There, Rose," said Miss Christine, as the little girl put the finishing touch to her sleeves, "next time you will not have to ask any one to show you how to 'bind off.' Your sleeves are very pretty, and I know your mother will be glad her daughter took so much pains to please her."

Rose glanced up at her teacher with a bright smile, and went skipping off, ready for fun and frolic, now that those troublesome sleeves were finished. But she had hardly reached the hall when she came running back, saying, in a most mysterious sort of stage-whisper, "She's coming! she's coming downstairs with Miss Stiefbach! Rebecca what's-her-name; you know!"

The girls looked up as Miss Stiefbach entered the room, and, although they were too well-bred to actually stare at her companion, it must be confessed that their faces betrayed considerable interest.

Rachel Drayton, the "new scholar," was between sixteen and seventeen; tall and very slight; her eyes were very dark; her face intensely pale, but one saw at once it was the pallor of recent illness, or acute mental suffering, not of continued ill-health.

She was dressed in the deepest mourning, in a style somewhat older than that generally worn by girls of her age. Her jet-black hair, which grew very low on her forehead, was brushed loosely back, and gathered into a rough knot behind, as if the owner was too indifferent to her personal appearance to try to arrange it carefully.

As she stood now, fully conscious of the glances that were surreptitiously cast upon her, she appeared frightened and bewildered. Her eyes were cast down, but if any one had looked under their long lashes, they would have seen them dimmed with tears.

Accustomed all her life to the society of older persons, no one who has not experienced the same feeling can imagine how great an ordeal it was for her to enter that room full of girls of her own age. To notice the sudden hush that fell upon all as she came in; to feel that each one was mentally making comments upon her, was almost more than she could bear. If they had been persons many years older than herself, she would have gone in perfectly at her ease; chatted first with this one, then with that, and would have made herself at home immediately.

Unfortunately the only young persons in whose society she had been thrown were some young ladies she had met while travelling through the West with her father. They had been coarse, foolish creatures, making flippant remarks upon all whom they saw, in a rude, unladylike manner, and from whom she had shrunk with an irresistible feeling of repugnance. No wonder her heart had sunk within her when she thought that perhaps her future companions might be of the same stamp.

Miss Christine noticed her embarrassment at once, and kindly went forward to meet her, saying as she did so, "Well, my dear, I am glad to see you down here; I am not going to introduce you to your companions now, you will get acquainted with them all in time; first I want you to come into the school-room with me and see how you like it."

And she took her hand and led her through the open door into the school-room beyond; talking pleasantly all the time, calling her attention to the view from the windows, the arrangement of the desks, and various other things, until at last she saw her face light up with something like interest, and the timid, frightened look almost entirely disappear; then she took her back into the library.

As they went in, Florence Stevenson, who stood near the fireplace, made room for them, remarking as she did so, "It is very chilly; you must be cold; come here and warm yourself. How do you like our school-room?"

"Very much; that is, I think I shall. It seems very pleasant."

"Yes, it is pleasant. It's so much nicer for being papered with that pretty paper than if it had had dark, horrid walls like some I've seen. What sort of a school did you use to go to?"

"I never went to school before; I always studied at home;" and poor Rachel's voice trembled as she thought of the one who had always directed her studies; but Florence went bravely on, determined to do her part towards making the new scholar feel at home.

"Well, I'm afraid you will find it hard to get used to us, if you have never been thrown with girls before. I don't believe but what you thought we were almost savages; now honestly, didn't you feel afraid to meet us?"

"It was hard," replied Rachel; but as she glanced up at the bright, animated face before her, she thought that if all her future companions were like this one she should have no great fears for the future.

Most of the scholars had left the room; the few who remained were chatting together apparently unconscious of the stranger's presence, and as Rachel stood before the fire, with her back to the rest of the room, and Florence beside her talking animatedly, she was surprised to find herself becoming interested and at ease, and before Miss Christine left them the two girls were comparing notes on their studies, and gave promise of soon becoming very good friends.

When Marion left the library, she went directly to her room, locked the door, and threw herself on the seat in the window in a tumult of emotion. Paramount over all other feelings stood shame. She could not excuse herself for her strange behavior, and she felt unhappy; almost miserable. "Why did I speak so?" she asked herself. "Why should I feel such an unaccountable prejudice against a person I never even heard of before? I thought I had conquered all these old, hateful feelings, and here they are all coming back again. I don't know what is the matter with me. It is

not jealousy; for how can I be jealous of a person I never saw or heard of before in my life? I don't know what it is, and I don't much care; there aren't four girls in the school that like me, and only one I really love, and that's dear old Flo. She's as good as gold, and if any one should ever come between us I pity her! I'll bet anything though, that she is downstairs making friends with that girl this minute."

This thought was not calculated to calm Marion's ruffled feelings, and she sat brooding by the window in anything but an enviable mood.

She was still in this state of mind when the tea-bell rang, and hastily smoothing her hair she went downstairs.

It chanced that just as she entered the dining-room Rachel Drayton and Florence came in by the opposite door. Florence was evidently giving Rachel an account of some of their school frolics, though in an undertone, so that Marion could not catch the words, and her companion was listening, her face beaming with interest. No circumstance could have occurred which would have been more unfavorable for changing Marion's wayward mood.

Coming downstairs she had been picturing to herself the unhappiness and loneliness of the poor orphan, and she had almost made up her mind to go forward, introduce herself, and try by being kind and agreeable to make amends for her former injustice; for although she knew Miss Drayton must be entirely unconscious of it, she could not in her own heart feel at rest until she had made some atonement.

No one could have presented themselves to a perfect stranger,—a thing which it is not easy for most persons to do,—with more grace and loveliness than Marion, if she had been so inclined, for there was at times a certain fascination about her voice and manner that few could resist.

She had expected to see a pale, sickly, utterly miserable-looking girl, towards whom she felt it would be impossible to steel her heart; and she saw one, who, although she was certainly pale enough, seemed to be anything but miserable, and above all was evidently fast becoming on intimate terms with her own dear friend Florence.

That was enough; resolutely crushing down all kindly feelings that were struggling for utterance, she took her seat at the table as if unconscious of the stranger's existence. Miss Stiefbach sat at the head of one very long table, and Miss Christine at another, having most of the little girls at her end; while Marion sat directly opposite with Florence on her right. Without changing this long-established order of things, Miss Christine could not make room for Rachel by the side of Florence as she would have liked, and the only place for her seemed to be on Marion's left, as there were not so many girls on that side of the table. Hoping that such close proximity would force Marion to unbend the reserved manner which she saw she was fast assuming, Miss Christine, before taking her own seat, went to that end of the table and introduced Marion to Rachel, laughingly remarking that as they were the oldest young ladies there, they would have to sustain the dignity of the table.

This jesting command was certainly carried out to the very letter of the law by Marion.

She was intensely polite throughout the meal, but perfectly frigid in the dignity of her manner, which so acted upon poor Rachel, that the bright smiles which Florence had called forth were effectually dispelled, and throughout the rest of the evening she was the same sad, frightened girl who had first made her appearance in the library.

When Marion knelt that night to pray, her lips refused to utter her accustomed prayers. It seemed hypocrisy for her, who had so resolutely made another unhappy, to ask God's blessings on her head, and she remained kneeling long after Florence had got into bed, communing with herself, her only inward cry being, "God forgive me!"

But how could she expect God would forgive her, when day after day she knowingly committed the same faults?

Sick at heart, she rose from her knees, turned out the gas, and went to bed, but not to sleep; far into the night she lay awake viewing her past conduct.

She did not try to excuse herself, or to look at her faults in any other than their true light; but, repentant and sorrowful though she might be, she could not as yet sufficiently conquer her pride to ask pardon of those she had openly wounded, or to contradict an expressed opinion even after she regretted ever having formed it.

Poor child! she thought she had struggled long and fiercely with herself; she had yet to learn that the battle was but just begun.

CHAPTER VII.

AUNT BETTIE.

"Oh, dear!" yawned Grace Minton, "how I do hate stormy Saturdays!"

"So do I!" exclaimed Georgie Graham; "they are a perfect nuisance, and we were going up to Aunt Bettie's this afternoon."

"Who's we?"

"Oh, 'her royal highness' for one, and your humble servant for another; Sarah Brown, Flo Stevenson, and Rachel Drayton, *of course*. By the way, how terribly intimate those two have grown! I don't believe 'her highness' relishes their being so dreadfully thick."

"What in the world makes you call Marion 'her highness'?" said Grace.

"Oh, because she *is* so high and mighty; she walks round here sometimes as if she were queen and we her subjects."

"No such thing, Georgie Graham!" exclaimed Sarah Brown, who came in just as the last remark was made, and knew very well to whom it alluded; "she doesn't trouble herself about us at all."

"That's just it; she thinks herself superior to us poor *plebeians*."

"Stuff and nonsense! You know you're jealous of her, and always have been."

"Oh, no!" replied Georgie, who, no matter how much she might be provoked, always spoke *to* any one in a soft purring voice. "Oh, no! I'm not jealous of her; there is no reason why I should be. But really, Sarah, I don't see why you need take up the cudgel for her so fiercely; she always snubs you every chance she gets."

Sarah tossed her head, blushing scarlet; for the remark certainly had a good deal of truth in it, and was none the less cutting for being made in a particularly mild tone.

"Well, at any rate," said Grace Minton, for the sake of changing the subject, "I think Rachel Drayton is lovely."

"Lovely!" exclaimed Georgie, "she's a perfect stick! I don't see what there is lovely about her, and for my part I wish she had never come here."

"Seems to me the tune has changed," broke in Sarah. "I thought you were one of the ones who were so down on Marion Berkley for saying the same thing."

"Oh, that was before I had seen her," replied Georgie, not at all disconcerted.

"In other words, you said it just so as to have an opportunity to differ with Marion," retorted Sarah. "I really believe you hate her!"

"Sarah, how can you get so excited? it is so very unbecoming, you know," purred Georgie. Sarah flounced out of the room too indignant for speech, and just as she was going through the hall met Marion, who was in an unusually pleasant mood.

"See, Sarah, it is clearing off; we shall have a chance for our walk, I guess, after all."

"Do you think so? It will be awful sloppy though, won't it?"

"No, I don't believe it will; besides who cares for that? We are not made of sugar or salt."

"How many are going?" asked Sarah.

"I don't know exactly; let me see." And Marion counted off on her fingers. "You for one, and I for another; that's two. Miss Drayton and Florence are four. Grace Minton, if she wants to go, five; and Georgie Graham six."

At the mention of the last name, Sarah gave her head a toss, which was so very expressive that Marion could not help laughing, and exclaimed, "Oh, yes! you know 'her royal highness' must allow some of the *plebeians* among her subjects to follow in her train."

Sarah laughed softly. "Did you hear?" she whispered.

Marion nodded, and just at that moment Georgie came out of the room where she had been sitting. "What was that you said, Marion, about 'her highness'?" she asked. "Did you think that the title applied to yourself?"

"I shouldn't have thought of such a thing, Georgie, if I hadn't overheard your remarks, and of course I could not but feel gratified at the honorable distinction."

"How do you know it was meant for an honorable distinction?"

"How can I doubt it, Georgie, when it was bestowed upon me by such an amiable young lady as yourself? Now if it had been Sarah, I might have thought *she* said it out of spite; but of course when Georgie Graham said it, I knew it was intended as a tribute to my superiority;" and Marion made a provokingly graceful courtesy.

"There is nothing like having a good opinion of one's self," replied Georgie.

"But you see you are mistaken there, Georgie; it was you who seemed to have such a high opinion of me. You know I didn't claim the greatness,—it was 'thrust upon me;'" and Marion, satisfied with that shaft, turned on her heel, and opening the front door went out on to the piazza, followed by Sarah, who had been a silent but appreciative witness of the scene.

Georgie Graham shut her teeth, muttering in anything but her usual soft tones, and with an expression in her eyes which was anything but pleasant to see, "Oh, how I hate you! But I'll be even with you yet!"

The shower which had so disconcerted the whole school was evidently clearing off, and there was every prospect that the proposed plan of walking to Aunt Bettie's directly after dinner might be carried into execution.

Aunt Bettie, as all the school-girls called her, was a farmer's wife, who supplied the school with eggs, butter, and cheese, and during the summer with fresh vegetables and berries.

She lived about two or three miles from the school, on the same road, and the girls often went to see her. She was fond of them all, although she had her favorites, among whom was Marion; and she always kept a good supply of doughnuts, for which she was quite famous, on hand for them whenever they might come.

The sun kept his promise, and before dinner-time the girls were all out on the piazza, getting up an appetite they said, although that was not often wanting with any of them.

The party for Aunt Bettie's numbered eight,—Rose May and Fannie Thayer having begged Marion to ask permission for them to go,—and they all set out for their walk in high spirits. Although Marion treated Rachel with a certain degree of politeness, she never spoke to her unless it was absolutely necessary, and then always addressed her as Miss Drayton, although every other girl in school had, by this time, become accustomed to familiarly call her Rachel. Florence had done everything in her power to draw Marion into their conversation at table, but seeing that she was determined not to change her manner, she thought it best to take no more notice of it, as by doing so it only made it the more apparent to Rachel that Marion had no intention of becoming better acquainted with her.

Rachel had been there but a short time, and already Marion began to feel that Florence was turning from her for a new friend. This was not really the case, and Florence, who knew Marion's feelings, was secretly very much troubled.

She loved Marion as deeply and truly as ever; but she could not turn away from that motherless girl, between whom and herself an instinctive sympathy seem to have been established, arising from the loss which they had each felt, and which naturally drew them closer to each other. Florence had never known her mother, but the loss was none the less great to her; she felt that there was a place in the heart that none but a mother's love could ever have filled, and no matter how bright and happy she might feel, there was at times a sense of utter loneliness about her which she found hard to dispel.

Rachel seemed to turn to her as her only friend among that crowd of strangers, and she could not refuse to give her her friendship in return, even at the risk of seeing Marion for a time estranged from her; for she trusted to Marion's better nature, hoping that in the future she would not be misjudged, and that all might be made pleasant and happy again.

And so to-day for the first time since they had been to school together, Florence and Marion were taking their Saturday afternoon walk with separate companions. Marion had Rose May by the hand, while she told Sarah Brown to take care of little Fannie. Florence and Rachel were directly in front of her, and she knew that they would have been happy to have had her join in their conversation. In fact, they spoke so that she could hear every word they said; but she occupied herself by telling Rose a story of such remarkable length and interest as to perfectly enchant the child, who exclaimed as they reached the farm-house, "O Marion, you do tell the best stories; I really think you *ought* to write a book!" Marion laughed, but had no chance to answer, for at that moment the door opened and Aunt Bettie appeared upon the threshold.

"Wall, gals, I be glad to see ye; this is a sight good for old eyes!"

"Did you expect us, auntie?" asked Marion.

"Spect yer, child! why, I been a-lookin' for yer these three Saturdays past! What you been a-doin' that's kept yer so long?"

"Well, nothing in particular; but you see the term has only just begun, and we've hardly got settled."

"Oh, yes, honey, I know; I haint laid it up agin yer. But who's this new one?—yer haint introduced me."

As Marion showed no inclination to perform the ceremony Florence presented Rachel, remarking that she was a new scholar from the West. But Aunt Bettie's keen eyes took in at a glance the deep mourning apparel, and her kind heart at once divined its cause; and she exclaimed with great heartiness as she took Rachel's hands in her own rough palms, "Wall, child, you couldn't 'a come to a better place than Miss Stiffback's, and you couldn't 'a got in with a better lot o' girls; take em as they come, they're about as good a set as I knows on!"

"O Aunt Bettie!" exclaimed Florence; "flattering, as I live! I wouldn't have believed it of you."

"Not a bit of it, child; just plain speakin', a thing that never hurt anybody yet, according to my notion. But come in, gals; come in, you must be tired after your long walk, and the tin box is most a-bustin' its sides, I crammed it so full."

The girls laughed, for they all knew what the tin box contained, and were only too ready to be called upon to empty it.

They all seated themselves in the large, old-fashioned kitchen, with its low ceiling and tremendous open fireplace, surmounted by a narrow shelf, on which was displayed a huge Bible, and a china shepherdess in a green skirt and pink bodice, smiling tenderly over two glass lamps and a Britannia teapot, at a china shepherd in a yellow jacket and sky-blue smalls; being, I suppose, exact representations of the sheep-tenders of that part of the country.

Aunt Bettie bustled in and out of the huge pantry, bringing out a large tin box filled to the top with delicious brown, spicy doughnuts, and a large earthen pitcher of new milk.

"There, gals," as she put a tray of tumblers on the table, "jest help yerselves, and the more yer eat, why the better I shall be suited."

"Suppose we should go through the box and not leave any for Jabe; what should you say to that?" asked Marion.

"Never you mind Jabe; trust him for getting his fill. Eat all yer want, and then stuff the rest in yer pockets."

"Oh, that wouldn't do at all!" exclaimed Marion; "you don't know what a fuss we had about those Julia Thayer carried home last year! Miss Stiefbach didn't like it at all; she said it was bad enough bringing boxes from home, but going round the neighborhood picking up cake was disgraceful. She never knew exactly who took them to school, for Julia kept mum; but I don't think it would do to try it again."

"Wall, I think that was too bad of Miss Stiffback; she knows nothin' pleases me so much as to have you come here and eat my doughnuts, and if you choose to carry some on 'em to school, what harm did it do? She ought to remember that she was a gal once herself."

"Oh, mercy! auntie, I don't believe she ever was," ejaculated Marion. "She was born Miss Stiefbach, and I wouldn't be at all surprised if she wore the same stiff dresses, and had the same I'm-a-little-better-than-any-body-else look when she was a baby."

"Wall, child, she's a good woman after all. You know there aint any of us perfect; we all hev our faults; if it aint one thing it's another; it's pretty much the same the world over."

"You do make the best doughnuts, Aunt Bettie, *I* ever eat," declared Fannie Thayer, who was leaning with both elbows on the table, a piece of a doughnut in one hand, and a whole one in the other as a reserve force.

"Wall, child, I ginerally kalkerlate I ken match any one going on doughnuts; but 't seemed to me these weren't 's good as common. I had something on my mind that worried me when I was mixin' 'em, and I 'spose I wasn't quite as keerful as usual."

"If *you* don't call these good, *I* do!" ejaculated Miss Fannie. "Why, I just wish you could have seen some Julia made last summer. She took a cooking-fit, and tried most everything; mother said she wasted more eggs and butter than she was worth, and her *doughnuts!*—Ugh! heavy, greasy things!"

"She must 'a let 'em soak fat!" exclaimed Aunt Bettie, who was always interested in the cookery question; "that's the great trouble with doughnuts; some folks think everything's in the mixin', but I say more'n half depends on the fryin'. You must hev yer fat hot, and stand over 'em all the time. I allers watch mine pretty close and turn 'em offen with a fork, and then I hev a cullender ready to put 'em right in so't the fat ken dreem off. I find it pays t' be pertickeler;" and Aunt Bettie smoothed her apron, and leaned back in her chair with the air of one who had said something of benefit to mankind in general.

"But where is Julia?" she asked after a short pause. "Why didn't she come?"

"Oh, I forgot!" exclaimed Fannie; "she sent her love to you, and told me to tell you not to let us eat up all your doughnuts this time, because she'll be up before long and want some. She had a sore throat, and Miss Stiefbach thought she had better not go out."

"I'm sorry for that," replied Aunt Bettie; "I hope she aint a-goin' to be sick."

"Oh, no, it aint very bad. Julia thinks it's nothing but cankers; she often has them."

"Wall, it's always best to be on the safe side, any way," said Aunt Bettie; "you tell her she needn't be afraid about the doughnuts; I'll have a fresh batch ready agin the time she comes."

The business of eating and drinking so occupied the girls' attention, that they did not enter into conversation as readily as usual; and after the first flush of excitement at meeting her young friends and dispensing her hospitality was over, Aunt Bettie, too, subsided into a quiet, subdued manner, which was quite foreign to her usual brisk talkativeness.

She sat in her high-backed rocking-chair, looking at the girls over her silver-bowed spectacles, with a sad, musing expression, as if the sight of them called up some unhappy thought.

This unusual restraint on the part of their hostess communicated itself in a certain degree to her visitors, though they did not themselves remark the cause of their silence, and their visit was

made shorter than usual.

It was Marion who first made the move to go; and although Aunt Bettie pressed them to remain she did not urge it with her accustomed eagerness.

They had got just beyond the bend of the road which hid the old farm-house from view, when Marion exclaimed, "You run on, Rose, with the others; I believe I left my gloves on the table; don't wait for me, I'll catch up with you;" and before Rose could beg to go back with her, she had turned round and ran off up the road. She ran quickly, but noiselessly along, and was back to the farm-house in a few moments, and was surprised to find Aunt Bettie sitting on the door-step with her head buried in her hands. Going up to her, she found her weeping as if her heart would break.

"Aunt Bettie!" she said, in her gentlest tones, "Aunt Bettie! It's only Marion. What is the matter? I thought you seemed worried about something, and came back to see if I couldn't help you; can't I?"

"Oh, dear!" sobbed the poor woman. "It may be dreadful wicked of me, but the sight of you young things, all lookin' so bright and happy, did make me feel awful bad, for I couldn't help thinking o' my own darter Jemimy."

"Why, what is the matter with her, auntie? Where is she?"

"The Lord knows, dear, I don't. Not a blessed word hev I heerd from her it's going on eight weeks. I've writ, and Jabe he's writ, but we haint had a sign of an answer, and I'm afraid she's dead, or perhaps wus;" and the poor woman rocked herself back and forth, completely overcome by her grief.

"But, auntie," said Marion, laying her hand gently on the good woman's shoulder, "don't you see there are forty things that might have happened to prevent your hearing from her? You know a girl that lives out can't always find time to write as often as she would like. Besides, she may have got a new place, and in that case might not have received your letters."

"I thought o' that, child, and the last letter Jabe writ he directed to the care of Miss Benson, the woman that keeps the intelligence office; but that's two weeks an' more ago, and I haven't heerd a word. You see, Miss Marion, there aint a better-hearted gal livin' than my Jemimy, but she got kinder lonesome and discontented-like a livin' way off here, and took it into her head she'd like the city better. She allus was a high-sperrited gal, and 'twas dull for her here, that's a fact; but I wish to the Lord I'd held my own and hadn't let her gone; for there's awful places in them big cities, and my gal's pretty enough to make any one look at her. I dunno, child, but I can't help feelin' somethin' dreadful's happened to her."

"O auntie, you must not get discouraged so easily. I thought you were one of the kind who always looked on the bright side of things," said Marion in a cheerful tone.

"Wall, dear, I do ginerally; but this has just keeled me right over, and I don't seem to know where I be. You see I haint got any one in the city as I ken call upon to help me. I don't know a soul in the place I could get to hunt her up. Sometimes I think I'll go down there; but where's the use? I should be like a hen with her head cut off in such a great, strange place as Boston."

"Well, auntie, I'll try my best to help you. I tell you what I'll do: you give me Jemima's address, and I'll write to my mother, and get her to look her up. She has to go to those offices very often after servants, and like as not she might stumble right on her. Now cheer up, auntie, for I feel just as if we should find her;" and Marion passed her hand over Aunt Bettie's wrinkled forehead and gray hair as tenderly as if she were her own mother.

Aunt Bettie looked at Marion with the tears still glistening in her eyes, and a sad smile on her face, as she said:—

"Marion Berkley it aint every gal as would take so much trouble for an old creetur like me, even if she noticed I was sad and worried. You've comforted a poor, old woman who was most broken-hearted. May the Lord bless you for it, an' I know he will."

Marion smiled up at the tender, old face that looked down at her, while her own flushed with pleasure at the words of commendation.

It was a pity that there were no unobserved witnesses of the scene; for Marion Berkley, cold and haughty, apparently indifferent alike to the praise or blame of those around her, was a very different person from this gentle girl. Her whole soul was shining through her eyes; all her haughtiness, pride, and coldness had fallen from her, and she stood almost like one transfigured, her face beaming with the light which makes the plainest face seem almost divine,—that of pure, disinterested sympathy for the sufferings and troubles of a fellow-being.

For a moment there was silence between the two, while the tears rolled down both of their cheeks; but Marion dashed hers away, as she exclaimed in a cheery voice:—

"Come, auntie, it is getting late, and I must be off; so get me the address, please."

"To be sure, child! How thoughtless I be! I'll get it for yer right away;" and Aunt Bettie went into the house with something of her usual briskness, and returning, brought out a scrap of paper, on which was written in a stiff, cramped, school-boy hand this direction:—

"MISS JEMIMA DOBBS,
In Kare of Mis Benson,
Number 22 East Crorful Street,
Boston."

Marion could hardly repress a smile of amusement at the remarkable orthography; but remembering that in Aunt Bettie's eyes it was a perfect monument to the glory of her son Jabe, she made no comments, and folding it up, tucked it carefully away in her purse. Then, with a bright, encouraging smile, she said good-by to Aunt Bettie, and hurried off down the road.

It was much later than she thought, and as the days were rapidly growing shorter, it was quite dusk, and the girls were entirely out of sight and hearing.

But her thoughts kept her company on her long walk, and all the way home she was turning over in her mind the probabilities and improbabilities of her mother's being able to find the young, unknown country girl in a large city like Boston.

Miss Christine had begun to feel quite anxious about her by the time she arrived, and Florence met her in the hall with a hearty caress, to which she responded with her old warmth.

"Why, you dear, old thing!" exclaimed Florence; "what has kept you so long? It must have been forlorn walking home at this hour."

"Oh, I did not mind it; I had something to think of," replied Marion, as she pulled off her muddy rubbers before going upstairs. "I'll tell you by and by; I must run up and get ready for supper."

That night, after they got to bed, Marion gave Florence a synopsis of her conversation with Aunt Bettie, and told her of her plan of writing to her mother for assistance.

"Well," said Florence, "I think it was real good of you to think of it. What a queer girl you are! I knew we didn't have quite as jolly a time as usual up there, but I never noticed there was anything the matter with Aunt Bettie; and if I had I don't believe it would have occurred to me to go back and comfort her. O Marion!"—and she threw her arm over her friend's shoulder,—"how much good there is in you! Why won't you let it all come out?"

"I don't think there was anything particularly good in that. You see there was no virtue in my being kind to the poor, old thing, because I could not help it. If there had been any hateful feelings to overcome, or any wounded pride to interfere, I probably should not have done it."

"I'm not so sure of that, Marion. You do conquer yourself sometimes."

"Not often, dear," Marion replied, with a little, nervous, forced laugh. "It is too much trouble. Good-night, I must go to sleep."

But it was long before sleep came to Marion. She laid perfectly still, so as not to disturb Florence, but the small hours found her still awake. She had been for some time thoroughly dissatisfied with herself, and the thought that she had been of some comfort to any one was indeed pleasant to her; but she would not attribute to herself credit that did not belong to her.

It was just as she had said to Florence; she could not help being kind to the poor old woman in her trouble; she had obeyed the promptings of her naturally warm heart. It had been an impulsive action, not one in which a disagreeable duty had been plainly pointed out for her to follow; and she determinedly put aside all feeling of self-satisfaction. She knew that if Rachel Drayton had made a similar appeal to her kindness and sympathy, her heart would have been resolutely closed against her, and she would not have spoken a single encouraging word.

This thought thrust itself upon her again and again. She tried to put it from her, but it was no use; she could not evade it. She told herself that she was ridiculously conscientious; that this girl had no claims upon her; and that she had done all that Miss Christine asked of her; treated Rachel politely and courteously; but she knew that her politeness had been cold and formal, and her courtesy less kindly than she would bestow upon a beggar at the door. But she said to herself, Florence makes up for all my deficiencies. This bitter thought, in various forms, had rankled in her breast day and night. She had often said that nothing could ever make her jealous of Florence; their affection had been too lasting, too much a part of themselves, for either to suspect the other of inconstancy; and now she was the first to doubt.

But the last words of Florence, as they talked that night, came back to her, and she remembered the fond embrace and the earnestness of her voice as she besought her to act her real self.

Should she doubt that generous heart, that had shown its love for her in a thousand ways, because, when it was appealed to by a fatherless, motherless girl, it had responded with all the warmth of its true, generous nature?

No, she could not do it; she felt that it was only another reason for loving her more, and tears of shame and sorrow filled her eyes, as, bending over in the darkness, she pressed a kiss upon the lips of her sleeping companion.

Her unjust suspicion of her friend vanquished and conquered forever, her thoughts gradually wandered back to Aunt Bettie, and with her mind full of plans and projects in her behalf, she at last fell asleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT CHURCH.

Sunday morning came bright and clear, but very cold, and many of the girls made their appearance in the library, shaking and shivering, as if they had never before experienced a northern winter.

"Gracious me!" exclaimed Sarah Brown, "I'm almost frozen. My room is as cold as a barn! My cheeks are as blue as a razor, and my nose looks like a great cranberry. Do let me get near the fire, Georgie; you're keeping the heat off of every one."

Georgie made way for her, quietly remarking, as she did so:—

"Well, Sarah, I must say the cold is not very becoming to your style of beauty; your nose and hair together ought to heat this room."

"You needn't say anything, Miss Graham; you're not so killing handsome yourself that you can afford to make fun of others!" hotly retorted Sarah.

It was a notable fact that these two could never come together without a passage-at-arms. Grace's quietly hateful remarks always excited Sarah to a most unmitigated degree, and she could not seem to learn by experience that the only way to silence her was to take no notice of them; and their disputes were often great sources of amusement to the other girls.

Georgie, tall and rather distingué-looking, although not pretty, with her quietly assured manner even when she knew herself beaten, and her hypocritically soft tones, was almost always more than a match for Sarah, who never could hide her feelings no matter what they were and who always retorted as sharply and spitefully as she could. She was a warm-hearted little thing, as honest and true as she was impulsive, and Georgie's quiet, deliberate hatefulness was more than she could bear.

If there was one subject on which Sarah was more sensitive than another it was her hair. It was a rich, reddish-yellow; very thick, long and curling, and any artist would have looked upon it with admiration; but it was the bane of Sarah's existence. When she was a little girl it had been really red, but time had softened its shade, and many a Parisian belle might have envied Sarah its possession. Sarah could see no beauty in it, for at home she was often greeted by the name of "carrot-top," and "little red hen;" and once when she got into a very excited argument with her brother, and stood shaking her head at him with the long curls which she then wore, flying about her shoulders, he had run out of the room, shouting as he got well out of reach:—

"I say, Sal! how much would you charge to stand on Boston common nights, and light the city? Your head would save all the expense of gas!"

You may be pretty sure it did not take Georgie Graham long to find out Sarah's weakness, and so the poor child's bane was still kept before her even at school, where there were no troublesome brothers.

She resolutely brushed out her long curls, and braided them into soft, heavy braids, winding them round and round at the back of her head until it looked like a great golden bee-hive; but she could not keep the front from rippling into soft, delicate waves; or the short hairs from twisting themselves into numberless little curls, which all the crimping-pins and hot slate-pencils in the world could not imitate. This hair which Georgie Graham so affected to despise was in reality a great object of her admiration, and she would have gladly exchanged it, with its usual accompaniments of glowing cheeks and scarlet lips, for her own sallow skin and scanty, drabbish-brown locks. But I have made a digression; let us return to our group in the library.

"What are you two quarrelling about this lovely Sunday morning?" asked Florence Stevenson as she and Marion came into the room together.

"Oh, we were not quarrelling," replied Georgie. "Sarah was only remarking that her cheeks were as blue as razors and her nose like a cranberry, and I agreed with her,—that was all."

"Yes," exclaimed Sarah, "and I told you you weren't killing handsome, and I dare say you agreed with me, though you didn't say so. But there is one thing certain, if the cold makes frights of both of us, it makes Marion look like a beauty!" and Sarah's eyes sparkled mischievously.

Georgie only shrugged her shoulders and elevated her eyebrows, as she replied, "Chacun à son gout."

"But it doesn't happen to be your "gout," does it, Georgie?" good-naturedly replied Marion, who knew very well that Sarah's admiration of herself was thus publicly exhibited solely for the sake of annoying Georgie.

"Come, girls, let's declare peace, or at least a 'cessation of hostilities;' it's a shame to commence the day with quarrels;" and Florence knelt down on the rug between the two girls, looking up at them with a smile that it would have been hard for any one to have resisted.

Directly after this Miss Stiefbach entered, and all were quiet as she read the morning prayers, and they joined in the responses.

By ten o'clock the girls, with the exception of Julia Thayer, whose throat was still troubling her, and Grace Minton, who was suffering from a sick headache, were on their way to church. They did not walk in a regular procession like so many convicts on their way to prison, but each chose her own companion, and the walk was enlivened with pleasant conversation. It so chanced that Marion and Georgie Graham were together, not by choice of either party, but because they both happened to come downstairs a little late, and the others had already got into the street as they came out the front door. Florence Stevenson, Miss Christine, and Rachel Drayton were all walking together, and Georgie, observing this, thought it would be an excellent opportunity for making Marion thoroughly uncomfortable.

"It seems to me," she began, "you and Florence are not quite so fond of each other as you used to be; or is it that she is not so fond of you?"

"I don't think there is any difference on either side," quietly replied Marion, determined not to lose her temper, or be led into saying cutting things of which she would have to repent.

"Oh, if you think so, I suppose it is all right; but I don't believe there's a girl in the school who hasn't noticed how Florence has left you to run after Rachel Drayton."

Marion resolutely kept silence, and Georgie, thinking that her shots had not taken effect, continued: "I don't see what there is about that girl, I'm sure, to make Flo fancy her so much; she certainly isn't pretty, and she's awfully lackadaisical."

"I think she is very pretty," replied Marion; "and the reason she seems lackadaisical is because she is not strong."

"I thought you did not like her," said Georgie, "you certainly have not troubled yourself much to entertain her."

"I do not see as that is any reason why I should not think her pretty, or why I should not see that she is quiet, because she is not only weak, but very homesick and sad."

"Why, really, Marion, I had not any idea you had taken enough notice of her to see all that. What a farce you must have been acting all this time, to seem so indifferent when you were *really* so deeply interested!"

"If that is so, Georgie," replied Marion, as she looked her companion steadily in the face, "I have been a better actress than you, for you play your part so badly that the little boys in the amphitheatre might see into the plot in the first act. I advise you to try another rôle."

Georgie opened her eyes in pretended astonishment; but she knew very well what Marion meant, and that her intentions of tormenting her companion were fully understood. But that fact did not prevent her from saying in a gently insinuating tone: "Now, Marion, don't be provoked, but *don't* you think that Florence is rather turning the cold shoulder on you?"

"No, Miss Graham, I do not," emphatically replied Marion, and for at least five minutes Georgie said nothing. "I wonder!" she at last exclaimed, "if Rachel Drayton is rich. I think she must be, for although there is no style to her clothes, and she is of course very dowdy-looking, still everything she has is made of the most expensive material, and you know nice mourning costs awfully. Just look at her vail now; see how long it is, and of the heaviest crêpe; but she looks like a ghost under it! I don't believe but what she is rich."

"Well, Georgie," replied Marion, with the slightest possible curve of her lip, "I can satisfy you on that point. She *is quite* well off; her father left about two millions, and with the exception of a few legacies of two or three hundred thousand or so, mere trifles to her, she will have it all; you see she is pretty well provided for."

"Two millions!" exclaimed Georgie, startled out of her usual composure; "two millions! why, I hadn't any idea of it."

"No, I thought not," dryly replied Marion.

"But, Marion, are you sure? How did you know it?"

"I heard Miss Stiefbach tell Miss Christine so the day Miss Drayton came here."

"And you've known it all this time!" ejaculated Georgie, who could not get over her astonishment.

"Yes," replied Marion, "I've known it all this time, and actually haven't toadied her yet; aren't you surprised?" and Marion's voice had, by this time, assumed its most coolly sarcastic tones, and her eyes flashed scorn and indignation upon her bewildered companion.

"I wonder if Florence Stevenson knew it. I suppose of course she did," musingly remarked Georgie.

"No, she did not," sharply retorted Marion; "and she doesn't know it now, I'm sure."

"Well, I don't know what to make of it!" replied Georgie in an annoyed tone; "an heiress in school and no one to know it!"

"Don't you think her prettier than when you first saw her?" exclaimed Marion, in such cutting, sarcastic tones that even Georgie winced; "and her pale face, I'm sure you think there is something very distingué about that, set off by her 'heavy, expensive crêpe;' and then I know you must think that there is something decidedly aristocratic about her 'lackadaisical' manner;" and Marion gave a little bitter laugh, expressing quite as much scorn as her words.

At that moment, they entered the church porch, and Georgie made no reply, only too glad of an excuse for silence.

Miss Stiefbach's scholars occupied the first six pews from the front; three on each side of the broad aisle. Miss Stiefbach sat at the head of one, with five of the youngest girls, and Miss Christine, on the opposite side, also had some of the smaller girls with her, while the rest of the scholars occupied the pews in front of their teachers.

As Marion entered the church, and the girls quietly took their places and knelt in prayer, the solemn stillness of the place struck painfully upon her. She could not so soon shake off all outward impressions, and the cutting words which had passed her lips, just as she entered that holy place, were still ringing in her ears.

She had risen that morning, her mind still filled with the pleasant thoughts which had lulled her to sleep, and with good resolutions for the future. She felt glad that it was Sunday, for she thought she was in the mood to be benefited by the sacred influences of the day.

But where now were her good resolutions? She had yielded to the first temptation; she had broken the vows made on her knees that morning, and she was utterly disheartened and discouraged.

She knelt with the rest, her head bowed as if in prayer, but her mind in a wild confusion of anger, shame, and remorse; but the anger died, leaving nothing but the saddest, most wretched thoughts of all; the sense of utter failure; of continued shortcomings, of broken resolutions and disregarded vows, made sacred by the time and place of their utterance.

She thought she was wicked because she could not pray, because her thoughts would not become composed, quiet, and peaceful, like the place and hour, and she knelt on, her hands clasped tightly together, and her head pressed down into them, the only cry that could silently shape itself into words, breaking from her heart in very agony of doubt and despair: "O God, help me! O God, save me from myself!"

And who shall say that it was not enough? That that cry, coming from the depths of a heart distressed, remorseful and repentant for errors that to many would seem but trifles, did not reach the ear of Him who, bending in mercy and love, sees into the hearts of all; reads the very secrets of their souls; and to all who sincerely put their faith in Him surely, sooner or later, sends them His consolation and peace? As the others rose from their knees Marion was recalled to herself, and rising with the rest, she opened her prayer-book and joined in the service, which had just then commenced.

Mrs. Berkley had requested, when Marion entered Miss Stiefbach's school, that no sectarian influences should be brought to bear upon her daughter's mind. She wished that her child should follow her own inclinations and the dictates of her own conscience in religious matters, for she understood her well enough to know that she would not blindly follow any faith without first feeling sure that she clearly comprehended and sincerely believed all that its doctrines taught. The influences which of course continually surrounded, although in a quiet, unobtrusive way, were not without their effect. She loved the service of Miss Stiefbach's church, and joined in it heartily. It seemed to her that it brought her nearer to God if she knelt the first thing when she entered the church and asked his blessing on her head. Not that silent, heartfelt prayers could not be uttered anywhere and in any position; but it seemed to her as if there, on her knees, in the place sacredly dedicated to his worship. God did not seem so far off—as if she could more earnestly and fervently supplicate him.

There was much in the service which she could not believe and accept as it was intended it should be accepted; but she interpreted it as her own heart dictated. The greater part, however, she believed and repeated with reverence, and a feeling which could never come to her in her own church; for there the intense simplicity and almost business-like manner of conducting the service, struck harshly upon her sensibilities; and she missed the participation in the prayers and responses which seemed to draw her out of herself, and raise her thoughts above their common level, even into the presence of the most High.

But to-day the holy words, the prayers and selections had no power to calm her troubled spirit; she tried to fix her thoughts upon the sermon, and not let them wander to dwell upon her own troubles; but it was no use; her mind was still in bitter confusion when she left the church.

As she went down the path, Georgie, who seemed to have forgotten her previous discomfiture, if not the subject of their conversation, joined her and began plying her with fresh questions about Rachel Drayton. Marion did her best to evade her remarks, but Georgie would not let her alone, until, thoroughly exasperated and provoked beyond endurance, she exclaimed shortly:—

"Georgie, I do wish you'd hold your tongue! I'm sick of your questions; do let me alone!"

"Dear me!" replied Miss Georgie, "you were very communicative this morning; but it's not very strange that you should be rather annoyed, considering Rachel has taken your best friend away."

An angry retort rose to Marion's lips, but she controlled herself sufficiently to keep from uttering it; although the expression of her face warned Georgie that she had said quite enough, and the two continued their walk in silence.

Having received permission from Miss Stiefbach, Marion set off immediately after dinner for the All Saints' church, and as the services began a half hour before St. Mark's she had her walk all to herself; nor was she sorry for this, for she did not feel like talking to any one.

She was early; hardly any one was in the church, and without waiting for the sexton to show her into a pew, she took the very front one, knowing that it was almost always unoccupied. The hymns were read by the clergyman of the parish; a good, earnest man, and one who in the homes of the poor, and by the bedsides of the suffering and dying was often seen, and most sincerely loved; but he had not the gift of preaching; he rarely made his sermons go home to the hearts of his hearers, and Marion felt disappointed when she saw him; she had hoped to hear some one else.

Her surprise and pleasure was great, when Mr. More stepped forward and announced that Mr. B., who had been pastor of that church fifteen years before, would preach for them that day.

The minister came forward, and bowing his head, remained for a moment in silent prayer; when he lifted it again Marion felt as if she had seen the face of an angel, so holy, peaceful, and patient was its expression. He was a very old man; his hair hung long and white about his shoulders; and as the beams of the afternoon's sun fell upon it, it gleamed with a light which was almost unearthly, spiritualizing and sanctifying that beautiful old face, until it seemed to many as if he were speaking to them from the very gates of heaven. His sermon was short but impressive; the gentle pathos of his voice, and the earnestness of his manner, were felt by all who heard him. Bending over the pulpit as he closed his discourse, his voice fell into a soft, musical cadence, which though very low reached the most remote recesses of the church, and stretching out his arms as if he would have taken each one by the hand and led them to the haven where he had found rest and peace, he exclaimed, or rather entreated:—

"O my friends! look down into your own hearts, and read each one of you what is written there; pride, wilfulness, sin in many forms. Man's greatest enemy is self. But who has said, 'He that conquereth himself is greater than he that taketh a city'?—Jesus! Jesus the Saviour, who came to wash out all our sins; to give us strength for the struggles and trials which come to us all; to teach us patience, humility, and charity.

"Each one in this world, young or old, has his sorrows to bear; his temptations to resist; his victories to gain; and to each one it seems sometimes as if everything was darkness and desolation; the blackness of night surrounds them on every side; darkness! darkness everywhere! no light, no hope, no guide. Look up, my friends! look up! not to the darkness; but above it, beyond it, to where Christ stands, ready, ay, more than ready. He comes to meet you, his eyes beaming with compassionate love, his hands outstretched. Grasp those hands, hold fast and firm; they, and they alone, can lead you through storm and darkness, through sorrow and fear; until kneeling at last in perfect peace and happiness you shall behold the face of your Father in heaven."

Then followed the Lord's Prayer; but Marion could not take her eyes from that holy face. It seemed to her as if every word had been uttered for her alone; as if the speaker had looked down into the secrets of her heart and had tried to give her comfort and consolation.

And this was partly true. As Mr. B. leaned forward and cast his eyes over the congregation they fell upon the face of that young girl, looking up at him with a longing, wistful, tearful glance that startled him. For many years he had been settled over a fashionable society in New York, where he often felt that the words he uttered were but as "seed sown by the wayside" or "on stony ground;" but there was no mistaking the earnestness of that face, over which was spread an expression which it pained him to see in one so young; for he knew that her trials, whatever they were, were but just begun, and thinking of the years of struggling that would probably come to her, his heart yearned over her in deepest sympathy. With the thought of her uppermost in his mind he gave out the closing hymn; two verses only. Marion had heard them often before, but their depth and meaning never came to her so fully as now:—

"Give to the winds thy fears;
Hope and be undismayed;
God hears thy sighs, and counts thy tears;
He shall lift up thy head.

"Through waves, through clouds and storms,
He gently clears thy way;
Wait thou his time, so shall the night
Soon end in glorious day."

As the last notes of the choir died away, and Marion bowed her head to receive the benediction, she felt strengthened and encouraged; and a peace such as she had not known for months fell upon her heart.

As she passed out of church she avoided meeting any one whom she knew, and hurried out of hearing of the remarks of various members of the congregation, who were commenting on the

sermon in very much the same manner as if it had been a theatrical performance.

Such expressions as, "Very fine sermon, wasn't it?—hit some of us pretty hard;" or "What a charming voice and manner! why, he really quite touched me!" made by different persons in a flippant, off-hand tone, jarred upon her ears, and she was thankful to leave them all behind.

As she was about to cross the street, preparatory to turning off into the road which led to school, she stopped to allow a carriage to pass; as it reached her a gentleman leaned towards her, and looking up she met the eyes of the minister bent down upon her with an expression of the deepest interest.

She never saw that face again; but the remembrance of it went with her through her whole life.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LETTER-BAG.

Monday morning Marion sent a long letter to her mother, in which she gave a full account of her interview with Aunt Bettie; sent the address, and gave as accurate a description as she was able of Miss Jemima Dobbs herself.

She waited anxiously for some days for an answer to her letter, and could hardly keep the thought of Aunt Bettie out of her head. Friday afternoon, when the postman came, she was the first to get to the door and take the bag from him. As she went with it into the library, the girls all crowded round her in eager expectation, while she stifled her own impatience and slowly unstrapped the bag, looking provokingly unconcerned, and quite regardless of the smiling, eager faces that were bent over her.

"O Marion!" exclaimed Sarah Brown, "don't you see I'm dying to know if there's a letter for me? Do hurry up."

"She doesn't expect a letter herself, so she doesn't care how long she keeps us waiting," sullenly remarked Mattie Denton; "she likes to torment us."

"You're mistaken there, Mattie," replied Marion, with a teasing twinkle in her eyes, "for I do expect a letter; but I like 'linked sweetness, long drawn out,' you know. Hands off, girls!" as she slowly opened the mouth of the bag, and two or three arms were stretched out for the letters that filled it to the top; "hands off, I'm postman to-day, and I won't have my rights interfered with. Let me see,—number one; that's for Julia Thayer. Julia! where are you? Here, Fan, run upstairs and take it to her. Number two, Grace Minton. Here, Grace, virtue recognized and patience rewarded; you held your tongue, and see how well I've served you;" and Marion rattled on a string of nonsense as she took out the letters and handed them to their various owners.

"Two letters and a pamphlet for Miss Stiefbach; one for Miss Christine; and whose is this great, fat one, I wonder, with a foreign stamp? Rachel Drayton, I do declare!" and she was about to add, "I'm glad she's got it;" but her habit of always treating Rachel with supreme indifference was too strong upon her, and she only remarked, "Here, who will take this letter up to Miss Drayton's room?"

Georgie Graham came forward and offered her services. "I am going upstairs," she said; "I'll take it up to her."

Marion handed it to her without speaking, but elevated her eyebrows in a very expressive way; but at that moment Rachel herself came into the room, and Georgie stepped forward and gave her the letter, saying in her sweetest tones:—

"Ah, Rachel! are you here? Here is a letter for you, and I could not resist giving myself the pleasure of delivering it."

Rachel took the letter with a delighted smile, and, thanking Georgie, ran upstairs that she might read it undisturbed; in the surprise and pleasure of receiving it she did not notice Georgie's unusually affable manner, or the astonished glances and expressive looks which passed between the other girls.

Marion mentally remarked, "The two millions are taking effect; Georgie has begun to toady already."

"Well, Marion, haven't you got a letter for me?" asked little Rose May, who had stood patiently by Marion's side, saying nothing, but looking longingly into the bag, the bottom of which was fast becoming visible.

"You poor little thing, how good you have been!" and Marion bent down and kissed the expectant, little face. "I'll look over these in a jiffy, and we'll see if there isn't one for you. Susie Brastow, May Fowler, *Marion Berkley*, and—yes, here is yours, Rose,—Miss Rose May in great black letters."

"Oh, it's from father! I'm so glad!" and Rose seated herself on the floor in the bow-window, and

was soon oblivious to everything but the contents of her letter.

"Here, Grace!" exclaimed Marion, as Grace Minton passed on her way into the drawing-room, "just take this and hang it on the nail; that's a good girl;" and she held the letter-bag towards her.

"No, I thank you," laughingly replied Grace; "you're very anxious to be postmaster when it comes to taking out the letters, but the rest of the duties you want to shirk on to some one else; but I won't submit, I'm going to do my practising."

"Oh, you unnatural, ungrateful girl!" replied Marion; "you have read your letter, and are not even thankful to me for giving it to you, almost the first one; and here I am perfectly wild to read mine. However," she exclaimed with martyr-like air, "it's only another proof of the total depravity of the human race."

"No ingratitude, Marion; but you *know* you always get some one to hang the bag up for you after *you* have had the fun of taking out the letters, and I don't think it is fair."

"Perfectly," replied Marion, as she hung the bag up in the vestibule, ready for the girls to make their various deposits, "perfectly; equal distribution of labor you know."

"Equal humbug!" replied Grace, who could not help laughing.

"O Grace!" called out Marion over the banisters, as Grace was about to turn into the drawing-room, "couldn't you find out what Georgie Graham is going to practise, for when she is in the school-room, playing Chopin's Polonaise, and you are in the drawing-room running the scales,—at least, to one who is not especially fond of 'close harmony,'—the effect is not so charming as it might be."

Grace, whose musical powers were not very extensive, made up a face, and slammed the drawing-room door, and Marion rushed precipitately into her own room.

"Don't sit down on that bed!" cried Florence; "don't you see I've got on the ruffled tidies?"

"O you old maid!" retorted Marion; "you know there's no place I enjoy sitting to read my letters so much as on the bed. What possessed you to put on those tidies to-day?"

"Why, Marion, we have been back more than seven weeks, and have not had them on yet. Now just see how nice they look."

"They do look lovely, that's a fact;" replied Marion. "There's one thing your respected aunt knows how to do to perfection, and that is to quill ruffles. On the whole I'm glad you put them on; it will cure me of my horrible habit of bouncing down on the bed; consequently save me an innumerable amount of lectures, besides making our room look very distingué; three excellent reasons for keeping them on, so I'll content myself with our old seat."

"Well, Mab, do tell me what your mother writes."

"Why, I actually haven't had time to read it yet; there were crowds of letters, and I, like a little goose, took the bag. I do hope she has some good news of Jemima;" and Marion opened the letter and read it aloud:—

"BOSTON, Nov. 16th.

"MY DEAR MARION:—I was delighted to receive your letter, but particularly so when I read it and found how much my dear daughter was interesting herself for the good of others.

"I have just been obliged to change our parlor girl, Mary having gone home to be with her invalid mother, and was preparing myself for going the usual round of the intelligence offices, when your letter came. The address which you sent (I presume it was not a specimen of Miss Stiefbach's instruction) I took with me, for I had never heard of Mrs. Benson's office, and doubted very much if I should be able to find it.

"As events proved, I was right, for after having crossed the city in every direction,—in cars, coaches and on foot,—I found that the place must be in Crawford Street, East Boston, instead of East Crawford Street, Boston; so I went to the East Boston ferry, and as good luck would have it, there was a directory in the office, which I looked over, and discovered that there was such a street, but could find no Mrs. Benson; however, as the directory was an old one, I did not trust to it, but crossed the ferry. I found the street without any difficulty; but when I came to No. 22, behold, it was occupied by a barber! I must say, I was discouraged; but upon going in and making inquiries, I found that Mrs. Benson had formerly occupied the store, but, as the colored gentleman informed me, 'she had removed to Boston, thinking that the crowded metropolis would afford her a better opportunity of carrying on her business, so as to render it more lucrative.' He was so extremely affable and polite, that I almost felt it my duty to sit down and have all my hair cut off; but I contented myself with buying a new kind of crimping-pin, which he assured me was the same as those used by Her Royal Highness the Empress Eugénie. Of course I believed him, and the crimping-pins will be ready for you when you come home at Christmas. But to return to my story; Mr. Ambrose St. Leger (don't be frightened, Marion, that is only the barber) gave me minute directions how to find Mrs. Benson's office, and I came back to the city, thankful to have some clue, however indirect it might be. I found the office without any difficulty, and Mrs. Benson, being of

course very anxious to work herself into the good graces of a Boston lady, was extremely loquacious and obliging, notwithstanding I was unable to suit myself there with a servant. To make a long story short, she told me that she had received several letters for a Jemima Dobbs, but as she had never had any such girl in her office, after keeping them some time, she had burned them up.

"I must say I felt extremely disheartened, for I thought that if I found the right woman she would certainly be able to tell me something about Jemima Dobbs. She produced her books, and upon looking over them I found the name of Arabella Dobbs. It seemed ridiculous to think that could be the same person I wanted, but I had an inward conviction that it was, and I have still; though don't get elated yet. Mrs. Benson, who relies more upon her memory than her book-keeping, says she is sure she got Arabella Dobbs a place in East Boston several weeks ago, and she is going to write to the lady, to find out if she is still there, and if she ever had the name Jemima. I thanked her for the interest she had taken in the case, and gave her my address, as she promised to send me word the instant she received an answer to her letter.

"And now, my dear, that is all I have to tell you. Very unsatisfactory I know it is; but I feel quite sure that Arabella Dobbs and Jemima Dobbs are one and the same person, for it is very seldom that one comes across a Yankee girl in these offices, and Dobbs is a name one would not be likely to find there twice.

"You will be the best judge of what it is best to do about telling Mrs. Dobbs what I have written to you; perhaps it will be better to wait until you hear something more conclusive; but the suspense must be terrible for her to bear, and it may be some consolation for her to know there is some one interesting herself for her here.

"I will write just as soon as I hear from Mrs. Benson; and now, my darling, I really have not another moment to spare you.

"Your father sends his usual stock of love, and ever so many messages, which I could not remember if I tried; but they were all very affectionate and so complimentary, that perhaps it is just as well you should not hear them.

"Charlie is asleep, and Fred has not yet come in from baseball; so you must content yourself with a whole heart-full of love from your fond

"MAMMA."

"Now, Flo, was there ever such a darling mamma as mine? I do think she is just perfection,—going all over Boston, and East Boston too, and never saying she was tired, or anything of the sort. I don't think there are many women that would do that; do you, Flo?"

"No, I don't believe there are many like her; I think she is the loveliest woman I ever knew. But, Marion, I don't see as you have found out much about poor Jemima after all."

"No, there is not much real, satisfactory information, that's a fact; but I *feel* just as if that girl was the right one, and I know mamma must feel pretty sure of it too, or she would have waited for the answer to that letter before she wrote me. I shall go up to auntie's as soon as I can; but I'm afraid it won't be before Saturday, for you know to-morrow is English composition day, and next day French abstract, and I was so careless about mine last time that I really think I ought to lay myself out this week."

"Indeed you ought, Marion," exclaimed Florence; "it's a shame that a girl who can write such compositions as you can, when you have a mind to, should hand in such a flat, silly thing as your last one was. I'm not complimentary, I know, but it's the truth; you know yourself it was horrible."

"Yes, I know it was; and that is why I'm particularly anxious to have a good one this time; don't you see?"

"But don't you think you will be able to get up to Aunt Bettie's before Saturday?" asked Florence; "it seems hard to keep her in suspense."

"I really don't see how I can find time, and then I'm in hopes that if I wait, by that time the answer to that woman's letter will have come, and I shall hear something decisive from mamma."

"Well, I think after all perhaps it will be better for you to wait until then. But do you know it is after four o'clock, and the girls have all got through practising? We ought to go down and try our duet."

"Sure enough!" exclaimed Marion, springing up. "I don't know my part at all; haven't looked at the last two pages, and Mr. Stein comes to-morrow."

"Oh, you read music so quickly, that you'll play your part better at sight than I shall after I've practised it a week. I wish I could read faster."

"Don't wish it, Flo; it is very nice sometimes, but I don't think people who read easily ever play readily without their notes. Now for you to know a piece once is to know it always, with or without your notes, while I have to fairly pound it into my head."

"There is more truth than poetry in that, I know," replied Florence, as the two went downstairs

together, "for I have heard Aunt Sue complain of the same thing; nevertheless I wish I wasn't so awfully slow."

But we will leave them to their music, and musical discussions, and hurry on with our story.

CHAPTER X.

MARION'S RIDE.

Marion had no other letter from her mother during the week, and she was so busy the whole time with her studies, music, etc., that it was not until Saturday afternoon that she started on her errand.

The weather had been unusually cold, and the previous night there had been quite a heavy fall of snow, which, notwithstanding it was now only the middle of November, still remained on the ground, and the thick, gray sky gave promise that there was yet more to come; indeed before Marion was fairly ready the flakes began to make their appearance, and came lazily down, as if they did not all relish being called out so early.

But Marion did not mind wind or weather, and with her water-proof over her thick sack, the hood drawn up over her head, and her feet encased in rubbers, she set out for her long walk in the most excellent spirits.

Florence went to the door with her and urged her to take an umbrella, but Marion laughed at the idea, saying, "It was only a little flurry and would be over in a minute;" but before she had reached Aunt Bettie's she wished she had taken Florence's advice, for the snow came down thicker and faster, beating against her face, and almost blinding her, so that it was with great difficulty that she could see her way, and it was at least an hour before she arrived at the farmhouse.

She went round to the back of the house, and without knocking lifted the latch of the door, and entered a sort of shed or unplastered room, which in summer was used as a kitchen, but which now served as a wood-shed.

"Aunt Bettie," cried Marion, "are you there?" and she stamped her feet, and shook her clothes to get rid of the snow which covered her from head to foot.

"For the goodness' sakes, who's that?" exclaimed Aunt Bettie as she jumped up from her seat by the kitchen fire, where she had fallen asleep over her knitting, and hurried into the outer room.

"Why, it's only me, auntie, to be sure," said Marion.

"Marion Berkley! well, did I ever! but massy me," as she took hold of Marion's water-proof, "you're as wet as a drowned rat; I'd no idee it snowed so hard!"

"Oh, it's only wet on the outside; *I'm* not wet a bit;" and Marion took off her water-proof and hung it over a chair to dry, pulling off her rubbers and placing them on the floor beside it; "but why don't you ask me what I came for, auntie?"

"Wall, child, to tell the truth, I was so s'prised to see yer that I didn't think anything 'bout what yer come for, and I aint going to ask nuther, 'till you jist seat yourself in front o' that fire and toast them feet o' yourn. I never see sich a child! To think o' your startin' out sich weather's this to come and see me!"

"It didn't snow much when I left school, and I hadn't the least idea it would be such a storm; it's so early, you know. Florence wanted me to bring an umbrella, but I wouldn't; I never will carry one if I can help it."

"Wall, it is a reg'lar out-and-outer," exclaimed Aunt Bettie, as she stood peering through the window at the storm; "winter's sot in airly this time, an' no mistake. I tell you what," as she came back to the fire and seated herself beside Marion, "if you've come for anything pertickler, I guess you better tell it right away, fur it won't do fur you to stop long, it gathers so."

"Well, I did come for something particular, auntie, but you must not expect too much;" and Marion, who saw that Aunt Bettie was unusually excited, notwithstanding she tried to appear composed, laid her hand on her arm in a soothing, caressing way. "It is only a little bit of comfort for you, not any real hope, except that you will perhaps feel encouraged to know that you have friends in the city looking for your daughter, and although I do not know anything certain about her, I think mamma has got hold of some clue. But I'll read you what she says; you know I promised to write her, and I did, and this is her answer."

Aunt Bettie signed for Marion to go on; she was too much moved to speak, although her emotion was caused quite as much by gratitude as anxiety, for she had waited so long, and up to this time in such perfect silence, that hope had almost died out within her, and she really did not expect any joyful tidings.

At the conclusion of the letter Marion looked up, almost dreading to meet Aunt Bettie's glance,

feeling sure that it must be one of disappointment; but, contrary to her expectations, the good woman's face was positively beaming through her tears, as she exclaimed in an almost joyful tone:—

"The Lord bless you, Miss Marion, and your mother too, for you're a pair of Christians if there ever was one! I'm jist sure that that Arabella Dobbs is my Jemimy; an' I'll tell yer why I think so. Yer see the gal that set my darter up to goin' to Boston used to visit some o' her kinfolk down in the village, an' that's how she and Jemimy got acquainted; she put it into my gal's head that *Jemimy* was an awful country kind of a name,—her own was Belindy,—and she always called her Arabella, an' jist as like as not Jemimy was fool enough to go an' give *that* as her name. I declare she orter been ashamed of herself!" and Mrs. Dobbs' indignation so far got the better of her grief, that if Miss Jemimy had been there in the flesh it is quite probable she would have received at least a good scolding.

"Why, auntie, if that is so," replied Marion, "I've no doubt it's the same girl; but how do you suppose she happened to go to East Boston instead of Boston?"

"Oh, like's not that Belindy Beers lived in East Boston, and jist said Boston 'cause she thought 'twas smarter. I never could bear that gal anyhow, an' if it hadn't been for her my darter'd been here now."

"Well, you know I haven't really found her yet," said Marion, who was afraid that Aunt Bettie's ire had caused her to lose sight of that fact; "we only have some *probability* of finding out where she is."

"I know, dear, I know all that, but I do feel better; it does seem as if there couldn't be two sich good creeturs as you an' your mother doin' your best to help me, and no good to come of it. 'T any rate I aint goin' to despond any more; it's like flyin' in the face o' Providence, and until I hear wus news I shall jist hope for the best."

"Aunt Bettie, I'm glad enough to hear you say so; I *can't* help feeling very hopeful myself, and I'm glad you can feel the same."

"Well, child, I think it's the right way arter all; 'taint my nater usually to be very despondent, but somehow I got entirely discouraged; but *I should* be an ungrateful woman enough if I didn't thank you over and over again. I can't speak it all, but I feel it jist the same."

"Indeed, auntie, it is not me, but mamma, that you must thank. I have done nothing but write to her, and she has done all the work."

"Yes, and how would she have known it, if it hadn't been for you? I thank her, the Lord knows I do, from the bottom of my heart, but it's all owin' to you, child, nevertheless. If you hadn't had quick eyes to see into my troubles, and a warm heart to put you up to helpin' me, what would she a' known about it? No, no, dear, you're the fust one I owe my thanks to, and whether I ever find Jemimy again or not, I shall always love you, and bless you for what you've done for me so long's I live."

And Marion knew that Aunt Bettie meant every word she said, and she did not again try to alter her opinion. It was pleasant indeed to know that there was any one who could have such a high regard for her; and with a warmth about her heart which it was pleasant to feel, and a light in her eyes which it would certainly have done any one good to see, she sat talking with Mrs. Dobbs, both of them oblivious to the fact that time was fast slipping away, until, upon looking up, Marion was astonished to see that it was long after four o'clock.

"Why, auntie!" she exclaimed, "see how dark it is growing; we've been talking nearly an hour. I must hurry off this minute, or I shall be frightened to death before I get home."

"Why, sure enough, it's most five o'clock! I'd no idee of it. But massy sakes!" cried Aunt Bettie as she went to the window, "jest come here and look out! Why, you can't walk home in this snow nohow; why, it's up to your ankles! I never see snow gather so quick in my life."

Marion went to the window, and took a survey of the scene. It certainly did not look very promising. The snow had gathered so rapidly that the roads were covered several inches deep, and darkness appeared to be fast approaching. Marion looked decidedly troubled; but there was no help for it; go she must; for she knew that Miss Stiefbach would be very much worried about her; so putting on as good a face as possible she said:—

"Well, auntie, I haven't a moment to spare; it is really quite dark, and it will take me longer to go than it did to come;" and Marion was hurrying out of the room to get her water-proof when Aunt Bettie caught hold of her:—

"You jest set down in that cheer, and don't you stir out of it till I tell yer you may! Do you s'pose I'm goin' to send you home afoot when it's sich walkin's this? No; not if my name's Sarey Ann Dobbs. You jest wait, and you shall have one sleigh-ride this year if you don't ever get another."

"Aunt Bettie, what do you mean?" exclaimed Marion.

"You jest wait, and you'll see what I mean." Auntie went into the outer room, and opening the door shouted at the very top of her lungs in a shrill, high key: "Jabe! Jabe Dobbs, be you there?" but Jabe did not respond to the maternal call. "Jabe! Ja-a-a-be!" Then in an undertone, "Plague take that boy! he's the laziest creetur I ever did see!"

Presently there came a reply from one of the outside sheds in a slow, drawling voice; very much as if the owner of it had heard the first summons, but was not in a great hurry to heed it:—

"H-e-r-e!"

"Wall, come in this minit, and don't keep me standin' here holdin' this door open any longer!"

In a few moments, but in what seemed to Marion almost an eternity, heavy steps were heard on the flagstone, and directly after, a youth of about sixteen made his appearance in the door-way, and slowly knocking the snow off his boots, asked in the same drawling tone:—

"What do yer want?"

"You come inside, and I'll tell yer," replied his mother.

"Well, yer might o'—" but catching sight of Marion his head went down, and Jabe stood sheepishly twirling his hat in his hands, shuffling from one foot to the other, apparently too bashful for speech.

"Don't stan' there twirlin' yer hat, and lookin' like a great idiot, but jest step round and be spry. Did you get down the big sleigh t'other day when I told yer to?"

Jabe nodded assent.

"Well, it's a wonder! Now you go out and tackle up Shadrack as quick as ever you can, and hev him round to the door, less'n no time; no shillyshallyin'!"

"What shall I put him into arter I get him tackled?" asked the hopeful youth, with a momentary glance at Marion from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"Why, put him into the sleigh, to be sure; what'd you s'pose?"

"Well, you didn't tell me, an' I didn't know but p'r'aps she was goin' to ride him," replied Jabe, with another glance at Marion, which almost upset her gravity.

"You didn't think any such a thing, and you know you didn't! You're to drive Miss Marion back to school, and you jest hurry out; and don't let the grass grow under yer feet either!"

"Aint much danger," replied Jabe, as he shuffled off; "it's most through sproutin' fur this year, and 'taint quite ready fur next."

"Now, Miss Marion, did you *ever* see sech a boy as that?" exclaimed Aunt Bettie in righteous indignation; "he worries my life out of me!"

"What is the matter with him?" asked Marion, who was intensely amused at the ridiculous-looking object she had just seen, and his comical, awkward ways; "there doesn't seem to be anything very bad about him."

"Bad! of course there isn't, but he *is* so powerful slow! There's no doin' nothin' with him; he's too lazy to work, and he's too lazy to study. But there's one thing, he's honest as he ken be, and I rally do think he does set consid'erable store by me; though he *does* try my patience awfully."

"Of course he thinks a great deal of you," replied Marion; "he's just at a lazy age now. I dare say he'll get over it, and prove a great comfort to you one of these days."

"Oh, he's a comfort now, in a sort of a way. He's stiddy enough; but laws! he's too lazy to be anything else."

"He'll wake up yet, auntie, see if he doesn't. There's a twinkle in his eyes that shows he's nobody's fool."

"Oh, I never supposed he was quite as bad's that; but he haint found his niche yet; when he does I s'pose he'll fit into it as tight as a pertater does its skin."

In much shorter time than Marion had expected, judging from what she had seen of Jabe's activity, the jingle of bells was heard, and directly after, the musical voice of Mrs. Dobbs' young hopeful called out:—

"I'm ready if you be!"

Aunt Bettie opened the door, her face positively radiant with smiles and the pleasure she felt at being able to give Marion a ride.

As Marion's eyes beheld the equipage that stood ready for her use, it must be confessed that her first sensation was anything but agreeable. In common with most girls of her age, and I might say with girls considerably older than herself, she had a great admiration for handsome horses, elegant carriages, and a driver in keeping with the rest of the establishment.

Certainly no one could say, however, that her driver was not perfectly in keeping with the establishment of which he evidently felt extremely proud; for he sat on the front seat, holding the reins in both hands, as if poor Shadrack was a four-in-hand team, or at least a tandem with a very refractory leader.

The sleigh itself was of such peculiar structure, that it would have been almost impossible to have decided at what ancient period it must have been made. In shape, it most resembled that

elegant vehicle commonly known as a "pung," excepting that it boasted of two seats, and a back that nearly reached the top of Marion's head. Its color was a beautiful pea-green, ornamented with various scrolls and devices in bright yellow, which might have been a combination of the paternal and maternal crests of Jabe's ancestors, but looked wonderfully like squash-vines.

Around old Shadrack's neck was hung a string of iron bells about the size of small cannon-balls, which jingled most melodiously every time he moved. But Marion's good sense would not allow her to yield to any feeling of mortification which she might feel at the idea of appearing at school in such a turn-out. She only thought of Aunt Bettie's kindness in ordering out her old horse on such an unprecedented occasion; and thanking her warmly and sincerely for her thoughtfulness, she stepped into the sleigh and was driven off by Jabe, who flourished the whip over Shadrack's ears, quite regardless of his mother's warning, "not to let the critter trot fast, 'cause 'twas heavy haulin'; the snow was so soggy."

For some time they jogged along, the silence only broken by the monotonous jingle of the bells. It had stopped snowing, and the sky was quite bright in the west, making it much lighter than it was earlier in the afternoon; touching up the trees with a rosy light, and casting a soft glow on the fields, as they passed along.

Marion forgot everything else in the pleasure of watching the fading light, and was quite oblivious to the existence of Jabe, until she was roused from her silent observations by a mild "ger-lang!" which reminded her that it certainly was her duty to make herself agreeable to her escort.

She hardly knew what to say to him, but she ventured to remark "that the horse did not look as if he was worked very hard."

"Worked hard!" exclaimed Jabe. "Lord, he don't know what work is! I just wish I had as easy a time as Shadrack."

"What in the world did you name him Shadrack for?" exclaimed Marion.

"Me!" replied Jabe, turning round slowly and looking at Marion out of the corner of his eye, "'twant none o' my doin's, 'twas father's; he allus liked something different from anybody else, and that time I think he hit it."

"Yes, I think he did," replied Marion, smiling in spite of herself; then in a soberer tone she asked, "Do you remember your father, Jabe?"

"No, he died 'fore I was two years old."

"Don't you wish he could have lived?"

"Well now, that depends on circumstances," replied Jabe in a deliberating tone; "if he was such a fellow for work as the marm, I can't say as I *should* be very particular 'bout havin' him round."

"Why, Jabe Dobbs!" exclaimed Marion, striving to conceal her laughter, "aren't you ashamed of yourself? I dare say it would be better for you, if your mother made you work a great deal harder than she does."

"O Lord! Miss Marion!" cried Jabe, in the most horrified tone, but with a twinkle in his eyes which Marion fully appreciated; "if she did I couldn't live nohow. You see, work and I don't hitch hosses; we weren't meant to go 'longside the same pole; and if one of us has got to stan' still, I think it might's well be me, and let *work* go."

At this Marion laughed outright, but not a muscle of his face did Jabe move, and if it had not been for that sly twinkle in his eye when he lifted it to Marion's face one would have thought he was solving some weighty problem.

He sat round sideways, one leg on the seat, and the reins now hanging loosely in his hands, as Shadrack jogged lazily on, while he was evidently highly pleased and flattered by Marion's attention.

"Well, Jabe," continued Marion, "perhaps, if you don't like to work, you like to study. Do you ever go to school?"

"I went last winter by spells, an' I s'pose I shall go this winter too."

"Do you like it?" asked Marion; "what do you like best,—spelling?"

"Spelling," repeated Jabe, in a ruminating tone,— "spelling, no, I don't like it much, that is, I don't like it the way they larn you down there. I think p'r'aps if they'd let a feller follow his own fashion I might like it; but they put in so many letters that there aint no kind o' sense in havin', that it jest confuses me, an' so I ginerally spells accordin' to fancy."

"O Jabe!" replied Marion, "that will never do in the world; but perhaps you like arithmetic better."

"'Rithmetic!" and Jabe fairly dropped the reins and struck an emphatic blow on his knee, as he exclaimed again: "'rithmetic! I tell you *there* you got me. If there is anything I do hate on the face o' this airth, it's 'rithmetic! Spellin's bad enough, but 'rithmetic's wus. When you set me to doin' a sum it's jest like the feller that had to go through the drill for the whole regiment; he got on fust-rate till they told him to go form a holler-square; but he said *that* 'wrenched him awfully."

"O Jabe! Jabe!" cried Marion, now fairly convulsed with laughter, "I am afraid you will never make much of a scholar anyway. But, indeed, you ought to try and do better; just think what a comfort you might be to your mother, if you would only—But stop the horse, stop the horse a minute; I've got an idea!"

Jabe drew up the reins with a sudden jerk, and looked at Marion as if she had scattered every idea he ever possessed.

"You jump out!" she exclaimed; "no, you needn't do that; just help me over on to the front seat, and then you climb on to the back. I'm going to drive up to school in style."

Jabe dropped the reins, and did as he was told, with a very bewildered expression on his great, round face, as he looked at Marion very much as if he doubted her sanity; but she went on talking very fast as she tucked in the almost worn-out robe, and took the reins in her hands.

"Don't you see, we're almost to the school, and everybody will be on the lookout for me; so I want to dash up to the door in very stunning fashion. Now sit up straight; fold your arms; hold your head up;—so,—that's it; you're my tiger; that means the groom, boy, you know, who sits behind when the gentleman drives. Now, when I stop the horse, you jump out just as quick as ever you can and rush to his head, as if you thought he wouldn't stand still long enough for me to get out. Do you understand?"

"Yes," replied Jabe, who sat as straight as a ramrod, his eyes twinkling under his bushy, fur cap, and his mouth stretched from ear to ear. If he didn't love work, he certainly did a good joke, and he entered fully into the spirit of the thing.

"Well, now, keep sober, and don't forget what I told you."

Marion braced her feet against the dasher; threw back her shoulders; extended her arms at full length, and gave poor old Shadrack such a tremendous "cut" with the whip that he sprang forward as if forty fiends were after him; but Marion was used to driving, and only flourished the old wooden-handled ox-whip, and urged him on the faster.

Everything happened precisely as Marion wished. Of course Miss Stiefbach had become considerably alarmed at her long absence, and every one had come into the front of the house, and all were looking out for her, their faces pressed up against the window-panes as they crowded together.

Just as Marion came in sight some one opened the front door; this was what she wanted. Giving the whip an extra flourish, and saying in an undertone to Jabe, "Be ready," she dashed up to the gate, and suddenly drew the reins up short. Poor Shadrack, being thus brought to a very unexpected stand-still, threw his head up in the air, and planted his fore feet straight out in front of him, in a most warlike attitude. Almost before they stopped Jabe sprang out and grasped the poor panting beast by the head, as Marion threw the reins down, and stepping to the ground exclaimed in a pompous tone, loud enough to be heard by those standing in the door-way, "Rub him down well, Thomas, and give him an extra measure of oats;" then, as she turned into the gate, "and Thomas, have the tandem at the door in the cutter, to-morrow-morning at ten."

Jabe, not to be outdone, touched his hat, sprang on to the seat, and whisked Shadrack round and up the road, at a pace that would have made his mother hold up her hands in holy horror.

"Why, Marion Berkley, where *have* you been?" exclaimed a chorus of voices, Miss Stiefbach's actually among the number.

"I've been taking an airing on the Western Avenue. How do you like my turn-out? Neat but not gaudy, isn't it?"

"Well, Marion, I don't know what you will do next," said Miss Christine; "but where have you really been?"

"Marion, I must ask you to give a strict account of yourself," said Miss Stiefbach, who, now that she had recovered from her unusual surprise and alarm, was her own stately self again. Whereupon Marion gave a brief and satisfactory history of her afternoon's expedition, embellishing it with sundry remarks and expressions of her own, which rendered it highly entertaining to her younger hearers; and I might say to all but Miss Stiefbach, for Miss Christine joined heartily in the general laugh at Marion's first sleigh-ride of the season.

CHAPTER XI.

LA SOIRÉE MUSICALE.

"Girls! what do you think's up?" exclaimed Sarah Brown, as she bounced into the library one afternoon. "Miss Stiefbach and Mr. Stein have just been having a long confab in the 'secret-chamber,' and they came out just as I passed the door, and I heard Miss 'Stiffy' say, 'Yes, I knew you would prefer Friday, so I ventured to invite them without seeing you again; as yet the young ladies know nothing about it!' Now *I* should like to know what in the world *it* is."

"Well, so should I!" exclaimed Julia Thayer. "What can she mean; 'invited them,' and 'the young ladies know nothing about it.' She must be going to give a party."

"Yes, that's it, you may be sure," said Marion; "she's going to give a party, and she and Mr. Stein are going to lead the German. Won't they look well dancing the 'deux-temps' together?"

"O Marion, how perfectly ridiculous!" laughed Florence. "You know she can't be going to have a party; but what can it mean?"

"Are you sure you heard right, Sallie?" asked Grace Minton. "Why didn't you break your shoe-string and stop to tie it up; or do something or other to keep you there long enough to get something a little more satisfactory?"

"Why, I couldn't hang round the hall listening to what they said, could I? But I know there is to be something going on here Friday; see if there isn't."

"Yes, and Miss Stiefbach isn't going to say anything about it to us until the last moment, because she thinks our heads will be full of it," ejaculated Marion. "I've a great mind to ask her myself."

"If I was in the habit of betting, I would bet you anything that I know all about it," remarked Georgie Graham, who had kept silent while the other girls were making their comments.

"Oh, what is it?" asked Marion; "my principles and my purse too will stand a pound of candy."

"And I another," cried Sarah.

"Not so fast," replied Georgie. "I said *if* I was in the habit of betting, but I never bet; it is very unladylike."

"Granted!" cried Marion; "but please reserve your lecture for another time, and out with your secret."

"I really don't know as I *ought* to tell," said Georgie, as she counted the stitches on her canvas in a provokingly cool way. "I knew it by accident, and that is the reason I haven't spoken of it before."

"Oh, if you got possession of it in the same way you have of several other secrets here, I don't blame you for not wanting to tell of it," retorted Sarah.

"I don't know what you mean to insinuate, Sarah; but I heard of this entirely by accident two weeks ago to-morrow," replied Georgie in the same unmoved tone. "I was in the anteroom looking over an exercise which monsieur wanted me to correct, when I heard Mr. Stein and Miss Stiefbach talking together in very low tones in the school-room. Of course it did not occur to me that there could be anything private in what they were saying, or I should have let them know I was there"—("Of course," laconically remarked Marion)—"but when they had got through their conversation Miss Stiefbach said, 'We will say nothing about it to any one, as I wish it should remain a secret for the present;'—so I said nothing."

"Well, don't you *intend* to say anything?" cried Sarah Brown; "now that we know there is something going on, don't you intend to tell us what it is?"

"I really don't think it would be very honorable in me," rejoined Georgie, thoroughly enjoying her important position.

"Don't trouble her, Sarah; we all know what her conscientious scruples are. It would be a pity to have them disturbed," remarked Marion in a cutting, sarcastic tone. "I can tell you what it all means in five seconds."

"What is it?—tell us, do!" cried all, with the exception of Georgie.

"Miss Stiefbach intends to have some sort of a musical spread next Friday, and we girls have got to play."

"How did you know it?" exclaimed Georgie, thoroughly off her guard.

"I didn't take your method of finding it out, you may be sure," replied Marion. "I never heard a word about it before this afternoon; but if you put two and two together they generally make four, that's all."

"What do you mean by putting 'two and two together'?" impatiently asked Julia Thayer.

"Why, just this!" replied Marion. "Does Mr. Stein have an earthly thing to do with this school except to give us music-lessons? and is there anything that Miss Stiefbach could be getting up with him, that concerned the 'young ladies' that didn't have something to do with our music? and would she be inviting people here when it was convenient to *him* if it wasn't that they are going to give a musicale, and he is going to make us play? So there you've got the whole matter; I don't think it required much brilliancy to see that."

"Well, I *never* should have thought of it!" exclaimed Sarah.

"Nor I either," said Florence. "But don't you think it is awfully mean not to have let us known anything about it beforehand, so that we might have had time to practise?"

"I presume Mr. Stein has been secretly drilling us for it this long time, though we poor,

unconscious victims didn't suspect it," replied Marion. "But there's Georgie, she has the advantage of us; she has probably decided what she is going to play, and has learned it perfectly." But there was no reply from Georgie as she had discreetly left the room.

"Oh, isn't she sly?" exclaimed Grace Minton.

"Sly! sly isn't the word for it," put in Sarah Brown in her most energetic tones; "she ought to have been named Foxy Graham!"

"Well, there's one thing certain," said Grace Minton, "I shan't have to play; I thank my stars for that!"

"I wonder who will play," said Florence. "Georgie Graham of course; Julia; and you Mab; and I rather guess I shall have to. Well, I don't much care, I don't believe there will be many here, and I think it's time I learned to play before strangers."

"I don't know how I shall ever get on in the world," cried Marion in a despairing tone; "that is about the only thing I never could do."

"And I think it is so strange," remarked Julia Thayer; "for you see so much company at home, and always seem so self-possessed wherever you are, that it does seem queer that you are afraid to play before people."

"I know it. I dare say every one thinks it is all affectation," replied Marion, "for I know you all think I've got assurance enough to do most anything; but it is the honest truth, that I'm frightened half to death whenever I sit down to play to any one; and if I get along well at this affair of Miss Stiefbach's, it will be nothing but my *will* that carries me through."

"So you mean to play, do you?" asked Georgie Graham, who at this juncture suddenly made her appearance in the room.

"Yes, I mean to play if I'm asked, and I suppose I shall be, because I think I ought. I am determined to overcome this ridiculous nervousness, even if it is at the expense of fifty mortifying failures before I do it; so, girls, look out and prepare yourselves for a public disgrace; for of *course* there is not one of you who would not take it quite to heart if I should break down."

"Well," replied Sarah Brown in the most energetic tone (Sarah almost always spoke in italics), "I know I for one should feel dreadfully; though of *course* I can't answer for some of the rest of us;" and she cast a meaning glance at Georgie.

"I'm sure, Marion, I *hope* you won't fail," said Georgie as she picked up her work, her ostensible reason for coming back, and left the room.

"I know one thing," exclaimed Sarah; "if that girl kept a list of all the lies she tells in a week, white and black; she'd use up all the letter-paper there is in the town."

"O Sallie!" laughed Florence, "you're too severe. I'm afraid you don't entertain a Christian spirit towards Georgie."

"I don't, and I don't pretend to!" answered Sarah. "I never did like her, and I never shall; she's always saying something to aggravate me."

"But she didn't say anything to you then," said Julia Thayer, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes; "she was only *hoping* that Marion would not break down."

"Yes, and a lot she hoped it!" excitedly replied Sarah; "there's nothing would suit her better than to have Mab make a regular failure of it; and I just wanted to let her know I thought so."

"Now, Sarah," said Marion, in a half-laughing, half-serious tone, "don't you trouble yourself to fight my battles. I think I am quite equal to it myself; besides, you'll have your hands full to look after your own squabbles."

"There's ingratitude for you!" said Grace Minton. "If I were you, Sallie, I never would trouble myself about her again; she doesn't deserve such a champion."

"Oh, I don't mind what she says," replied Sarah, good-naturedly; "she can't make me hold my tongue, and I shall say just what I've a mind to, to that Georgie Graham, so long as she keeps on tormenting me."

That evening the whole school was informed that on the following Friday Miss Stiefbach was to give a *soirée musicale*, at which ten of the scholars were to perform.

These were Marion Berkley, Florence Stevenson, Alice Howard, Mattie Denton, Julia Thayer, Georgie Graham, Susie Snelling, Kate Brastow, and, to the surprise of every one, little Rose May and Fannie Thayer.

Of course nothing was talked of that week out of study hours, but the *soirée*, and great indignation was expressed by most of the performers that they had not been allowed more time to prepare themselves. But Mr. Stein knew what he was about; he wished the *musicale* to be as much as was possible an *impromptu* affair, as it was not his idea to make an exhibition of the skill of his pupils, but to accustom them to play with ease and self-possession before strangers. He gave his pupils a list of their names in the order in which they were to play, selected from the music belonging to each girl several pieces, from which she was to choose one, exercising her

own taste and judgment; decided himself upon the duets he wished performed, and then informed them that his part in the matter was ended; from that moment he was to be nothing but a spectator.

"But, Mr. Stein," exclaimed one, "just *please* tell me, can I play this well enough?" and then from a second, "O Mr. Stein, *would* you play this?" and "Oh, I never can play *any* of these before any one!" from a third, and many other exclamations and lamentations were poured upon him; but he only held up his hands in a deprecating way. "Now, young ladies, do not, do not, I beg of you, ask me another question! I consider that you know any one of the pieces which I have laid aside for you to choose from sufficiently well to play anywhere; it only remains for you to decide which one you will play. Now, good-bye until Friday; you will not see me until then, when I shall not come as your teacher, but as an invited guest, to have my ears delighted with the sweet sounds which I shall expect to hear from that instrument;" and with a profound bow the old German made his exit.

But, notwithstanding his apparent unconcern as to the result of this new whim of his, Mr. Stein was really quite excited about it; several of his pupils at Miss Stiefbach's he considered were quite remarkable for their age, and he looked forward to the coming musicale with a feeling of pride not unmixed with fear, lest some of his favorites should fail to do themselves credit.

Marion had noticed that for two weeks before the secret was generally known Georgie Graham had practised Chopin's Polonaise in A, every day, but since the whole school had been informed of the musicale she had only heard her play it twice. This induced her to think that Georgie, taking advantage of the knowledge which she had surreptitiously gained, had chosen that piece for Friday night, and having nearly perfected herself in it, was avoiding practising it, so that none of the girls might suspect what she intended to play.

Marion would not have been likely to have thought of this, if she had not taken the Polonaise about the same time that Georgie had, and had often remarked that she thought Georgie played it better than anything else, and very much better than she did herself. Remembering this, and knowing that Georgie would be particularly anxious to excel her in the eyes of the whole school, and before invited guests, she felt perfectly confident that Chopin's Polonaise was the piece she had chosen.

Now Georgie had certainly done everything she could to make Marion thoroughly uncomfortable ever since they had been back at school, and Marion had been actually longing for an opportunity to revenge herself. Here was the opportunity. The soirée was to open with a duet by Mattie Denton and Julia Thayer; then a solo by Florence, followed by a song from Alice Howard; then a piano solo from Marion, and after her Georgie Graham. This precedence over Georgie gave Marion the opportunity which she could not resist. She would play the Polonaise herself, thus forcing Georgie to choose another piece almost without a moment's notice.

Do not despise her, my friends; she was very much like other girls, and had a natural desire to punish Georgie for all the mean, petty annoyances to which she had been subjected at her hands. A very wrong desire, I grant you, and one for which she blamed herself very much; but she had it, and consequently as a faithful chronicler I must write it.

But do not for a moment suppose that she intended publicly to disgrace her school-mate; nothing of the kind; she knew that Georgie was perfectly capable, and perfectly willing to play any of her music before no matter how many strangers. She only wanted to provoke her, and spoil her nicely arranged plan of playing a very difficult and very brilliant piece of music, better than any of the other girls would be able to play, as they had not had the advantages of practising expressly for the occasion which she had taken. She was not at all jealous of Georgie, for although they were generally considered the rival pianists of the establishment, the rivalry was entirely on Georgie's side.

Many might say that they played equally well, but the few who truly loved music for its own sake missed something in Georgie's playing which they found in Marion's.

The secret was this: Georgie played from a love of the admiration and praise she received, and from an ambitious resolution she had made when a little child, that no one she knew should play better than she did herself. Consequently every one was struck with the accuracy and rapidity of her execution, and the brilliancy of her touch in all difficult music; but in more quiet pieces,—pieces that required that the soul of the performer should thrill through every chord, and vibrate with every touch of the piano, that the full depth and beauty of their perfect harmony might be conveyed to the listener's ear,—then it was that Georgie's playing seemed cold and mechanical, while that of Marion seemed an interpretation of the purest ideas of the composer.

Friday afternoon came at last. Throughout the house the two pianos had been going at almost every hour in the day; early and late, before breakfast and after supper, might be heard duets, solos, and songs, until those scholars who were not to perform at the musical soirée declared themselves thoroughly disgusted with the whole affair, and hoped Miss Stiefbach would never have another.

This afternoon, however, no one was allowed to go near the piano, and every girl was obliged to learn her lessons for Monday, and take her usual amount of exercise, notwithstanding that they had all begged and entreated to be permitted to give their last moments to music. Miss Stiefbach was obdurate and held her ground, for she knew the girls were all very much excited, and that nothing but a strict attention to other things would sufficiently calm them to enable them to play

at all, that night.

But just before tea excitement reigned supreme. To be sure it was divided and subdivided by being confined to the various rooms where the scholars were dressing themselves for the evening; still, if an entire stranger had walked through the lower part of the house where everything was quiet, and no one was to be seen except Miss Christine, who was arranging some beautiful flowers that had mysteriously made their appearance that afternoon, he would have felt perfectly sure that some event of an unusual and highly interesting nature was about to take place. As a rule all the scholars dressed very plainly, for Miss Stiefbach's motto regarding dress which she endeavored to instill into the youthful minds about her was, "Neatness, not display."

But notwithstanding the fact that ordinarily all finery was eschewed, almost every girl had stowed away in her trunk at least one dress a little more elaborate than the rest of her wardrobe; a set of pretty jewelry, or handsome ribbons, "in case anything should happen;" and now something was actually going to happen; the dull routine of school-life was to be broken in upon, and consequently the little vanities of this world would have a chance to air themselves.

"To friz, or not to friz! that is the question!" exclaimed Marion, as she turned from her looking-glass and appealed to Florence, who was buttoning her best-fitting cloth boots.

"Why, friz of course; you know it's the most becoming."

"Oh, I know that well enough; but you see I was too sleepy to put it up last night, and now I shall have to do it with hot slate-pencil, and it's the ruination of the hair."

"I guess it won't hurt it for just this once, and this is certainly a great occasion," answered Florence; "what are you going to wear on it,—cherry?"

"Oh, no! that lovely gold band you gave me; it just suits my dress, and lights up beautifully. I like to wear only one color when I can."

"That is all very well for you to say (these boots are *rayther* snug), because you're a blonde, and look well in plain colors; but I'm such a darkey that nothing but red and yellow suits me," said Florence.

"So much the better. I don't think there is anything handsomer than a rich orange or a bright scarlet, and sometimes a little of both is just the thing. There! how does that look?" continued Marion, as she put the last hair-pin in her back braids, gave an extra touch to the gleaming waves of her front hair, and straightened the narrow gold satin band which ran through them.

"Perfectly lovely!" enthusiastically cried Florence; "you've got it just high enough without being a bit too high, and those crimps are heavenly! Now put on your dress; I want to see the whole effect before I get myself up."

"I don't think it is quite long enough, do you?" asked Marion, in a doubtful tone, as she shook out the folds of a rich Irish poplin, and threw it over her head; "it is so awfully hard to get a dress just the right length, when you are not old enough for a train, and too old to have it up to your knees! But there! how's that?" and she turned for her friend's final verdict.

"Lovely! just lovely! That is the prettiest shade of green I *ever* saw; and *such* a poplin! Where did you get it?"

"Uncle George brought it to me from Ireland; wasn't it good of him? But come, Florence, you really must hurry; I expect the tea-bell will ring any minute; it's a blessed thing Miss Stiefbach put tea off half an hour, or we should never have been dressed beforehand. O Flo! what a stunning dress! I never saw it before."

"*Do* you like it? I didn't show it to you, for I was afraid you would think it was terribly niggery; but I saw it in Chandler's window, and just walked in and bought it without saying boo to auntie, and it really is quite becoming to me, I'm so black."

"Becoming! I should think it was; I never saw you look so well in anything in your life. If the thing had been made for you it couldn't have suited your style better, and that Roman-gold jewelry is just right for it; in fact, as mademoiselle used to say, you are decidedly '*comme il faut*.'"

The two girls certainly made a charming picture as they stood together, each interested and eager that the other should look her best.

Marion's beautiful hair fell slightly over her forehead in soft, curling waves, seeming even lighter and brighter than ever, and making the contrast with her dark eyes and eyebrows all the more marked. Her fair skin and glowing cheeks were set off to advantage by the rich green dress she wore, which, though simply trimmed and in keeping with her years, was very handsome.

It would have been hard to choose between the two, for each in her own style was certainly very lovely.

Florence's hair was drawn off from her low, broad forehead, as she always wore it, and she had nothing on it but a tiny gilt band, like a golden thread encircling her head; which, though she did not know it, was a perfect Clytie in contour. Her dress was a French poplin, the ground a rich blue, while all over it, at regular intervals, were embroidered singularly odd-shaped figures in the brightest-colored silks, giving it a peculiar, piquante appearance, and perfectly suiting the wearer's brunette beauty.

Perhaps I have given too much time and space to dress; but parents and guardians may skip the above passage, as it is written expressly for young girls, who, I know from personal experience, are very naturally interested in such matters.

The hour at last arrived. The grand-piano stood between the folding-doors which separated the two large parlors; in the back room was Miss Christine, surrounded by all the school, and in the front sat Miss Stiefbach and the invited guests, about twenty in number, all of them refined, cultivated persons, many of them quite severe musical critics.

Mr. Stein fluttered from one room to the other, trying hard to appear unconcerned; but I doubt if any of his pupils were in a greater state of excitement than he. It had been an undecided question whether or no he should stand by the piano and turn over the music; but the majority concluded that he would only make them more nervous, so he retired to the back of the front parlor, in a position where he could command a view of every note in the key-board.

M. Béranger made his appearance at an early hour, and declared his intention of sitting with Miss Christine, to help her preserve order. She remonstrated with him, telling him he could hear the music to much better advantage in the other room; but nevertheless, when the company was all seated, and silence reigned supreme preparatory to the opening duet, M. Béranger quietly ensconced himself in the back parlor.

The fatal moment had at last arrived; the musicale was about to commence.

Marion sat through the first duet, trying hard not to think of herself, and to listen to the music; but she heard nothing but a confusion of sounds, the beating of her own heart sounding loudest of all. Florence's piece she did enjoy, and joined heartily in the applause which followed its 'finale,' and gave her friend's hand a congratulatory squeeze, as she came back to the seat beside her. But in a very few moments Alice Howard's song was ended, and as the murmurs of approbation died away, Marion took her seat at the piano.

To all outward appearance she was calm and self-possessed, and with a strong effort she summoned her almost indomitable will to her aid and struck the first chords clearly and decisively. Through the first two pages everything went well; but just as she was about to turn over her music, she missed one or two notes with her left hand. No one who was not perfectly familiar with every bar of the music would have noticed the omission; but to Marion it seemed as if she had made a terrible discord. Her forced composure left her, and all her nervousness came back again; she turned over hastily; the music slipped from her fingers and fell to the keys; she grasped it blindly with both hands, but the loose sheets fluttered to the floor, and confused, embarrassed, and mortified almost beyond endurance; she stooped to pick them up, amid a silence which was unbroken, save by Miss Stiefbach, who said in cold, hard tones:—

"Miss Berkley, do not attempt to repeat your piece; such carelessness is unpardonable."

The hot blood rushed to Marion's face; then as suddenly receded, leaving it deathly white. She rose from the piano, and with a firm step and untrembling lips walked quietly to her seat. But although externally she was so calm as to appear almost indifferent, her mind was in a state of the wildest excitement. The air immediately about her seemed filled with a confusion of sounds, rushing, whirring, whirling about her; while the dead silence of the room seemed to take palpable shape and weight, crushing upon her, until she felt as if she must rush from the room to break through the unbearable stillness, or scream aloud to silence the imaginary sounds that were ringing in her ears.

But she did neither; she sat quietly in her seat, the object of stealthy but almost general scrutiny. Some of the girls looked at her with pitying, sympathizing eyes; those who did not like her exchanged glances of satisfaction; but all refrained from speaking to her, or otherwise showing their sympathy,—all but Florence; she slipped her hand into her friend's, and there it remained for the rest of the evening.

When Marion first struck the piano, and Georgie Graham saw what she was about to play, her rage and indignation knew no bounds; but when the music fell, and Marion stood mortified, and, as she thought, disgraced in the eyes of every one, her spirits rose to a most unparalleled height, and elated and radiant with satisfaction she took her seat at the piano, and played the Polonaise almost faultlessly; better than she had ever played it before.

With the exception of Marion, all the pupils acquitted themselves with a great deal of credit; but for a while her failure seemed to cast a slight shadow over the evening's enjoyment; for her beauty, and the heroic manner with which she had borne her disgrace, aggravated as it was by Miss Stiefbach's very unnecessary rebuke, had won for her the admiration of all the guests, most of whom were entire strangers to her.

After the close of the musicale, as pupils and guests were mingling together, and the room was noisy with animated conversation, Miss Christine went up to Marion, who was standing in a retired corner of the room talking to M. Béranger, and taking her hand said:—

"Marion, now that we are apparently unobserved I must tell you how sorry I was that Miss Stiefbach should have spoken so severely to you. I am sure she was not aware how unkind it seemed; she did not intend to hurt your feelings, and probably thought from your apparent calmness that you were really not at all nervous, and that dropping your music was nothing but carelessness and want of interest."

Marion made no reply, her lips seemed glued together, and Miss Christine continued:—

"I was surprised that Georgie should have played the Polonaise. I rarely speak of the faults of one girl to another, and perhaps I ought not now, but I must say, I did not think I had a scholar who would be so unkind as to choose a piece she knew one of her companions had chosen."

The rebuke intended for Georgie struck directly home to Marion. She had been struggling with herself ever since Miss Christine had stood there, knowing that she ought, before the evening was over, to tell her teacher the unworthy part she had acted; now every sense of honor and justice compelled her to do so. But directly beside her stood M. Béranger, and her pride rebelled at being again disgraced in his eyes, for his kindness and forbearance, ever since their first lesson, had won for him her sincere esteem and regard. The struggle was severe, but momentary, for raising her eyes to Miss Christine, she said:—

"It was a very contemptible thing, Miss Christine; nothing but an intense desire for revenge could have induced me to select a piece I knew Georgie had previously chosen."

"You, Marion!" exclaimed Miss Christine; nothing else, just that exclamation; but the tone of her voice cut Marion more deeply than any harsh rebuke could have done.

"Yes, Miss Christine, I chose it, knowing that Georgie had practised it on purpose to play it to-night. I thought as I was to play first I should be able to disconcert her. I am heartily ashamed of myself; my disgrace was nothing but what I deserved."

For a moment there was silence. Miss Christine was shocked to find Marion could have done such a thing. Sarcastic, haughty, disagreeable to her companions in many ways, she had known her to be, but mean never; she could not understand it.

If she had known the disgraceful part Georgie had really taken in the affair; if she had heard of the eaves-dropping of which she had been guilty in the school-room, to punish which had been quite as great an inducement for Marion's conduct as a desire for revenge, she would have felt very differently; but of that Marion said nothing. But Miss Christine was too kind-hearted, and understood her pupil too well to speak sternly to her; besides, she knew it must have cost Marion a severe struggle to exonerate Georgie at the expense of herself, and doubly so in the presence of M. Béranger. In fact, when the first shock of surprise had passed off, she felt that the nobleness of Marion's expiation had atoned for her fault, and she could not help thinking that there were many girls in the school who would have held their tongues, and been only too glad to thrust the blame on to one who was so intensely disagreeable to them.

These thoughts flashed through Miss Christine's mind in a moment, and holding out her hand, she said in her kindest tones;—

"My dear Marion, I am sure this is the last time you will ever do anything so unworthy of yourself."

Marion's only reply was a warm pressure of that dear hand, as she turned and left the room.

"Do you not judge Mlle. Berkley too hasteelie?" whispered M. Béranger. "There is something behind all this, which you do not yet perceive. I feel verie sure that Mees Georgie do know more tan she do tell."

CHAPTER XII.

SARAH BROWN SPEAKS HER MIND.

"Now where do you suppose they came from, Marion? I don't know of any one round here who has a conservatory; they must have come from Springfield. Who could have sent them?" asked Sarah Brown.

"I'm sure I don't know; aren't they lovely?" replied Marion; "but here comes Miss Christine,—let's ask her. Miss Christine," she said, turning round quickly as her teacher entered the room, "who sent you these lovely flowers yesterday?"

Miss Christine started at the abrupt, point-blank question, and looked a trifle confused:—

"Why, really, Marion, I—that is,—M. Béranger sent them here; but, as the box had no address, I presume they were for the benefit of the whole school. I certainly did not intend to monopolize them."

"No, of course you didn't, you dear old Christian!" exclaimed Marion with the affectionate familiarity she often used towards her teacher; "of course you didn't; and as they were meant for all of us, you won't mind it a bit if I appropriate this little sprig of geranium, and do just as I've a mind to with it, now will you?"

"No, I don't think I could refuse that, although it does seem a pity to take it out of water. Why, Marion, what are you going to do with it?—put it in my hair! No, no, it's too pretty, and it will wither in such a little while; do take it out!"

"No, I shan't do any such a thing. You gave it to me to do just what I chose with it, and I *choose* to have it in your hair; so you must not take it out."

"No, Miss Christine, don't!" exclaimed Sarah Brown. "You ought to keep it in, even if it's only to please Marion, for most girls would have stuck it in their own heads; but she never *says* anything or *does* anything like most girls."

"Hold your tongue, Sarah!" peremptorily replied Marion; "you don't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, I do," replied Sarah, emphasizing every word with a shake of the head. "I know perfectly well what I am talking about, and you know I know it, and *I* know I shan't know it much longer without letting somebody else know it; so there!"

"Well, Sarah," said Miss Christine, who could not resist joining Marion in a hearty laugh at Sarah's excited and rather incoherent sentence, "if you and Marion know what you are talking about, that is certainly more than I can say, and as it is never polite to allude to a secret in the presence of a third party. I think I ought to be that somebody else, whom you are 'to let know it,'" and Miss Christine shook her head in laughing imitation of Sarah.

"Well, I'll tell you one thing, Miss Christine; it's about Marion's—"

"Sarah Brown, hold your tongue!" cried Marion, at the same time clapping her hand over Sarah's mouth.

"Marion Berkley, I shan't!" cried Sarah, struggling to free herself, and gasping out at intervals broken sentences perfectly unintelligible to Miss Christine; then, as Marion loosed her hold, she shouted: "It's about Marion's break-down! there!"

"Sarah Brown, you'll be sorry for this!" cried Marion, her eyes flashing with indignation.

"Sarah! Marion!" exclaimed Miss Christine, looking from one to the other in utter amazement. "I don't understand you at all; what is this all about?"

"She doesn't know what she is talking about, and I think she had better mind her own business!" exclaimed Marion.

"I do know what I'm talking about, and it's just as much my business as it is any one else's; if it isn't, I'll make it so."

"Girls! girls! you cannot think how you grieve and astonish me. Do you know how you are talking? Your language is unladylike in the extreme. But"—turning to Sarah—"even that is not so unpardonable as the thoughtlessness which could lead you to speak of Marion's failure last night, when you know it must be extremely unpleasant for her to have it alluded to in any way."

"Miss Christine, it's too bad for you to speak so to me," cried Sarah, the tears now streaming down her cheeks, and her voice pitched to its most excited tones. "You know I just worship Marion, only she won't let me show it, and I never did an unkind thing to her in my life; but I told her I should tell about the Polonaise, and so I will; no one shall stop me!"

"Sarah, you forget to whom you are speaking," quietly replied Miss Christine, adding as she glanced at Marion, and noticed that she stood with her lips tightly compressed, "If you have the affection for Marion which you profess, you will cease to speak of a subject which evidently annoys her."

"Well, it has no business to annoy her, and I mean to tell every girl in the school," retorted Sarah, now fairly beside herself; and raising her voice until she fairly shouted, she called to the girls who were passing the door, on the way to the library, "Come in here, girls! come in here, every one of you! Yes, Georgie Graham, you too, I want you all. Now listen to what I've got to say. You all thought Marion Berkley ought to have been ashamed of herself to play the Polonaise when she knew Georgie was going to play it; and you were all glad she broke down, because almost all of you hate her, and are jealous of her because she's the handsomest, and the smartest, and the very best girl in the school every way; and because she doesn't say one thing to your back and another to your face, the way most of you do; but I'll tell you why she played it. She played it because that creature there—" pointing her finger at Georgie, who happened to be the central figure in the group of astonished listeners—"because that girl was in the anteroom *listening, eaves-dropping*, as she always is, and knew all about the musicale two weeks before any of us, and practised, and practised, by stealth, just for no other reason than to show off before company, and put Marion in the shade; and Marion played it just to punish Georgie for that and fifty other mean things she's done. I suppose you think it was hateful in Marion; but *I* don't; I only just wish that for once she'd had a little of Georgie's *brass*,—for *she's* got enough for every girl in the school,—and then she wouldn't have broken down. But I haven't done yet," exclaimed the excited girl, after stopping to take breath, "I haven't done yet; when Miss Christine told Marion how sorry she was that Georgie should have played the piece she had chosen, Marion told her the whole truth up and down. No, not the whole truth. She never told about Georgie's listening to Miss Stiefbach; no, not a word! She just told her she deserved to break down herself for having treated Georgie so unkindly; and there aren't a dozen girls in the school but what would have told on another to save herself. Now, who do you think was the mean one, I should like to know?" and Sarah glanced round the room with an air of triumph; then as suddenly changing her expression to one of contempt, she exclaimed, "You needn't say anything. I know you think just as Marion

does, that I've been meddling in business that does not concern me; but I don't care *that* for one of you;" and, snapping her fingers in the air, Sarah sat down in the nearest chair, completely exhausted by her harangue.

"Young ladies! young ladies! what is the meaning of this noise?" exclaimed Miss Stiefbach, in utter amazement, as she entered the room by another door from that around which almost all the scholars were crowded. "Why are you not at work in the library? Miss Christine, explain the cause of this excitement."

Miss Christine, who had heretofore been completely overpowered by the suddenness and volubility of Sarah's outbreak, saw at a glance that something must be done at once to prevent her from going through the whole again to Miss Stiefbach; for she dreaded the effect it might have upon her sister, knowing that she would look upon the matter from her cold, calculating point of view, and probably punish Sarah severely for her disrespectful conduct, utterly ignoring the generous impulses which had led to it. As for Georgie, when she hastily glanced at her, and saw her usually haughty head hanging in shame and confusion, she felt that for the present at least her punishment was sufficiently severe. So stepping forward and laying her hand on Sarah's shoulder, at the same time placing herself almost directly in front of her, she turned to Miss Stiefbach and said:—

"Sarah has been rather disrespectful to me; but I do not think she was intentionally rude. I shall have to send her to her own room to do her mending by herself. The rest of the young ladies must go at once to the library, and I will be with them, directly."

Miss Stiefbach made no reply, although it did not escape her keen eye that more had been going on than she was made aware of; but she knew by previous experience that there were times when Miss Christine's judgment was wiser than her own. She turned towards the door, and with a commanding gesture waved the girls out. Marion hesitated, and would have held back, but Miss Stiefbach coldly remarked:—

"Marion, unless you, too, are in disgrace, you will please leave the room;" and motioning her to lead the way sailed out of the parlor.

The instant they were gone Sarah threw her arms around her teacher's neck and sobbed aloud.

"I could not help it, Sarah; indeed I could not," said Miss Christine with a troubled voice as she stroked her pupil's hair; "it certainly was very wrong of you to behave so, and if I had not sent you to your room I should have had to tell Miss Stiefbach all about it, and I am afraid she would have punished you more severely than I have."

"It isn't that, Miss Christine, it isn't that," sobbed Sarah. "I'd a great deal rather go to my room; and you knew it when you sent me there. It's about Marion; she said she'd never speak to me again if I told; she didn't know I knew about it until this morning."

"Well, how did you know it, dear; did any one tell you?"

"No, and I wasn't listening either," exclaimed Sarah, raising her flushed face; "but several of us knew how Georgie found out about the musicale, and I noticed, just as Marion did, how much she had practised the Polonaise, and last night I heard her tell one of the girls she was glad Marion broke down, it just *did her good*; and I determined then I'd pay her for it. I was standing very near you, though you did not know it, when Marion told you all about it last night, and I thought it was outrageous that she should bear all the blame; and before M. Béranger too! It was a shame! But oh, dear, Miss Christine, it hasn't done a bit of good! She'll just hate me now, I know she will, for she almost made me promise not to tell."

"I cannot say I quite approve of your method of doing Marion justice, but I hardly think she will be very severe to such a disinterested little champion," said Miss Christine, who could not help smiling at the utter wretchedness of Sarah's tone; "however, here she comes to speak for herself."

"O Miss Christine, do come in there! I made an excuse to get me some darning-cotton; but Miss Stiefbach's reading the most stupid book of sermons; do come in and take her place! What!" as she caught sight of Sarah, "is she here yet?"

"Yes, Marion, she is here, and is making herself perfectly miserable, because she believes she has made you an enemy for life. Don't you think you can convince her of the contrary?"

"O Marion!" sobbed Sarah, "please don't be mad with me, for I really could not help it. I thought I was doing it all for your good, and when I got started I *could* not stop till I had it all out."

"You little bit of a goose! did you really think I was going to be angry with you after making such a thrilling stump-speech in my favor?" and throwing herself on her knees beside Sarah's chair, Marion looked up at her with a smiling face, but with eyes not undimmed by tears.

"And you really think I did it from kindness?"

"Yes, I certainly do!"

"And you won't snub me any more?" cried Sarah, giving Marion a passionate kiss.

"Oh, I can't promise you that," laughed Marion; "a little, healthy snub, now and then, does you good, and I shouldn't be doing my duty if I didn't give it to you, but"—and her voice assumed the

tender, affectionate tone so rarely heard by her school-mates, and which touched Sarah even more than her words—"I shall never be really unkind to you again, and I promise to love you as much as you wish."

"You really mean it, Marion? You really mean that you will love me?"

"Yes, I really mean it. Miss Christine shall be my witness that I have this day gained a friend."

"Yes, my dear," answered Miss Christine, who had been a silent but interested observer of this little scene: "and a truer one I do not think you could have."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WANDERER RETURNS.

For several days the musicale, and the events connected with it, formed the subjects of general conversation. At first Sarah's remarkable address to her school-mates appeared likely to have a contrary effect from that which she desired, being calculated to make Marion more disliked than ever by those to whom she had been held up by her zealous little champion as superior to themselves in every way.

But Sarah, despite her quick temper, was a great favorite in the school, for her warm heart and generous nature made her as ready to do any one a kindness as she was to fly into a passion. She always spoke the truth, and if she unintentionally wounded or even annoyed one of her companions she was ever ready to make reparation. Perhaps many of them felt the truth of her remarks, and thought that in this case silence was their only safeguard.

Miss Christine had spoken privately to the older scholars, entreating them not to harbor any ill-will towards either of the three immediately concerned, and so the matter was passed quietly over, and that which in many instances could have had nothing but evil results seemed likely in this one to be productive of good; for Marion, fearing that she had been the means of depriving Sarah of some of her warmest friends, almost unconsciously assumed a different bearing towards all her companions, and for her new friend's sake exhibited an interest in persons and things about her which she had heretofore treated with supreme indifference. And so the days wore on, and Thanksgiving was rapidly approaching. None of the girls who lived at a distance were going home this year, and the house was filled with lamentations, and half-stifled fears lest certain boxes should fail to make their appearance.

Marion had as yet received no definite news from her mother regarding Jemima Dobbs, and her heart was filled with disappointment when she thought of the lonely Thanksgiving they were likely to have at the farm-house in place of the bright and happy one she had pictured to herself.

She was sitting in her window one morning thinking of Aunt Bettie, when her door suddenly opened, a voice cried, "Look out for your head!" and a thick letter was shot into her lap. She caught it eagerly, not stopping to think whose was the unerring hand that had so accurately hit its mark, and tearing off the envelope in true school-girl fashion, she glanced rapidly along the pages, when her eyes were caught with the words: "Jemima will be at the B— station Wednesday, when the seven o'clock train arrives; be sure and have some one there to meet her." With a cry of delight Marion ran to the door to call Florence, and was met by that young woman at the head of the stairs. She received the happy tidings as enthusiastically as Marion could possibly wish, and going back to their room, and seating themselves in their usual window, Marion read the letter aloud:—

"BOSTON, Nov. 24th.

"MY DEAR DAUGHTER:—Papa has just gone down town; Fred is at school; and Charley radiantly happy in the possession of a new mechanical toy, which I expect will be demolished in a few moments, as that young gentleman is developing a surprising fancy for inquiring into the 'why and wherefore' of everything he takes hold of. As everything seems to promise a quiet time for me, I think I will devote myself to you, as I have quite a long story to tell you.

"I know you have been very much disappointed that my recent letters have contained no news of your protégé; but I am in hopes that this one will put all your anxiety to rest, and quite equal your most ardent expectations.

"After waiting some time, Mrs. Benson received a letter from the lady in Charlestown, with whom the girl calling herself Arabella Dobbs has gone to live, in which she wrote that Arabella had stayed with her three weeks, but had left, thinking she could find work in some wholesale clothing establishment, that would prove more profitable than living out.

"The lady also voluntarily wrote, that she had every reason to think the girl was living under an assumed name, as she had repeatedly answered questions directed to the cook, whose name was Jemima, and seemed very much confused, when after doing so several times, remarks were made, and excused herself by saying that her mother used

to call her Jemima 'just for fun.'

"Of course we were not much longer in doubt as to the identity of Miss Arabella, but we were, if possible, wider from the mark than ever, for we had not the most remote idea to what clothing establishment she had gone, and there being several in the city, it did not seem very probable that without much difficulty we should be able to find the right one. While I stood talking with Mrs. Benson, as she was looking over the directory, a girl came up to the desk. I moved aside that she might more easily speak to Mrs. Benson, and she asked in a weak, tired voice, 'Any letters for me, ma'am?'—'What name?' demanded Mrs. Benson, running her finger down the column of the book, and not raising her eyes. 'Arabella Dobbs,' replied the servant-girl.

"Up jumped Mrs. Benson, slamming the covers of the directory together with a report like a pistol, while I turned, equally unable to conceal my astonishment, and looked at the girl as if she had been a ghost. As you may imagine, such a proceeding could not be very agreeable to the poor thing, and she looked from one to the other with a bewildered, half-frightened expression.

"I must say at my first glance I was not favorably impressed with her. I had looked for a round-faced, good-natured-looking country girl; perhaps a trifle 'airy' after her short experience of city life; but I saw a thin, angular face and figure, the hair drawn tightly off her forehead up to the very top of her head, and done in an immense waterfall; a little, round hat tipped forward, the brim just reaching her forehead, across which lay a row of corkscrew curls; her dress, which had originally been a good, serviceable delaine, but was now so soiled as to almost defy description, was looped up and puckered into a great bunch behind, in imitation of the panniers worn by the fashionable young ladies of the day. All this I took in at a glance, and confess to being rather disgusted with the young woman; but when I looked carefully at her face all such uncharitable feelings vanished, for it bore the marks of recent illness and real distress.

"Do not think, my dear Mab, that I kept the poor creature standing as long as it has taken me to write all this; my thoughts flew much faster than my pen ever can. I went up to her, and putting out my hand said, before Mrs. Benson could recover from her surprise, "Jemima, I believe there are no letters for you now, but I can tell you about your dear mother, who is very, very lonely without her daughter."

"It is useless to give you an account of our conversation, for I cannot remember it myself; the poor girl was so overcome by my unexpected kindness, and her own joy at finding a hand held out to her when she most needed help, that she opened her heart to me at once. The person who influenced her to come to Boston proved to be anything but a friend, and Jemima has paid heavily for following her advice; it was through her, as Mrs. Dobbs supposed, that she was induced to give her name as Arabella, and that act was the key-note to all her misfortune. She succeeded in getting work at a clothing establishment, at what seemed to her country ears most liberal terms; but work as hard as she could, she could earn but little more than enough to pay her board. Crowded into a room with more than twenty other girls, bending over her work in the stifled atmosphere from morning until night, soon told upon her health, accustomed as she had always been to pure country air and bodily exercise, and she had hardly been at the place three weeks when she was taken ill with a violent fever. The woman with whom she boarded, although a cold, grasping creature, was prevented from sending her away by the entreaties of the other boarders, who, as the fever was not of a malignant nature, insisted upon having her kept in the house. Some of the girls were very kind to her; but they could give her but little attention, as their time was mostly passed in the workroom. After the first severity of the fever passed, and the tiresome days of convalescence were reached, the poor thing yearned for home and dear, familiar faces; she had sent her friends to Mrs. Benson's several times to inquire for letters, but with most incredible short-sightedness had always told them to give the name Arabella Dobbs, entirely forgetting that her mother did not know she had thrown aside the countrified Jemima.

"The day I saw her was the first day she had walked out, and she had literally dragged herself along the street, and up the two long flights leading to the office. She had given all her dresses, with the exception of the one she had on, to her landlady, and the woman had threatened to turn her out if she did not pay her five dollars that night. I fortunately had the carriage with me, and drove with Jemima to her boarding-place. The woman was all smiles and blandishments when she saw me, and quite overpowered Jemima with her tender inquiries as to how she felt after her walk; but I cut her short by telling her I had come to take Jemima home with me, and paid the five dollars she owed her. I think the woman would have asked more if she had not seen I was pretty determined; and so promising to send for Jemima's trunk, which was now almost entirely empty, I brought the exhausted girl here, that she might rest a few days and gain strength for her journey. She evidently is longing for home, and I do not believe she will feel like herself until she gets there. I am having her a good, warm dress made, and shall give her my plain gray silk bonnet, that her mother's good sense need not be shocked at sight of her hat, which is about the size of a small saucer. I think she is very much humbled; she shows it in many ways; most of all in her dress, and I am happy to say the corkscrew ringlets no longer adorn her brow. Jemima will be at the B—

station when the seven o'clock train arrives; be sure and have some one there to meet her.

"And now, my dear, I have only time to say that we are all well, and hoping to hear from you soon. I know this letter will be more interesting to you than if it contained pages of spicy news. I seem to see you and Florence enjoying its contents. Give my love to her, and accept more than ever a letter carried before for yourself, from your fond

"MAMMA."

"She'll be here to-morrow, as true as you live!" exclaimed Marion. "Oh, I am so glad! for now Aunt Bettie will have a Thanksgiving after all, and I was afraid it would be anything but that."

"Of course you'll go up there with her."

"No, I shan't. I shall go this afternoon, if Miss Christine will let me, and of course she will, and tell auntie that Jemima is found, and will probably be with her by Saturday; then you see Jemima will surprise her by getting there to-morrow, for I must have a surprise about it somewhere. I shall tell auntie how sick Jemima has been, and that she must not be the least bit harsh with her."

"But I should think you would want to go too, so as to see the fun," said Florence.

"Fun! I don't think there'll be much fun in it. I believe it will be rather a *teary* time at first, and I prefer to be out of the way."

"In other words, you think it would be a little easier for them to be by themselves; so you give up seeing the 'grand tableau' at the close of the play, which never would have happened but for you."

"Don't be a goose, Flo!" laughed Marion, who, although radiant with delight, and a secret sort of satisfaction, tried to remain cool, for fear she should appear too much pleased with the part she had played in the affair.

"Who are you going to send to the station?" asked Florence.

"I'm going myself."

"Do you suppose Miss Stiffy's going to let you march off by yourself two days in succession?"

"Not a bit of it," replied Marion. "I'm going to get up a party to go to the farm this afternoon, and I'll manage it so that I can hang back, and tell the good news after you have all gone out."

"And then rush off and not give her a chance to thank you."

"I dare say," replied Marion; "but I mustn't stop here; it's time we went down, for the clock struck five minutes ago."

Marion was as good as her word, and arranged a party for Aunt Bettie's that afternoon, taking care, however, to have Florence gain the required permission, as she knew she should want the same favor the next day. She managed to make Aunt Bettie understand in a few words all that was necessary of her daughter's story, leaving it for Jemima to make up deficiencies, and hurried off, overtaking her companions before they had missed her.

The next day, finding out at what hour the train in which Jemima was coming would arrive, she walked to the village, made arrangements with a man who was in the habit of doing errands for Miss Stiefbach, to have a comfortable covered wagon ready to take Jemima and her trunk to the farm, and then went to the station to await the arrival of the cars. As she sat waiting, the station-master came into the room, and planting himself in front of her, with both hands in his pockets, and chewing a toothpick suddenly accosted her with:—

"Goin' deown?"

"Going where?" asked Marion, not overpleased at his advances.

"Deown—deown to Boston;" jerking his thumb over his shoulder, as if that city was situated in the room directly behind him.

"No, sir."

"No? 'spectin' someun p'raps."

Marion made no reply.

"S'pose you're one o' them gals up t'the schule?"

Marion still observed a dignified silence.

"Spectin' one o' the gals?" queried the man, who, being a true Yankee, was not at all abashed by the coldness with which his questions, or rather comments, were received.

"No, sir," replied Marion.

"You ben't?—*not* one o' the gals; you're marm, p'raps?"

"No, sir."

"Did you say as how you b'longed up t'the schule?"

"No, I did not say so," replied Marion, too irritated to be amused at his persistency.

"Oh, you didn't; wall, I didn't know but p'raps you did, an' ef so, I hed somethin' to tell yer, that's all;" and whistling a tune he was about to walk off, when Marion exclaimed:—

"I didn't say whether I belonged to the school or not, because you didn't ask me."

"Didn't I jest say I s'posed you was one o' them gals up t'the schule?" demanded the man, still chewing his toothpick, and looking at her as if his last remark was a poser.

"So you did," replied Marion; "you stated the fact, and as I didn't say anything took it for granted I was one of the scholars. When you ask a direct question perhaps I'll answer it."

"Aint you a smart un?" exclaimed the man. "Wall now, that's what I call right deown smart; jest answer to the pint, an' then yer don't git cornered;" and he nodded his head at her in real admiration. "Wall, I s'pose I must put it pretty sharp ef I expect to git an answer. Neow," taking his hat off and rubbing his hands through his hair as if to collect his ideas, "be you one o' them gals as goes t'the schule jest about tew miles from here?"

"Yes, I am," replied Marion, who, now that she saw the man had some motive besides idle curiosity, descended from her loftiness.

"Wall, I've got a box in here that came deown in the express train, an' I didn't kneow but what you'd come to see 'bout it. It's fur one o' them gals, an' 's I haint bin here long I haint much used to the business, an' I didn't know heow to git it up there."

"Who is it for?" asked Marion.

"I don't remember; one o' yer highfalutin sort o' names. But you jest come and see it;" and he led the way into the "gentleman's room," and pointed to a large box standing in the corner.

Marion walked up to it, and glancing at the address exclaimed: "Why, it is for me!"

"Wall, neow du tell!" exclaimed the station-master; "neow I call that quite a coincydance, I du!"

"Well, I call it a very nice box," laughed Marion; "and there comes a man I've engaged to do a job for me, and he can take it in his wagon, and leave it at the school."

"You're a smart un, I tell you," remarked the man as he lifted the box and carried it to the door; "you know how to do the bisness, an' no mistake."

Before Marion could reply, or take any notice of his remark, the whistle of an engine was heard, and as she went out on to the platform the train whizzed up and stopped. If it had not have been for her mother's preparation, she would never have recognized in the thin, subdued, pale young woman who stepped from the cars, the bright, rosy country girl she had seen so many times at Aunt Bettie's.

She welcomed Jemima most cordially, making no allusions that could embarrass the poor girl, and rattled on a string of good-natured nothings, as she delivered the little hair trunk into the hands of her charioteer, and then placed Jemima on the back seat.

"Aint you goin', miss?" asked the driver.

"Oh, no! I prefer to walk. Good-by, Jemima. Give my love to your mother, and tell her I wish her a happy thanksgiving."

Jemima grasped the hand Marion held out to her, and exclaimed under her breath, just loud enough for Marion to catch the words, "God bless you, miss!" It was the first time she had spoken since she arrived; but I think Marion was satisfied.

As Marion turned away from the wagon, her eyes fell upon the station-master, who, with his legs planted at a most respectful distance from each other, his hands still in the depths of his pockets, and his head cocked on one side, had been watching all the proceedings with the deepest interest. As she passed him he nodded his head slowly three times in the most serious manner, and remarked, with even more than his former emphasis, "You're a smart un!"

CHAPTER XIV.

MARION'S THANKSGIVING PARTY.

"Where have you been?" exclaimed half-a-dozen girls as Marion entered the gate; "here's a splendid great box just come for you."

"And who do you think was with the man that brought it?" asked one. "Why, Mimy Dobbs, as sure as you're born; you know she's been away ever so long, and the cook told me people thought she'd run away, and was never coming back at all, because she hated living with her mother up at that poky old farm."

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed Marion. "I advise cook to pay more attention to our dinners, and let other people's affairs alone. But that is a box worth having, if the inside prove as good as the out. Come, lend a hand, girls, and help me carry it upstairs, for if Miss Stiffy sees it I shall have to open it down here, and she'll *advise* me to put most of the things in the larder, and that won't suit me at all."

"Hush!" said Florence, as she took hold of one of the rope-handles with which the box was provided; "don't make a noise. Miss Stiefbach is in the secret-chamber; she passed through here a minute ago, and we girls all hustled round the box, and covered it up with our skirts; for it's such a bouncer we knew she'd make a fuss about it."

"Come, ready now! You go first, and don't step on the back of your dress and stumble," whispered Marion. "Isn't it heavy though? Sarah Brown, do put your hands under, and give it a boost;—softly now!"

Amid considerable pulling and tugging, accompanied with half-suppressed screams, as the corners of the box came in dangerous proximity to the wall, the two girls managed to get as far as the bend in the stairs, when, alas! notwithstanding Marion's warning, Florence made a misstep, and trod on her dress, which threw her violently back on to the stairs, bringing the box down with full force upon one of her feet.

"Oh, it's half killing me! it's half killing me! take it up quick, or I shall scream right out!" exclaimed the poor girl, in low but agonized tones, which ought to have roused the sympathies of the hardest heart; but Marion and Sarah, notwithstanding they pitied Florence from the bottom of their hearts, were so full of laughter that, although they exerted to the utmost the little strength they had left, they could not move the box an inch.

Poor Florence writhed and moaned in perfect torture, and not being a saint, but a very human girl, exclaimed, in tones of unmistakable anger, "I wish the old box was where it came from. If you don't stop laughing, and take it off my foot I'll yell at the top of my lungs!"

Happily for all parties, Grace Minton and Julia Thayer, who had been watching them from below, sprang up the stairs, and, lifting the box, carried it into Marion's room.

Florence could hardly move, and now that their laughter had subsided, Marion and Sarah helped her up to her room, making up by their devotion for their apparent thoughtlessness.

"Oh, do be careful, Mab; it's almost killing me!" cried Florence, as she sat down on the edge of the bed, and Marion proceeded to take off her boot. "Oh! oh! just wait one minute till I brace myself,—there! Now give one awful pull, and have it over with."

Marion did as she was told; the boot came off, but poor Florence, notwithstanding she shut her teeth tight, and clenched the coverlid with both hands, could not suppress a groan as she threw herself back on the bed.

"Quick! quick! some camphor! cologne! rum! anything! she's going to faint!" cried Sarah Brown, clasping her hands, and jumping straight up and down, without offering to get either herself.

"No, I'm not," said Florence, with considerable more energy than is generally shown by fainting persons; "but it did hurt terribly! Now pull off my stocking, please, and see if I've made a fuss about nothing. I shall be provoked if it isn't black and blue!"

"I know just how you feel," said Marion, as she carefully pulled off the stocking; "it is a perfect satisfaction when one is hurt to have something to show for it; but mercy! I never saw such a looking foot; you'll be laid up for a week!"

And there certainly seemed every reason to think Marion's prediction likely to prove true, for the edge of the box had made a deep, red groove across the instep, and the whole of the upper part of the foot was rapidly turning black and blue.

"Bring the wash-basin full of water, and some towels, and bathe her foot very gently. I'll get some arnica and a roll of linen mother always has me bring in case I get hurt. What a lucky thing I happened to have it! Sarah, hand me a tumbler half full of water, and I'll put some arnica in it; it won't do for her to have it on clear."

"Marion is right in her element," remarked Florence; "there's nothing she likes better than fussing over *wounds*."

"Yes, particularly when they're of such a dangerous nature as this one," laughed Marion, as she knelt down to apply the arnica.

After some time had been spent in sympathy and bathing, the injured foot was nicely bound up, and laid tenderly on the bed, but what to do for a stocking and shoe was the next question, for the foot was so much swollen that Florence could not possibly get on her own.

"I tell you what I'll do," said Sarah Brown, who, now that there seemed no danger that Florence would faint, had become as cool as it was possible for her to be; "I'll just steal into Miss Stiffy's room, and get a pair of stockings out of her drawer, and a slipper too; she's got about forty pairs of creepers, and she won't miss 'em for a little while."

"But suppose you should get caught?" exclaimed Florence; "then it would all come out, and we had better have told in the first place."

"Not a bit of it! If we did it would spoil all our fun with Marion's box, for of course she intends to give us a treat."

"Of course," replied Marion; "but why don't you go down into the laundry, and get Bidly to give you a pair? There are some there, I know, and she'll never tell of us."

"Why, don't you see, Miss Stiefbach knows exactly how many pairs she puts into the wash, and if they didn't all come up she'd know it; but she won't miss 'em if I take them out of the drawer."

"Well, if you really aren't afraid to risk it; and do be quick about it; don't make a bit of noise, for if Miss Stiefbach should catch you you'd never hear the last of it, and I should be to blame," said Florence.

Sarah hurried along the entry until she reached Miss Stiefbach's room, which was directly over the private study, and then it occurred to her that Miss Christine might be in there; so she spoke and called her by name. Marion and Grace, who stood at the other door, exchanged glances with Florence, who was still on the bed, and all three looked like detected culprits. Sarah spoke again; but receiving no answer gently pushed the door open. She nodded her head to the girls to let them know that the coast was clear, and stealthily entered the room. Marion and Grace heard her as she crossed the room; then followed a moment of terrible silence; then they heard the creaking of the bureau-drawer as she slowly opened it.

"Oh!" whispered Marion, "if she *should* pull it out too far, and the whole thing come down on the floor with a bang! Miss Stiefbach would certainly hear it, and know some one was in there."

"Hush!" answered Grace, "don't suggest anything go horrible! There, she's shutting it; so far so good; now for the slippers,—they're in the closet."

"I know it, and that closet-door creaks awfully!"

The closet-door did "creak awfully" and no mistake, and it seemed to the two girls, listening in almost breathless silence, that the noise was loud enough to be heard all over the house. In a moment they heard Sarah fumbling over the slippers, of which Miss Stiefbach always kept several pairs on hand, as she never wore anything else in the house. They felt comparatively safe now, for no sound was heard from below, except once in a while a laugh from the girls in the library, and Miss Stiefbach would not probably leave her study until supper time. They were just about to turn back into the room to go to Florence, when they heard the study-door open, and Miss Stiefbach's voice from below, saying, "In one moment, I am going upstairs to my room."

What if she had heard the noise and was coming up to ascertain the cause! Marion rushed along the entry, reaching her teacher's room just as Sarah was carefully closing and latching the closet-door.

"O Sarah, hurry! hurry! she's coming upstairs; she's at the foot of the stairs! Give me that slipper, and hide the stockings under your apron. Run for your life! No, no, it's no use, she'll meet us; we must face it out; don't look conscious."

Sarah tucked the stockings under her apron, Marion slipped her arm through her friend's, and hiding the slipper between them, with beating hearts, and almost sure of detection, they walked slowly down the long entry, directly in the face and eyes of Miss Stiefbach. As they approached her she stopped, and with more than her usual mildness remarked:—

"Ah! young ladies, thinking of home, I dare say; but I trust you will have as pleasant a Thanksgiving here as there, although I am happy to say there has not been the usual influx of boxes."

The girls laughed slightly in reply, nudging each other quietly as she passed on, restraining their desire to rush for Marion's room, and not until the door was fairly closed behind them did their pent-up feelings find vent, when Marion, tossing the slipper till it hit the ceiling, shouted:—

"Victory! three cheers for General Brown, the Stonewall Jackson of Massachusetts!"

"But what in the world should I have done if you hadn't rushed in, and told me she was coming?" exclaimed Sarah. "Why, I should have run right into her!"

"Lucky for you you didn't," remarked Grace; "she'd have given you Jessie; if you know what that is."

"Well, Marion and Sarah," said Florence, "I think you're both perfect angels!"

"Yes, dear, 'angels in disguise,'" remarked Marion. "Well, this angel will proceed to put your foot into Miss Stiffy's delicate, little stocking; the slipper will be a perfect fit, I know; you'll have the most stylish foot in town. There! now see if you can step on it."

"Take hold of me, please, for I know I shan't be able to bear my whole weight on it!"

"Don't be in a hurry; lean on my shoulder; put your well foot on the floor, and set the other down very carefully."

"O Mab, it hurts awfully! I don't see how I can ever get down to tea in the world; but I shall have to grin and bear it, or else Miss Stiefbach will find it out."

"Suppose you go down now," suggested Sarah, "and we can help you into the dining-room before

the bell rings, and if we all crowd round you Miss Stiefbach won't notice the slipper."

"That's a capital plan," said Marion; "now put your arm way over my shoulder, Flo. Grace, take hold of her that side, and Sallie go in front as a spy. I think this is growing interesting."

"Very—for you," remarked Florence.

"You poor child! does it hurt terribly? Don't step on it, hobble along as well as you can, and lean all your weight on us."

With much hopping and halting, and little starts and agitated whispers, as they thought they heard Miss Stiefbach or Miss Christine behind them, they proceeded on their way, and after some little time reached the dining-room in safety, and as the tea-bell rang immediately after, and the scholars all came in together, nothing unusual was noticed; but they dreaded the moment when they should have to leave the dining-room on their way to the study, where Miss Stiefbach always read history aloud for an hour after supper. Marion had been turning it over in her own mind during the meal, and decided to make an attempt to get rid of the reading that night.

"Miss Stiefbach," she asked, as supper was almost over, "didn't you say you hoped we should all have as pleasant a Thanksgiving as if we were at home?"

"I believe I said so, Marion. I certainly meant it."

"Well, do you know, when I'm at home, our Thanksgiving begins the night before, and we *never* spend the evening reading history."

Miss Stiefbach could not help joining in the general laugh, only her laugh was a dignified smile, and replied, "I suppose that means that you would like to give up our history to-night."

"I don't think we should any of us weep if that should be the case."

"No, I suppose not; and for fear you might if the reverse order of things was to take place, I will dispense with the reading to-night, and Miss Christine and myself will withdraw from the room, leaving you young ladies to chat over your supper for a while longer."

"Oh, splendid!" "Thank you, Miss Stiefbach." "Just what we wanted!" etc., resounded from all sides, as, with a most unusually gracious bow, Miss Stiefbach left the room with Miss Christine, who nodded and smiled back at the girls, fully appreciating the pleasure they experienced at being released from all restraint.

The closing of the door was a signal for a general hubbub; every tongue was unloosed, and the spirit of mischief reigned supreme. One girl drank her tea to find it strongly flavored with salt; another raised her goblet of water to her lips just as a piece of biscuit went splash to the bottom of the glass, dashing the contents into her face; a third turned suddenly on hearing her name called from the other side of the table, only to be hit plump on the nose with a hard cracker; and so it went on, a perfect Babel of shouts and cries; for the younger girls, following the example of the older ones, went in for a regular train, and pieces of bread and broken crackers were soon flying in every direction.

Marion and Sarah took advantage of the confusion to get Florence up to her room; having succeeded in doing so, Marion produced a hammer, and getting down on her knees prepared to open that wonderful Thanksgiving box.

"I mean to see what there is in it," she said, "and then if I can manage it, I'll get some of the girls up here, and we'll have a jolly time."

With much hammering, pulling, and chattering, the cover of the box was at last removed, and Marion proceeded to display its contents to the eager eyes of her companions.

"First of all, here's a note from mamma; now curb your impatience while I skim it over."

Marion seated herself on the floor and having glanced down the page commenced reading it aloud:—

"BOSTON, Nov. 21st.

"DEAR MARION:—I have only a moment to spare, for I have been so busy getting the box ready, that I have not had time to-day to write you a long letter, and only scratch off this bit of a note to let you know we are all well, and almost dreading to-morrow, because you will not be with us.

"I hope you will enjoy the contents of your box. I think it would be an excellent plan for you to hand over some of the most substantial articles to Miss Stiefbach for the use of the community; but mind, I only make the suggestion, you can do as you please about following it; only don't go too far with your frolic, for I am perfectly sure you will have one.

"Papa has made an addition to the bill of fare, which I submitted to him for inspection, of which I am supposed to be entirely ignorant; for, as he said, he was not entirely sure I would approve if I knew the contents of the brown-paper box, which you will find surrounded by your other goodies. As papa superintended the packing of it himself, and seemed particularly anxious lest it should not be sufficiently wrapped up, I cannot help

suspecting that it has breakable qualities; whatever it is, my dear daughter, be judicious in your use of it.

"My note has stretched into quite a letter. I am expecting the express-man any moment, so must close now with a thousand loving good-bys,

"From your fond

"MAMMA."

"I wonder what it can be that papa has sent; something nice, I know! He doesn't think there is anything in the world too good for me,—an idea which I don't hesitate to encourage him in. Now, Sarah, just clear off that table, please, and pull it out into the middle of the room, so I can have a place to put all these things; toss the books and table-cover on to the bed there, beside of Florence.

"First and foremost here are two loaves of cake, and such cake! Flo, do look at this one! That is some of Biddy's doings, I know; frosted elegantly, and 'Marion' in the centre all in quirkys; that's just like Bid! she's about as ridiculous over me as father is. What is the reason, girls,"—and Marion stopped short with the cake in both hands, and a change in her bright, joyous manner,—"that they all think so much of me at home, and hardly any one likes me here?"

"Because you don't—"

"There, Sarah Brown, that will do; I don't want to hear the rest," exclaimed Marion, putting up her hand with an impatient gesture. "I asked a question hastily, without thinking of the consequences. I'll take your answer for granted, and I know just as well what it would be as if you'd spoken; so you'll oblige me by keeping quiet."

"Of course when 'Her Royal Highness' commands, her loyal subjects can have no choice but to obey," replied Sarah, with an air of mock humility and submission.

"Well, see that you do," laughed Marion, "and put this great turkey on the table. I guess it will be policy for me to follow mamma's advice, and that gobbler will be handed over to Miss Stiffy. But see here, as true as you live, mamma has sent me a pair of cold ducks, and here's a glass of currant jelly; she knows I must have jell with my ducks. Here is a bundle of something, I'm sure I don't know what—oh, nuts! ever so many kinds, all cracked; that's splendid! And here is another of raisins, and a bundle of candy; take some, girls; hand it to Flo, Sarah, she can open it. Take some of these cookies, do; they're delicious, and lots of 'em, put in all round everywhere to fill up the cracks. I wish I could get out papa's box, but all these things are wedged in round it; besides, I must be careful not to break it, whatever *it* is. Here's the last thing,—a bundle of prunes and dates, and from Fred; he knows I've a weakness for dates. And *now* for papa's box; help me lift it out, Sarah, and take it over to the bed. Oh! oh! it's champagne! it's champagne, as sure as I'm a sinner; who would have believed it? Here's a card: 'Miss Marion Berkley, with the compliments of her totally depraved father.' That is papa right over! We always have a great joke about champagne, because I never drink it, except a glass with him Thanksgiving and Christmas day; you know I've always been home before, and he didn't mean I should be cheated out of it this year. Here it is, two bottles and a half-a-dozen glasses; we'll have a party to-night, a regular goose party, and drink the health of the dear, old darling."

"What *would* Miss Stiefbach say," exclaimed Florence, "if she knew you were going to have a regular Thanksgiving supper?"

"Hold up her hands in holy horror; and of course it's a dreadful thing. I haven't the least doubt but what mamma thought it was cider."

"Whom are you going to invite?" asked Sarah.

"Only three besides ourselves; that will be six—a good number. Whom shall I ask, Flo?"

"That's for you to say, I should think."

"Well, you know it doesn't make much difference to me. I'll ask Grace, of course; she helped get the box up here."

"And Georgie Graham," dryly suggested Sarah.

"I rather think not," replied Marion. "Grace Minton, Julia Thayer, and who shall be the third? Come, say some one, Flo."

"I wish you'd ask Rachel Drayton," said Florence, in the tone of one pleading for a great favor.

"I don't believe she'd come if I asked her."

"Well, you might try it," said Sarah; "she can't do anything more than refuse."

"She won't refuse if Marion asks her cordially."

"Well, Flo, I'll do it, considering you've been laid up in the cause."

And Marion ran out of the room, and downstairs, to hunt up the three girls, and let them know, in as quiet a way as possible, that she wanted them up in her room in about fifteen minutes. In her inmost heart she had wanted to ask Rachel Drayton, but did not like to mention her herself, and

she gave the invitation with so much warmth, despite the necessity of a mysterious whisper, that Rachel accepted at once with a nod, and a bright smile, such as Marion had never before called up on that usually serious face.

When Marion got back to her room, Sarah had arranged the various articles on the table in something like order, although the variety and quantity prevented them from making a very elegant appearance.

"There! how does that look?" she asked as Marion made her appearance.

"Well, I must say it does not exactly suit me; there's too much on the table. We couldn't eat it half to-night, if we try; so what's the use of such a spread? That turkey I'm going to present to Miss Stiefbach; so that can go into the empty box. Flo, I'm going to appropriate your fancy basket for the nuts and raisins; it will give a distingué air to the table, you know. Now what shall we do for plates?"

"Oh, never mind about plates," said Florence; "you can carve the ducks, and put a bit of jelly on each piece, and we can eat with our fingers; you mustn't be so particular."

"But I've no idea of putting ducks and cakes, and cookies and dates, all higgledy-piggledy on to the table together! Sarah, you're such a good forager you won't mind running down the back way, and getting three or four plates, now will you?"

"I just as lief as not, and I'll bring some knives and forks, and a spoon too, for the jelly."

"You're a jewel! and be quick, or I'm afraid the girls will be here before you get back."

Marion fluttered about, putting such things as she wished to keep for a future occasion on a shelf in the closet, chattering to Flo all the time. "Now isn't this jolly, Florence? I mean to have a magnificent time to-night, no matter what happens. Those bottles give quite a regal air to the table, don't they? And your basket is equal to the greatest achievement of the renowned Smith. I must say our supply of china doesn't look very promising; however, we'll have all the more fun."

"Are they here?" asked Sarah, coming in. "No? Well, I thought I was pretty quick; here's one of the kitchen platters for the ducks, four plates, two knives and forks and a spoon; that's the best I could do for you."

"Capital! Now I believe everything is ready;" and Marion stood back, and surveyed the scene with perfect satisfaction. "There they are!" she exclaimed, as a knock was heard at the door. "Stand in front of the table, Sallie, so that the full splendors of the scene won't burst on them at once, and I'll let them in,—that's it."

"Hollo, girls! Come in quick; don't make a bit of noise, for fear Miss Stiefbach should hear you."

"O Mab, how splendid! elegant! what a treat!" exclaimed the girls, as the full magnificence of the entertainment was revealed to them.

"What a box that was!" said Grace Minton; "no wonder it half killed you, Flo."

"And how are you now?" asked Rachel Drayton, who naturally felt a little out of place, for she had never been in the room before. Flo was rarely if ever there without Marion, and had never invited her there, not feeling sure of the reception she might meet with from her room-mate.

"I'm feeling nicely now," she answered. "In fact, I've been so interested in watching Marion, that I've hardly thought of myself. I wonder if I couldn't get up, and stand by the table."

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Marion; "you mustn't think of such a thing. You are to be the belle of the party; Miss Drayton comes next on the list of distinguished guests, and she must sit there;" placing a chair at the foot of the bed, where Rachel could have a good view of Florence; "the rest of you may sit where you've a mind to, and I'll do the honors."

"I'll keep Florence company," said Julia Thayer, as she seated herself on the foot of the bed. "Now, Miss Brown, you can help Miss Berkley open the champagne."

"Will it pop?" asked Sarah, clapping her hands over her ears.

"Of course it will, if it's worth anything," replied Marion. "But you needn't be frightened; I'm only going to loosen the wires a little; we don't want to commence with champagne."

"Wouldn't it be a joke," said Grace Minton, "if Miss Stiefbach should walk in on us just as you got the cork out?"

But hardly were the words spoken, when the door, which all supposed locked, suddenly opened, and Miss Stiefbach appeared upon the threshold. Oh! horror of horrors! Marion's experience in opening wines had not been sufficient to teach her the force of champagne. As the door opened, she was standing in the middle of the room, holding the bottle at arms' length, fumbling at the wires; in her surprise and amazement at the apparition before her, she gave an extra tug, when pop went the cork, and with it half the contents of the bottle in Miss Stiefbach's face.

Miss Stiefbach stood with uplifted hands, perfectly electrified with astonishment at the sight before her. As for the six girls, each in her turn was a perfect picture of horror; visions of fearful lectures, perhaps expulsion from school, rising in the minds of all.

But before Miss Stiefbach could collect her scattered senses, and wrap herself in her mantle of frigid dignity, Marion set the bottle on the table, and, springing forward, caught up a towel, and with profuse lamentations and regrets for the accident, commenced wiping the stains from her teacher's dress.

"O Miss Stiefbach, what did you come so soon for? It was too bad of you; it has just upset all our plans. We had only this moment got the table set, and I had not had time to go down and invite you and Miss Christine. I had no idea that horrid champagne would go off like that; it frightened us half to death.—Sarah, put your hand over that bottle, or we shall lose it all.—Now, Miss Stiefbach, do sit down, and I'll go right off and get Miss Christine."

"Marion Berkley, do you mean to say that you expect me and Miss Christine to sit down to a supper which you young ladies have secretly prepared?"

"Why, of course I do!" replied Marion, with an air of perfect simplicity and confidence, which perfectly amazed her companions, who were breathlessly awaiting the issue of the conversation; "of course I do! Why, what did I ask you to give up the history for if it wasn't that I might have time for my supper? I knew it would never do to have it down in the dining-room, for then all the little girls would want to come, and of course we couldn't have them; and I don't care to invite all the old girls, only just those who would make a pleasant party. Now, Miss Stiefbach, it would be positively cruel for you to refuse to join us!" and Marion looked as if her whole future happiness depended on her teacher's answer.

Miss Stiefbach was in a dilemma; she could hardly bring herself to believe that the supper was intended as a compliment to herself; but nevertheless Marion's invitation was given with such apparent sincerity, and without even a hint of a doubt as to the propriety of the affair, that she was put quite off her guard, and hardly knew what to say. To sit down with a parcel of school-girls to a table heaped with good things, and crowned with champagne, was altogether too much for her dignity, and a compromise suggested itself to her.

"I thank you, Marion, for your implied compliment," she said with her usual stately, polite manner, "but I really think it would be unbecoming in me to enter into any festivities with a part of my scholars, from which the rest were excluded; but I will send Miss Christine to keep you company, as I could not think of leaving you alone."

"Of course not," said Marion; "we never thought you would; but please before you go let us drink your health in a glass of champagne?"

"Might I ask where this champagne came from?" asked Miss Stiefbach, glancing round the room at the other girls, who still maintained a discreet silence.

"Oh, papa sent it to me," replied Marion. "I presume mamma thought it was cider; but papa always has me drink champagne with him Thanksgiving day, and as I could not be home, the next best thing was to send it, so I could drink it here. You don't think it was *very* dreadful in him, do you?"

"I cannot say that I wholly approve of it; but perhaps under the circumstances I must waive my objections."

"Oh, please do, Miss Stiefbach, just this once; and oh, I forgot all about it, here's a great turkey, and a loaf of cake for you; shall I take it down?"

"Thank you, you are very kind," replied Miss Stiefbach. "You may take it down after you have finished your supper; but I will go now, and send Miss Christine."

"No! no! Miss Stiefbach, not yet. Papa would feel dreadfully if he knew you refused his champagne; it never would do in the world. Here, Sarah, hand these round to the girls;" and Marion filled the six glasses. "I shall have to take a tumbler myself, but never mind; now are you all ready? Well, here's to the health of Miss Stiefbach; may she live many years at the head of this school, and may every Thanksgiving eve see her as she is now, smiling encouragement upon the innocent pleasure of her pupils."

The toast was drank with smiles and bows, and Miss Stiefbach retired from the room with a bland "Good-evening, young ladies, and a happy Thanksgiving to you all."

Poor woman! with all her learning, and the terrible dignity with which she thought it necessary to enshroud herself, as a part of her position as head of a large school, she was at heart as simple-minded as a child.

"Girls!" exclaimed Marion, as she turned to her companions, and the door closed after Miss Stiefbach, "you've been taught that there are seven wonders in the world; after this I think you can add an eighth."

"Indeed we can!" exclaimed Sarah Brown; "and that eighth will be Marion Berkley!"

"I don't mean myself at all, but the whole thing. Imagine Miss Stiffy smiling benignly on an affair like this! But keep quiet, Miss Christine will be here in a minute. She'll see through the whole thing, you may be sure; but nevertheless we must carry it out just the same. Don't you betray me; we'll have just as good a time, and better too, if she's here; besides, no matter what happens now, Miss Stiefbach has countenanced us. Don't stir off that bed, Julia, and keep your skirts well over Flo's foot. How do you feel now, dear?"

"All right; in fact, I had forgotten all about it; but here's Miss Christine."

Miss Christine came in with a comical smile on her face; but whatever may have been her opinion of the affair, she said nothing, and took everything just as it came. She was not so old but that she could enter heartily into the girls' fun and nonsense, and yet her presence was a restraint upon them, which, although unfelt, kept them from carrying their hilarity too far.

Mr. Berkley's contribution to the box was certainly a very injudicious one, which the majority of parents would heartily condemn; and, as Marion had conjectured, his wife had supposed the bottles contained nothing more exciting than sweet cider. Fortunately, the unskilful manner in which they were opened sent more of their contents round the room than all that went into the glasses; so the amount consumed was really very small. At ten o'clock the party broke up, and I am inclined to think that for the rest of their lives those girls never forgot Marion's Thanksgiving party.

CHAPTER XV.

MISS CHRISTINE GOES TO A PARTY.

Thanksgiving day passed off very quietly, but nevertheless very pleasantly, at school. The little dissipation of the night previous had given such perfect satisfaction to all those who participated in it, and they were the scholars who were generally the ringleaders in every scheme for fun and frolic, that they were all willing to maintain a most discreet behavior throughout the day. To be sure they entered into all the lively conversation of the dinner-table, and amused some of the younger ones afterwards with games and stories; but there was none of that general uproar and confusion that one would expect to see in a school full of all ages, when the whole day was fully understood to be at their disposal and they were released from any apparent restraint.

The quiet behavior of Marion and her set might have been readily attributed to the fact of Florence's lameness, had that fact been known; it took the united energies and tact of the six to get her up and down stairs, and in and out of rooms so that her limping would not be noticed, or attention attracted to the sudden growth of one of her feet. She bore the pain like a martyr, and managed to conceal her sufferings from the public, only giving vent to her feelings when she was perfectly sure of not being observed.

Of course Marion's supper could not remain a secret, and she and the five whom she had honored with invitations were made to feel the scorn of some of the older scholars, who were not of the favored few. Mutterings of discontent, contemptuous shrugs of the shoulders, and glances which were intended to be withering in the extreme, were levelled at the obnoxious six, who were highly entertained at the remarks and actions of some of the girls, and in various little ways added fuel to the flame.

Georgie Graham felt herself especially insulted, and did everything in her power to rouse her companions to a realizing sense of their injured dignity.

"Why, really, Georgie," said Mattie Denton, "I don't see as there was anything so very dreadful in Marion's asking the girls into her room. She probably had those she wanted, and I don't blame her. I'm sure you couldn't expect she would invite *you!*"

"Expect she'd invite me!" retorted Georgie, with a scornful toss of her head; "she knew very well I wouldn't have gone if she had."

"Oh, well," quietly replied Mattie, "I suppose, of course, that was the only reason she didn't ask you."

"The idea of her having Rachel Drayton," continued Georgie, ignoring Mattie's remark; "she has hardly treated her decently since she's been here, and to start out all of a sudden, and be so *dreadfully* intimate as to invite her into her room with a *select* party of friends, is really too absurd—or would be if it wasn't so easy to see what she is after!"

"See what she is after! Why, what in the world do you mean?" asked Mattie. "I don't imagine she's after anything."

"Oh, no! I suppose not," scornfully laughed Georgie, tossing her head still higher. "Of course not! you know the old saying, Mattie, 'None so blind as those that won't see.'"

"What in the world do you mean, Georgie Graham? I don't believe you know yourself!"

"Don't I, though? Well, now, do you suppose that Marion Berkley, who holds her head so high, and doesn't condescend to take any notice of us girls, would have whisked round all of a sudden, and been so very sweet on Rachel Drayton, if she hadn't an object in view?"

"You certainly are the strangest creature I ever saw," indignantly replied Mattie. "As if Marion ever had been sweet on Rachel! No one but you would ever have thought of such a thing! I presume she invited her, because she is a friend of Flo's."

"No such thing," replied Georgie, leaning across the table and speaking every word slowly and

distinctly. "She invited her because she is an heiress, and Marion intends to toady round her until she gets into her good graces."

"I don't believe it," flatly declared Mattie.

"She told me so herself."

"What! told you she meant to toady Rachel!—a likely story!"

"No, told me Rachel was an heiress."

"Well, suppose she is an heiress, what of that? You know perfectly well that Marion Berkley is not a girl to *toady* any one, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself for saying so. I'm sure every one could see that she has not treated Rachel very cordially, and if she invited her into her room it was on Flo's account, and I'm glad for one she showed her some kindness. No one but *you* would ever have put a bad motive on such a simple action."

"Thank you, Mattie, for defending me," quietly remarked Marion herself, as she passed through the library where the two girls were sitting, and went upstairs.

"There, Miss Graham, I hope you feel better now!" exclaimed Mattie, who was now thoroughly roused.

"Pooh! I don't care; 'listeners never hear any good of themselves;' she shouldn't have been eaves-dropping."

"That sounds well, Georgie, I must say, coming from you," replied Mattie. "She was in the school-room, and goodness knows we talked loud enough. Next time you have any such agreeable insinuations to make against one of your school-mates, you'll be kind enough to go to some one else;" and Mattie turned away indignantly, and left Georgie to her own reflections.

Finding that she had not been able to rouse any ill-will towards Marion in Mattie's breast, and inwardly provoked with herself for having proclaimed Rachel to be an heiress,—a fact which for reasons of her own she would have preferred to have remain a secret,—she left the hall, and entered the drawing-room, where most of the girls were congregated, thinking perhaps that there would be a better field for her operations.

Poor Marion had been cut to the quick by Georgie's remark; not on account of the source from which it came, but because she feared, that, through Georgie's manœuvring, it would become the general opinion of the scholars, and in her inmost heart Marion had hoped that she might not leave the school at the end of the year, without leaving behind her a better reputation than she had borne before.

She said nothing of this hope to any one, not even Florence, but had tried in many little things, principally in her manner, to be more kind to those of her school-mates who were not in any way attractive to her.

Forgetful of the feelings of others as she so often appeared, she was herself extremely sensitive, and nothing could have annoyed her more than to be accused of toadying any one. She could not bear the idea of having such an imputation fastened upon her, and she secretly resolved that in the future she would treat Rachel Drayton with the same coldness and hauteur she had shown in the past. If she had only known that that was the very object at which Georgie was aiming!

She had been thinking all day of Aunt Bettie's happiness, and the thought of it had greatly contributed to her own; but now all her peace of mind was quite destroyed. She knew the resolution she had made was unworthy of herself; but every time she tried to reason against it, the thought of how her conduct would be misrepresented if she should treat Rachel with kindness and consideration, as she had made up her mind the previous night she would do, proved too much for her sensitive pride, and she determined to hold firmly to her first resolution.

She knew it was miserably weak in her, to allow herself to be governed by fear of the misrepresentation of any one whom she held in such utter contempt as she did Georgie Graham; but she knew that the girl's influence over some of the scholars was great, and though outwardly she appeared indifferent to whatever they might think of her, at heart she really longed for their good opinion.

A still, small voice whispered in her ear, that if she would only follow the dictates of her better nature she would certainly be worthy of their good opinion, and in the sight of One who not only sees, but understands, everything that passes in our minds, she would be doing right. But she was not in a mood to listen to any such voice; she left the room, and running down to the parlor, seated herself at the piano, and for an hour played for the girls to dance, trying in that way to get rid of the unpleasant thoughts that would force themselves upon her.

"What do you think?" exclaimed Mattie Denton, going up to her almost out of breath, after a furious gallop; "Miss Christine is going to a party."

"A party!" exclaimed Marion; "when and where?"

"To-night, at Mrs. Dickenson's; she has a family dinner-party, and a few friends are invited in the evening; of course I don't suppose it's a regular *party*, but quite an event for our Miss Christine."

"I should think as much," replied Marion. "I am so glad she's going! Wasn't Miss Stiefbach

invited?"

"Oh, yes, of course; but she declined. I suppose she thought it would never do to leave us alone."

"No, 'while the cat's away the mice *will* play,' you know."

"Yes, I should think the mice played a little last night," laughed Mattie.

"So they did; but then the cat was round. Come, I've played enough for these girls. I mean to ask Miss Christine to let me do her hair. You come with me, and I'll give you some of the good things the mice *didn't* play with."

"O Marion!" wailed half-a-dozen girls; "aren't you going to play any more?"

"No, I can't. I've most banged my fingers off; ask Fannie."

"But she doesn't play half as well as you do."

"Much obliged for your flattery; but it's all wasted this time," answered Marion, as she and Mattie left the room to hunt up Miss Christine.

"Sallie, do you know where Miss Christine is?" asked Marion, as they met Sarah Brown on the stairs.

"Yes, she's just gone to her room. Do you know she's going to a party!"

"I know it; isn't it splendid? I'm going up to ask her to let me do her hair."

"I don't believe she'll let you."

"Yes, she will; I'll coax her into it, see if I don't."

"Where are you going to do it? Do let me see you."

"In my room, I guess, so that Flo can see me; but not until after tea."

After depositing Mattie in her room with a plateful of goodies, Marion proceeded to that of Miss Christine, which was directly opposite that of Miss Stiefbach, and upon knocking was immediately told to "Come in" by Miss Christine, who at that moment was shaking out the folds of a plain, but handsome black silk.

"O Miss Christine, isn't it splendid?" cried Marion, clasping her hands; "you're going to a party!"

Miss Christine laughed her dear, little, good-natured laugh. "Why, it seems to be considered a most wonderful event. Sarah has just been up here, and appears almost as pleased as if she were going herself."

"Of course she is, and so am I; and I'm going to do your hair."

"My dear," replied Miss Christine, "it will be too much trouble."

"Trouble! why, I admire to do it. I always do mamma's when I'm home, and she wants to look *very* fine."

"But you see I don't want to look very fine."

"Oh, yes, you do; or if you don't I want you to; besides, I promise not to do it any *fixy* way,—braid the back *something* as you do, only put it up with a little more style."

Miss Christine laughed. "Well, as you are so very kind as to offer, I'll let you; but when will you do it?"

"Directly after supper, please; that will be time enough. Will you be kind enough to bring your brushes into my room? I think the light is better."

"Very well, it does not make any difference to me. You run out now, and I will be all ready but putting on my dress, before tea."

Marion ran back to Mattie, and then went down to communicate the success of her errand to Sarah and Florence. Immediately after supper they helped Flo upstairs, and had just got her comfortably settled in the only easy-chair in the room, with her foot on a cricket, and a shawl thrown carelessly over it, as Miss Christine came in, brushes in hand.

Marion seated her with her back to the glass, saying as she did so, "I don't want you to see yourself until it is all done."

"Don't make me look too fine," said Miss Christine.

"No fear of that," replied Marion, as she rapidly undid the massive braids, and brushed them until they shone like burnished gold.

"There is some pleasure in doing such hair as yours," said Marion, with all the enthusiasm of an Auguste; "no need of rats or yarn here."

For a few moments she worked in silence, as her fingers flew in and out, until two long shining braids were made; these she twisted gracefully round at the back of Miss Christine's head,

exclaiming as she put in the last hair-pin:—

"There! who would ever suppose she had as much hair as that? Just look at it, girls; isn't it lovely?"

"Perfectly lovely!" cried Florence. "Why, Miss Christine, you don't make any show of it at all."

"I braid it up as tight as possible, and don't care for anything but to have it stay firm and smooth."

"Now, Miss Christine," said Marion, in a tone which seemed to imply that she expected opposition, but meant to conquer it, "I'm going to crimp the front."

"My dear child, are you crazy? Why, I should not think of doing such a thing!"

"Of course you wouldn't, because you don't know how; but I'll do it now, and teach you some other time."

"Yes, yes," put in both Florence and Mattie; "your hair will be lovely crimped, and *so* becoming; do let her!"

"But I am afraid you'll make me look ridiculous, Marion," said Miss Christine, in a deprecating tone; "and perhaps you will burn it."

"Indeed I won't; *your* hair shan't suffer the way poor Meg's did in 'Little Women,' for I'll do it over a hot slate-pencil, and that *never* burnt mine."

"You don't mean to say you want to friz my hair up the way yours is!"

"No, indeed; I'll take more hair, and that will do it in large, soft waves. Now you'll see how lovely I'll make it look;" and Marion already had the pencil in the gas, and in a moment more was twisting over it a lock of Miss Christine's hair. "Now for the other side; then I'll comb it out, and it will be perfectly stunning!"

"Marion, what an expression!" said Miss Christine, as she sat in momentary expectation of having her hair singed off her head, or her forehead blistered. "I wish you would correct yourself of the habit of using slang words."

"*Slang!* why, that's not slang!"

"Yes, my dear; I think it is."

"Well, it is certainly a very mild form."

"Mild or not, it is extremely unladylike, and I hope you will get over the habit soon, or it will become fixed upon you."

"Well, I'll try," said Marion, taking a hair-pin out of her mouth; "but it will almost kill me. Stunning, and scrumptious, and jolly, and lots of those things, express so much more than any old, prim, stuck-up words. There! I suppose that's slang too! Well, never mind now, Miss Christine; when I come back after Christmas vacation, I'm going to be 'Miss Piety promoted;' see if I'm not! Now look at yourself."

"Why, Marion, haven't you crimped my hair a *little* too much?"

"No, indeed!" cried the three girls.

"You look just as sweet as you can look," said Florence; "it's not a bit too much, it's only lovely waves."

"Now I'm to get your dress, and you must put it on in here," said Marion; and before Miss Christine could utter a word of remonstrance she was off, and in a moment came back with the dress over her arm, and a lace collar in her hand. "I wish the skirt was a trifle longer," said Marion, as she stooped, and pulled it down behind.

"It's long enough for such a plain body as myself; you want to make a fashionable lady of me."

"I wouldn't have you a fashionable lady for the world! but I do want you to look your very bestest."

"You have forgotten my pin, dear; it was on the bureau beside my collar."

"No I haven't forgotten it," said Marion, who was opening and shutting various boxes in her upper drawer. "Where in the world is that ribbon? Here it is. Now, Miss Christine, I don't want you to wear the pin; it's the same you wear every day, and you ought to have some color about you somewhere; so I want you to wear this knot of blue satin, and I've got a band to match. Please do, just for my sake!"

"Why, Marion, you will make me absurd; you forget what an old maid I am."

"Old maid! I should think as much," replied Marion, pinning on the bow in spite of all remonstrance,—"old maid indeed! You're nothing of the sort, and what's more you know you never will be;" and Marion gave a mischievous glance at her teacher.

"Don't be impertinent, Marion," replied Miss Christine; but "old maid" as she called herself, she

could not keep a very girlish blush from glowing on her cheeks at her pupil's words.

"I think you are just as lovely as you can be!" exclaimed Marion. "Oh! I forgot; the band for your hair;—there! now you're complete."

"Why, Miss Christine, you'll hardly know yourself," said Florence; "just look in the glass. Those crimps make you look five years younger."

"I'm going down to get Sallie," said Marion. "Don't put your things on yet, please; she wants to see you."

Marion ran off, returning in a few moments with Sarah Brown, who, the moment she saw her teacher, threw open her arms, and gave her a most emphatic hug.

"Now you look just as you ought. I'm perfectly delighted you're going, and your hair is beautiful,—that band is so becoming."

"That is all Marion's doings; in fact, I owe all my 'fine feathers' to her, and without them I should not be such a 'fine bird' as you seem to think me;" and Miss Christine laughed her dear, little laugh, that her scholars loved so well, and glanced affectionately at the group of admiring girls about her.

"You are not a 'fine bird' at all," exclaimed Sarah, in her most enthusiastic way; "you are just a dear, white dove."

"O Sarah! a white dove in black silk and blue satin—rather incongruous," said Miss Christine.

The girls all joined Miss Christine in her laugh; but nevertheless protested that Sarah's simile was not a bit exaggerated.

"Well now, Miss Christine," said Marion, "if you are ready, I'll go down and tell Bidy to put her things on."

"Bidy isn't going with me," replied Miss Christine, who seemed very busily engaged enveloping her head in a cloud, bringing it so far over her face that not a vestige of her hair was visible.

"Why, you're not going alone?"

"No; M. Béranger was invited, and kindly offered to escort me," said Miss Christine, bending her head to fasten her glove.

"Oh!" said Marion; but she gave a sly glance at her companions, which was not observed by Miss Christine, whose glove-buttons seemed to be giving her a great deal of trouble.

"Now, good-night, girls. I thank you a thousand times for all you have done for me, Marion;" then, as she kissed them all, "I don't believe there ever was a teacher had such affectionate scholars."

"You mean there never were scholars that had such a perfectly lovely teacher!" cried Sarah Brown, loud enough to be heard in the hall below.

"Sh!" said Miss Christine. "Monsieur is down there; he will hear you."

"I guess it won't be any news to him," whispered Marion, as they hung over the banisters watching the proceedings below. "Do you know, Sallie, I believe she pulled that cloud over her head on purpose so that Miss Stiefbach wouldn't see she had her hair crimped. I dare say if she had, she'd have given her a lecture, when she got back, on the follies and vanities of this world."

"I dare say," replied Sarah. "She'd like to make Miss Christine just such a stiff old maid as she is herself; but she won't succeed."

"Not a bit of it," replied Marion.

When Miss Christine came home from the party, and stood before her glass preparatory to undressing, if she had been one of her own scholars she would have said she had a "splendid time." Evening companies, even as small as the one she had just attended, were something in which she rarely indulged; in fact, she had often remained at home from preference, sending her sister in her place, thinking she was much more likely to shine in society than herself. But this night she had really enjoyed herself. It certainly was very pleasant to know she looked better than usual; and if the evidence of her own eyes, and the admiration of her scholars, had not proved that, there had been some one else who testified to the fact in a few respectful, but very earnest words.

As she unpinned the blue ribbons, she wondered if it had been foolish and undignified in her to wear them; but the recollection of the loving girls who had urged her to do so filled her heart with delight, and she went to bed feeling that the affection of those young hearts was worth more than all the elegance of manner, and extreme dignity, for which her sister was noticeable, which, however it might inspire the awe and respect of her pupils, never won their love.

The next morning the girls noticed that Miss Christine's crimps were not entirely "out." When she brushed her hair that morning, her first impulse had been to straighten out the pretty waves with a dash of cold water; then she thought, to please Marion, she would leave it as it was. I wonder if it occurred to her that the only lesson for the day was French?

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HOLIDAYS.

The days and weeks at Miss Stiefbach's school quickly succeeded each other, all passing very much as those I have already described, and the Christmas holidays were close at hand.

Shortly after Thanksgiving there had been another musicale, at which Marion played without dropping her music, or making any mistakes, and won universal admiration for the delicacy of her touch, and above all for the depth and beauty of her expression. Not that so-called expression which has lately become the fashion, which seems to consist in playing half the piece in pp., rushing from that to ff., with a rapidity which certainly astonishes the hearer, if it does nothing more; but carefully noting the crescendos and diminuendos, which are to music what the lights and shadows are to painting, and rendering the whole in a manner that appealed to the heart rather than the senses.

Marion was gradually, and without any noticeable effort on her part, obtaining a different footing in the school. The girls who had admired but feared her might now be said to only admire; for the cutting sarcasms, the withering scorn, which had formerly led them to fear her, were now very rarely observable in either her conversation or her manners.

Once or twice some of the scholars had spoken of the difference in Marion's behavior, and, as one of them expressed it, "wondered what had come over the spirit of her dreams;" but the answer to the query was generally accepted as a fact, "that it was only one of her odd freaks, and very likely would not last long."

But it was not one of her freaks; far from it. A change was coming over her whole character; slowly but surely it was approaching; manifesting itself at present in certain ways, or perhaps not so much in certain ways as in the absence of certain other ways, which had before been the dark spots in a nature which God had intended to make broad, intense, and noble. God had intended?—no, not that; for what could God intend and not perform? The nature was there, heart and soul bearing the impress of the Maker's hand; but like a beautiful garden having within its borders flowers of surpassing beauty and luxurious growth, but twined and intertwined with rank weeds and choking briars, which the gardener must clear away,—not tearing them apart with rough and ruthless hands, and by so doing killing the tender plant; but delicately, carefully, as a mother would tend her babe; untwining tendril after tendril, leaf after leaf, propping and sustaining the flowers as he works, until at last the weeds lay withered and broken, but a few moments trailing their useless branches on the ground, ere the gardener with a firm grasp wrenches them from the soil. His hands may be scratched and bleeding from contact with the briars; but what of that? If the plants are rescued; if they raise up their drooping heads, and gladden his eyes with the sight of their buds and blossoms, do you suppose he will murmur or complain for any wounds he may have received? Not he! The weeds and briars are gone, the blooming plants are saved,—that is enough.

Such a garden was Marion's heart, and she had already commenced the work of the gardener; but so slowly did she proceed that sometimes she was almost willing to let the work go, so hopeless did it seem to her; only a few tendrils untwined, only a few leaves saved from the briars whose roots as yet remained untouched. But such moments of discouragement did not come to her often, or if they did, she tried not to yield to them. The great trouble with her was the determination with which she held to her resolution in regard to Rachel; she still treated her with the same coldness, the same formal politeness, which she had shown her on her first arrival; she had not succeeded in quieting the still, small voice, which persisted in whispering in her ear; but though she could not help hearing it, she resolutely forbore to heed it.

Poor Florence had built high hopes on the easy, friendly manner with which Marion had treated Rachel the night of the famous Thanksgiving party, and had thought the pain she suffered with her foot but a small price to pay for the bringing together of her old friend and her new; but she had seen those hopes vanish one by one. As the friendship between herself and Rachel increased, Marion's coldness became the more distressing to both parties; for although Marion had never abated one jot of her affection for Florence, there was a certain barrier between them, which each from her heart deplored, but which seemed destined for the present to remain uncrossed.

But, my dear reader, I'm afraid you think I am growing fearfully prosy, and if you don't I am sure I do; so I will hurry on with my story.

It was the 23d of December, and the young ladies of Miss Stiefbach's school were starting off en masse for their various homes; indeed, some living at the West had already gone, having been called for by parents or friends, and not a few by their older brothers on their way home from college, who were not at all averse to spending one night in "that stupid old town," for the sake of a peep at the pretty girls of the school.

Marion Berkley, Mattie Denton, the two Thayers, Florence Stevenson, and Rachel Drayton, all went by the Boston train, and I don't believe a merrier party ever started on a journey together.

Florence, finding that Rachel was intending to spend the holidays at the school, had written to her father, and obtained his permission to take her new friend home with her. Rachel had at first

demurred, dreading to again encounter strangers; but Florence had plead so earnestly, representing to her how forlorn and stupid it would be for her at the school, at the same time promising that she should not see any company, or participate in any gayety,—“they would just have a quiet time at home and enjoy each other,”—that she had at last yielded.

It was a most excellent thought of Florence, for anniversaries of any kind were likely to prove very trying to Rachel; making her realize more forcibly than ever the loss of her father,—a loss to which she had tried to reconcile herself; but, strive hard as she would, it was ever present in her mind, and if she had been left in that great house, with none of the pupils with whose laughter, fun, and frolic the walls had so often resounded, it is probable that the melancholy which had at first seemed fixed upon her, but which the presence of so many bright young lives around her had done much towards dispelling, would have returned to her with double force, and taken a stronger hold upon her than ever.

When Florence had communicated her intention to Marion, she answered not a word; but no one knew what a hard struggle it was for her to keep silent.

Christmas vacation was always looked forward to by them both, with greater anticipations of pleasure than any other, for Florence always spent several days in the city with Marion in a round of pleasure. Not balls and parties, but theatres, concerts, picture-galleries, etc., were visited; in fact, every new thing that came to the city that week, and was worth seeing, Mr. Berkley always made it a point to take the girls to see, and those good times were talked over for weeks and weeks after they were back at school.

Marion had been looking forward to the holidays with more than her usual eagerness, for then she thought she and Florence would be together just as they used to be, without any barrier whatever between them; but when she heard that Rachel would spend the vacation with Florence, she knew, of course, that there would be an end to all the merry-makings; for even if she and Rachel had been on good terms, the latter would not of course have participated in such gayety.

The girls were all met at the depot by their respective papas, mammas or “big brothers,” and after great demonstrations of delight at meeting, and good-byes, and “Come round soon,” etc., from the girls as they parted, they all separated on their way to their various homes.

“Marion,” asked Mr. Berkley at the breakfast-table the next morning, as he helped his daughter to the best chop on the platter, “who was that young lady with Florence last night?”

“Miss Drayton,” replied Marion, with the slightest possible change of manner,—“Rachel Drayton.”

“Rachel Drayton. That’s rather an uncommon name. I don’t think I ever heard of a real bona fide Rachel before; handsome, isn’t she?”

“No, not exactly; perhaps she would be if she were well.”

“She’s uncommon-looking,” continued Mr. Berkley, as he helped himself to another slice of toast; “didn’t you notice her, Margaret?—tall, with jet-black hair and eyes. Rachel is just the name for her.”

“I noticed her; in fact, Florence introduced her, but I was attracted towards her first by the unusually sad expression of her face. I never saw it so noticeable in one so young; and I suppose she is young, though she looks much older than you or Florence.”

“She is only seventeen,” replied Marion, busily engaged in giving Charley sips of her coffee.

“Oh, well,” said Mr. Berkley in his hearty way, “we’ll soon get rid of that sad look; we’ll have her in with Flo, and I guess after she’s seen Warren once or twice she’ll learn how to laugh. What do you think, Marion?”

“It won’t be any use for you to invite her, papa. She wouldn’t come; she’s in deep mourning,—she lost her father just before she came to school.”

“Poor child!” said Mrs. Berkley, whose heart always warmed towards any one in trouble; “poor child! Where does her mother live?”

“She has no mother either; she died when Rachel was a baby. In fact, she has no relations at all except an uncle, who has been abroad for ten years, and will not be at home until school closes next spring.”

“Well, I do pity the poor thing!” said Mr. Berkley, who, although death had never robbed him of his own dear ones, felt the deepest sympathy for all those who had been so stricken. “I think it is one of the saddest cases I ever knew. I suppose Flo—bless her heart!—could sympathize with her even more than the rest of you, having lost her mother too.”

“She and Rachel are great friends,” replied Marion, wishing the subject would ever be changed.

“Is she well provided for?” asked Mr. Berkley.

“She is immensely wealthy,” replied Marion; “will have two or three millions in her own right, when she is twenty-one.”

“Whew!” exclaimed Mr. Berkley; “pretty well provided for, I should think. Well, I’m glad of it; she

has had trouble enough already, without having to worry about money matters. Marion, have another chop?"

"No, I thank you, papa, I've had quite enough," replied Marion, rousing herself, and speaking with her usual energy, the absence of which had not escaped her mother's ear. "How soon will Fred be home? I'm crazy to see him."

"In about an hour, I expect," replied Mrs. Berkley; "he is quite as anxious to see you as you are to see him."

"I tell you what, Mab," said Mr. Berkley, "Fred is a pretty important member of society since he got into college; you ought to hear him talk about 'the men of our class;' it makes me feel old."

"Oh! he'll get over that," laughed Marion. "I suppose he feels particularly grand, because he's younger than most of his class."

"Yes, I dare say," said Mrs. Berkley, with a little motherly anxiety in her voice. "I wish he had waited a year; it would have been much better for him."

"Oh, nonsense!" answered Mr. Berkley, as he pushed his chair back from the table; "the sooner he sows his 'wild oats' the better; besides, he's sound enough, never fear. But I forgot, Marion; I'm getting to be almost too old a beau for you; so I told Fred to bring some one home from college to pass the vacation. He has invited a Mr. Thornton; he took a great fancy to Fred, though *he is* a junior; so you can't turn up your nose at him."

"I don't want to turn up my nose at him; but junior or not, he will not be my escort. I'll hand him over to mamma; but wherever I go, you'll have to take me, do you understand?"

"Oh, yes, I understand perfectly. That all sounds very pretty, no doubt; but you wait till you see Arthur Thornton. Such *heavenly* eyes!" exclaimed Mr. Berkley, disengaging himself from Marion, and clasping his hands in the most enthusiastic manner, "and such a *magnificent* figure! and such a *stunning* mustache, and such—such a—such a surprising appetite!"

"Now, papa," said Marion, laughing at her father's romantic gestures, and the very unromantic conclusion of his sentence, "you know I never rave so over young men; it's so silly!"

"Now, mamma, just hear her," said Mr. Berkley, turning to his wife; "she never raves over young men; oh, no! Wasn't little Bob Jones the *loveliest* dancer she ever saw? and didn't Walter Hargate sing the 'rainy day' so as to make one weep *oceans* of tears? and wasn't Jack Richards' profile 'enough to make one *wild*?' and wasn't—"

"Stop! stop!" cried Marion, jumping up and putting her hand over her father's mouth; "you shan't say another word; it isn't fair. That was nearly two years ago, when I was young and foolish; now I am almost eighteen, and, as Fred says, 'I'm going to come the heavy dignity.'"

"All right," replied her father, as he gave her a kiss; "only don't come it over me, that's all. Here they are now! Marion! Marion!" he cried, as she broke from him, and made a rush for the front door, "that's very undignified, very undignified indeed; you should receive them in the parlor."

But Marion paid no heed to his admonition, and in a moment more had her arms round Fred's neck, utterly oblivious to the fact that a young six-footer stood behind him.

"Come in, Marion; what do you mean by keeping Mr. Thornton standing out there in the cold?" said Mr. Berkley, with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. "I'm surprised at you! Come in, Mr. Thornton; glad to see you; my daughter, *Miss Berkley*."

Mr. Thornton raised his hat, and bent that "magnificent figure" in the most profound salutation, while Marion responded with a bow, which, as her father whispered to her, "was dignity itself."

After the usual bustle accompanying an arrival was over, and some little time had been spent in chatting, Mr. Berkley said:—

"Come, Fred, you and Mr. Thornton must be hungry; go out and get some breakfast; we have had ours, but Marion will do the honors."

"We breakfasted before we left," answered Fred. "I knew we should be late; but we'll do double duty at dinner."

"I'm sorry for that," whispered Mr. Berkley to Marion, as he handed her his meerschaum to fill, "for I wanted to prove the last part of my description. I know you've accepted the first part already as perfect."

"Hush, papa! don't be silly," answered Marion, as she dipped her fingers into the tobacco-box.

"Miss Berkley, can you fill a pipe?" asked Mr. Thornton.

"Why, of course she can," said her father; "she's filled mine ever since she was so high. I should have given up smoking long ago if it hadn't been for her."

"That's all nonsense, papa; you'll never stop smoking till the day of your death; so I suppose I shall always fill your pipe."

"Miss Berkley," said Mr. Thornton, with a graceful little bow, "I wish while I am here I might be

allowed the pleasure of having *my* pipe filled by those fair fingers."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Thornton," said Marion, with the least possible toss of her head; "but I never fill any one's but papa's."

Mr. Thornton bowed, flushing slightly as he rose to follow Fred to his room, mentally resolving never to waste pretty speeches again on that girl; and Mr. Berkley observed as he left the room, "A perfect scorcher, Marion! If you keep that dignity up for the rest of his visit, there won't be a piece of him left as big as a chicken's wing."

The following morning was as bright and beautiful as ever a Christmas morning could be, and indoors the merry party at Mr. Berkley's was quite in keeping with the weather; such strife as to who could wish "Merry Christmas" first, such an exhibition of presents, and such general jollification, could only be found where every one was in the best of spirits, and all determined to enjoy themselves to the utmost.

The Christmas gifts had been arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Berkley the previous night in the parlor, where the door was kept fastened until directly after breakfast, when Mr. Berkley unlocked it, and let in the whole family. Marion was in a perfect state of excitement over her presents, quite forgetting the talked-of dignity in her admiration of them; and the charming way in which she thanked Mr. Thornton for a bouquet, bearing his card, quite did away with the effect of her hauteur of the previous day. From her father and mother she received what she had long expressed a wish for,—Goethe's *Female Characters* illustrated by Kaulbach, a book which her intense love for art enabled her to fully appreciate; from Fred a beautiful amethyst ring; a pretty necktie from Charley, which, as he said, "he choosed hisself;" a bust of Clytie from her Uncle George; besides gloves, bows, embroidered handkerchiefs, etc., too numerous to mention, from various aunts and cousins.

"But, Marion, there is something else," said her mother; "lift up that handkerchief and see what is under it."

"Oh, is that for me? I didn't understand," said Marion, as she took up the handkerchief that hid something from view. "O mamma, how perfect! Isn't it lovely? She couldn't have given me anything I would have liked half so well;" and the tears started to her eyes, for the present was from Florence, and Marion had thought she had nothing from her, and was cut to the quick; for they had always exchanged Christmas gifts ever since they were children. This one was an exquisitely colored photograph of Florence herself, beautifully framed in blue velvet and gilt.

"She had it taken just before she went back to school," said Mrs. Berkley, "and I colored it for her; isn't the frame lovely? She had it made to order. I never saw one like it."

"It is lovely; just exactly like her;" and Marion looked fondly at the eyes that smiled into hers with such a sweet, affectionate expression, and as she did so thoughts of the past and present flitted quickly through her mind, and further speech just then was quite impossible.

But it is useless to attempt a description of each of those many merry days; they all passed only too quickly. Mr. Thornton proved himself to be a very valuable addition to the home circle, as well as a most hearty participator in all their schemes for going about here, there, and everywhere. During the holidays Mr. and Mrs. Berkley received several invitations to large parties, in which 'Miss Berkley' was included; but all were declined, for Mrs. Berkley had no idea of having Marion go into society for more than a year yet. Her father had said, in his jolly, easy way, "Oh, let her go, it won't hurt her; why, you and I did most of our courting before you were as old as she is."

"I can't help it, my dear; because you and I were foolish is no reason we should let her be," replied her mother. "I have no objections to her going to the little 'Germans' given by girls of her age; but regular balls and parties I can't allow."

But Marion was not at all disturbed about the party question; she was enjoying her vacation to the utmost. At first she missed Florence very much. She had been out to see her once or twice. The first time she saw her alone for a few moments, and thanked her warmly for her photograph, receiving Florence's thanks in return for her present of a lovely locket, and promising to have her own picture taken to put in it.

"Marion," said Mrs. Berkley one day, "don't you intend to invite Florence and Miss Drayton in here to spend the night?"

"I don't think Rachel would come, if I asked her, mamma. You know we are pretty gay now that Mr. Thornton is here."

"But you need not ask any one else, and I don't believe she would mind him;—he seems like one of the family."

"I don't think she would come, mamma."

"Very well, my dear, you know best;" and Mrs. Berkley did not again refer to the subject. She felt instinctively that Marion did not entertain the same friendship for Rachel that Florence did; but she said nothing about it, never wishing to force herself into her daughter's confidence, knowing well enough that, if she waited, that confidence would come of its own accord.

Everything must come to an end at last, and so did those Christmas holidays, and Marion went

back to school, and Fred and Mr. Thornton to college; the latter young gentleman, if we might judge from a little scrap of conversation he had with his chum on his return, not quite heart-whole.

"You see, Sam, I went home with Berkley more to please him than myself. To be sure I knew I should have a stupid time loafing round here, and I had no idea of going home; for the house is all shut up while the old gentleman and mother are in Europe. So I thought, as Berk really seemed to want me, I'd go, and I tell you I never had a jollier time in my life;" and Arthur Thornton watched the wreaths of smoke as they curled about his head, quite lost in recollections of the past two weeks.

"What did you do?" asked his companion, knocking the ashes out of his pipe.

"Oh! went to the theatre, museum, concerts,—everything! Stayed at home once or twice, and had a 'candy-scrape.' It's the best place in the world to visit, and the most delightful family."

"All of whom unite, I suppose, in worshipping Master Freddy."

"Not by a long shot!" replied Arthur Thornton, energetically; "*he* unites with the rest of the family in worshipping at quite another shrine."

"And that is—"

"His sister Marion; the most perfectly bewitching girl I ever saw in my life!"

"Arty, my boy, has it come to that?" solemnly asked his companion, as he removed his pipe from his mouth, and looked at his friend with a face expressive of the deepest dejection; "do you mean to say that you've surrendered, and gone over to the enemy?"

"I haven't gone over at all; but she certainly is the best specimen of a girl I ever saw! None of your sentimental, simpering kind! I just wish you'd seen her when I tried to make a pretty speech to her; didn't she toss her head up, and flash those eyes at me? By Jove! I never felt so small in my life!"

"If she has the power of producing that effect upon you, she must be something fearful," replied his friend, coolly surveying the six feet of human frame which lay stretched on the sofa before him. "She flashes her eyes, does she?"

"Doesn't she? and such eyes!—great, dark-brown eyes with long black lashes; and such hair!—golden hair! Do you hear? golden hair and dark eyes, and—"

"My dear fellow," replied Sam, languidly waving his hand before him, "forbear! I entreat you to forbear; half of that description is enough to do away with the quieting influences of this pipe; if you should continue, I don't know what would become of me, to say nothing of yourself. I see that you are lost to me forever. Farewell, my once loved, never-to-be-forgotten friend; I see that you are—in for it."

"Don't be a fool, Sam, and just wait till you've seen her yourself."

"Until that blissful time arrives," replied his friend, rising to leave the room, "I will occupy all my spare hours in hunting up an armor that will be proof against the 'flashes' of those eyes."

"You're an old idiot!" shouted Arthur; but Sam had dodged back, and slammed the door, just in time to escape being hit by a boot-jack, which his friend threw at him.

To tell the truth, Mr. Thornton was just the least bit in the world touched. Marion had done her best to entertain her brother's friend, and indeed that was not a very severe task, when the individual in question was a handsome young fellow, intelligent and agreeable, and not possessing quite the usual amount of conceit that young men of his age are troubled with. In fact, she succeeded so well in making herself agreeable to him, that Fred told his mother in confidence, that "it was easy enough to see Thornton was dead smashed with Mab, and 'twouldn't be a bad thing for her if she should fancy him, for he was a 'regular brick,' and hadn't he got the rocks!"

For which inelegant expressions his mother most seriously reproved him, at the same time saying that she thought Marion had taken a fancy to Mr. Thornton, and that was all she ever would care for him; and it was very silly to be talking about anything serious now, when she was nothing but a child.

Of course when the scholars all met again at school nothing was talked of but the vacation; presents were shown and admired, and for days and days after their return, as soon as study hours were over, little knots of girls might be seen scattered all over the house, chattering away as fast as their tongues could go, rehearsing again and again the delights of the holidays.

The first thing Marion did was to make a visit to Aunt Bettie's to thank the good woman for her present of a barrel of as rosy-cheeked apples as ever grew. She found the old lady well and happy, rocking away in the sunshine, while Jemima made bread in the pantry, singing in a clear, bright voice, which gave excellent proof of her recovered health and contentment.

She carried Jemima a couple of bright ribbons, and a pretty embroidered linen collar, and Aunt Bettie a neat lace cap, which unexpected gifts quite overpowered them, and caused Aunt Bettie to remark, "Seemed as how some folks was a-doin' and a-doin' all the time, and could never do

enuff;" which remark, Marion declared, as she ran out of the house, certainly did not apply to her.

CHAPTER XVII.

MARION'S MIDNIGHT WALK.

It was a clear, cold day, in the latter part of February; the ground had been covered with snow ever since Christmas week, and seemed likely to be so for some time yet; even quite a heavy rain had failed to melt away King Winter's snowy mantle, for being followed by a freezing night it had only served to crust everything with a thin coating of ice, and set upon the old fellow's head a crown, which glittered and sparkled in the sunlight rivalling in beauty that of many a lesser monarch.

A sleigh was standing at the gate of the school, and Martin, the Irishman who sawed the wood, built the fires, and did all the little odd jobs generally of the establishment, stood with the reins in his hands; evidently very much pleased with his new position as coachman.

Miss Stiefbach was going away, fifteen miles into the country, to see a friend who was very ill, and had sent her a very pressing letter, asking her to come to her as soon as possible; and the most feasible way for her to get there and back seemed to be, to hire a horse and sleigh in the village, take Martin as driver, and return the next day.

Nothing but the very urgent request of a sick friend would have called Miss Stiefbach away from school just at this time; for the cook was sick abed with a terribly sore throat; the laundress could hardly speak, on account of a bad cold, and Bridget, the housemaid, was almost worn out with doing a part of everybody's work, for the last three days. But Miss Christine begged her sister to go; she would get the older girls to help her with the extra work, and as it was only for one night, there certainly seemed no danger but what they could get along without her; so at two o'clock Miss Stiefbach started. Marion, Julia, and Sarah offered their services to wash the dinner-dishes, and with sleeves rolled up, and long aprons on, went into the business in earnest, laughing and chattering like magpies. While they were at work Rachel Drayton came into the room for a glass of water, and Sarah Brown, looking up, exclaimed:—

"Why, Rachel, what in the world is the matter with you? You look like a ghost!"

"Only one of my headaches," said Rachel, making a feeble attempt to smile. "I've had it all day."

"But you are hoarse; you can hardly speak," said Julia.

"Don't say anything about it; but my throat is terribly sore. Please don't tell Miss Christine; there are enough sick in the house already without me."

"But you ought to do something for it, indeed you ought," said Sarah. "I wish I could tell you of something; don't you know of anything for a sore throat, Marion?"

"I always gargle mine with salt and water," answered Marion indifferently, without looking up from the buffet-drawer, where she was arranging the silver.

"Well, do try it, Rachel," said Julia; "it can't hurt you certainly; here's some salt. How much do you put in a tumbler of water, Marion?"

"I really don't know," replied Marion, still busy with the silver; "I never measured it."

"Well, can't you give me any idea?" asked Julia, rather impatiently.

"Don't trouble Miss Berkley," said Rachel, in a voice which she tried in vain to render steady, for, sick and suffering as she was, Marion's indifference cut her to the heart. She turned away to leave the room, the blinding tears rushed to her eyes, her head swam, and she staggered forward, as Sarah cried: "Quick, Julia! catch her; she's fainting!"

Marion started up in time to see Rachel, with a deathly white face and closed eyes, stretch out her hands helplessly before her, as Julia and Sarah caught her in their arms, and saved her from falling.

The sight of that white face struck Marion with horror; but still she did not move from the spot where she had stood ever since Rachel entered the room; it seemed as if she *could* not move, until Sarah exclaimed:—

"Marion, hand me a glass of water, for Heaven's sake; she'll faint away."

"No, I shan't," said Rachel, in a feeble voice, trying to raise her head; "it was only a sudden dizziness. I often have it when my head aches, only to-day it was worse than usual."

"Lie still there," said Julia, as they led her to the sofa, "and keep perfectly quiet; I'll go call Miss Christine."

"No! no!" cried Rachel, jumping up, but sinking back again as the sudden movement sent her

head whizzing round; "please don't; she has gone up to give cook her medicine, and indeed I shall be better soon."

"I won't call her, if you'll promise to go to bed as soon as you are able to walk."

"Well, I will," answered Rachel. "I can go in a few minutes; would you mind asking Florence to come here?"

Sarah ran off to get Florence, and Julia sat down by Rachel, bathing her head with cold water. Marion went on quietly putting away the dishes; only now and then glancing at the white face in such fearful contrast with its surroundings of black hair and dress.

Florence came in, and, as soon as Rachel was able, helped her up to her room, where she laid down on the bed without undressing, hoping to feel well enough to go down to tea; but that was out of the question; her head grew worse instead of better, and at last Florence insisted upon calling Miss Christine.

When Miss Christine came up, she told Marion to take Rachel into Miss Stiefbach's room, and help her to undress at once, while she went to get some hot water in which to bathe her feet. Very soon Rachel was in bed, and begged Miss Christine to "go away and not mind her, for she knew she should feel all right in the morning."

But of this Miss Christine did not feel at all sure; the deadly pallor of Rachel's face had been succeeded by a bright red spot in each cheek, and the palms of her hands were burning hot. Leaving Florence to sit with her friend, she went down to attend to her other duties. She went into the dining-room to set the tea-table; but Marion and Sarah were there before her.

"How is Rachel?" asked Sarah; "do you think she is going to be ill?"

"I hope not; indeed I think not, for you know she often has these dreadful headaches; still she has a bad sore throat, and seems feverish. I almost wish Miss Stiefbach had not gone."

"It was too bad," said Sarah; "just now when everybody is sick! I don't see why that lady had to send for her!"

"Well, my dear, she could not possibly know that it was not convenient for us to have Miss Stiefbach away, and she wanted to see her about something very important; it could not be helped. I dare say everything will come out right in the end. I must go now and help Bridget, or she will get discouraged. O Marion," she said, as she was about to leave the room, "will you please sleep with Rose? She'll be afraid to sleep alone, and I have put Rachel into Miss Stiefbach's room, where I can be near her if she should want anything in the night."

"Oh, I don't want to," replied Marion, much to Miss Christine's surprise. "Rose kicks awfully. Ask Florence."

"Will she be any less likely to kick Florence than you?" asked Miss Christine, quietly.

"No, I suppose not; but you know Florence won't mind, as long as it's for Rachel."

"And you would, I am sorry to say."

"I suppose it's no use for me to offer," said Sarah, "for that would leave Jennie all alone, and she's an awful coward."

"No, I thank you," said Miss Christine, as she left the room; "I will ask Florence."

Marion said nothing; she went on setting the table and talking to Sarah, never in any way alluding to Rachel, and doing her best not to think of her, or reproach herself for having treated her so unkindly; but no matter what she did, she could not stifle the voice of conscience, and its whisperings were far from pleasant to hear.

That night, as she went up to bed, her better nature prompted her to step into Rachel's room, and ask her if she felt any better; but "No," she said to herself, "she will think it's all hypocrisy, and I won't do it."

She hurried and undressed herself as quickly as possible, so that she was already in bed when Florence came in to get her night-clothes to carry into Rose's room; but she did not speak or open her eyes. Florence moved round as quietly as possible, getting her things together, and then stepping to the bedside stooped down and kissed her friend; but Marion did not speak or move; so Florence, thinking she was asleep, turned out the gas, and left the room. When she was gone Marion buried her head in the pillow, and wept bitter, bitter tears.

It was a long time before she went to sleep, and then her rest was disturbed by frightful dreams; she thought the house was on fire; that she was safe, but Rachel and Florence were in the attic, where no one could reach them, and they must burn to death while she stood looking on.

She awoke with a start, to see a bright light in the entry; springing out of bed, she ran to the door just as Miss Christine, with a candle in her hand, and a wrapper over her night-dress was passing by.

"O Miss Christine," she cried, in an excited whisper, "is the house on fire?"

"No, indeed, dear, nothing of the sort; but Rachel is very ill, and I am going down to make her

some lemonade. Won't you please put something on, and go in and sit with her? I cannot bear to leave her alone."

Marion did not stop to answer; but running back into her room, threw a shawl over her shoulders, and hastily thrusting her feet into her slippers, hurried into Miss Stiefbach's room. There was only a dim light in the chamber. Marion went up to the bed, and, leaning over, called Rachel by name; but she made no answer, only moaned feebly, and tossed her arms over her head, rolling her great black eyes from side to side.

"Rachel," said Marion, thoroughly frightened, "don't you know me?"

The voice seemed to rouse her, for she started up, and looked fixedly at Marion; then putting her hands before her eyes, as if to shut out some horrible sight, she cried, in a hoarse voice, "Go away! go away! you hate me! you hate me! you're going to kill me!"

Marion shuddered, for she knew Rachel must be delirious; she tried to soothe her, but the sound of her voice only seemed to make her more excited. She seemed to have a vague idea who she was, and that she was there to do her harm. Once she sat up in bed, and, laying her hand on Marion's arm, said in the most grieved, beseeching tone, "What makes you hate me so? I never did you any harm."

Marion, with tears in her eyes was about to speak, when suddenly the tender, supplicating expression left Rachel's face, and one of intense horror and grief took its place, as she grasped Marion's arm tightly with one hand, stretching out her other arm, and pointing into a dark corner of the room, exclaiming, in a voice that made her companion shudder from head to foot: "See! see! you see they're taking it off! they're taking it off! don't you see? It's my father! O father! father!" she wailed, stretching out her arm as if entreating some person seen only by herself, "don't leave me; for there'll be no one to love me then. I'm all alone! all alone! all alone!"

Marion's tears fell thick and fast, as the exhausted girl threw herself back on the pillow and sobbed aloud; every unkind thought, every cold glance, and every act of neglect which she had shown the poor, desolate creature beside her pictured itself before her. Remorse was doing its work, and her greatest fear was that Rachel would die while yet delirious, and before she had an opportunity to ask her forgiveness, and atone by her kindness in the future for her neglect of the past. But although these thoughts passed rapidly through her mind, they were but as the undercurrent of her immediate anxiety; it seemed as if Miss Christine would never come, and Rachel still moaned and sobbed in a heart-rending manner.

When Miss Christine did at last enter the room, bringing the lemonade, Marion hurried towards her, and whispered:—

"Oh, do you think she's going to die? Can't we do anything for her? Can't *I* do anything?"

"I think she seems very ill indeed," replied Miss Christine, going to the bedside, and laying a cloth wet in cold water on Rachel's head; then coming back to Marion, "Will you stay with her while I go for the doctor?"

"Can't you send Bridget?"

"No, the poor thing is half worn out with all she has had to do this week. I would not call her up for anything. If you will stay with Rachel, and keep changing the cloth on her head, I will go, for I dare not wait until morning."

"O Miss Christine!" exclaimed Marion, in a trembling whisper, "I can't stay; indeed I can't, and hear her rave about her father; it is dreadful! it goes right through me; you stay and *I'll* go."

"Marion, do you know it is almost midnight? You will be afraid."

"You were not."

"No, because I'm not nervous."

"Well, I won't be nervous; if there's no danger for you, there is none for me. I shall go."

"Any *real* danger I do not think there is, but of imaginary danger a plenty, and if you should get seriously frightened I never should forgive myself."

"But I won't be frightened or nervous," said Marion, resolutely. "Here, feel my hand; when Rachel was raving a moment ago, I *could* not keep it still; now it is as steady as yours. O Miss Christine, if you only *knew*, you would let me go."

"My dear child," said Miss Christine, laying her hand tenderly on Marion's cheek, "I *do* know, and if you really are courageous enough, you may go. It is no use for me to wake up any of the girls; there is not one of them that would dare go with you, I know."

"I'll go alone, Miss Christine, and I know nothing will happen to me."

Marion hurried back into her room, and dressed herself as quickly as possible, putting on her thickest cloak, furs, and a warm hood. Miss Christine stepped into the entry, and kissed her good-by, saying:—

"Don't be afraid, darling; you know nothing ever happens round here, and if you bring the doctor back with you it may be the means of saving Rachel's life."

Marion made no reply, except by a glance full of meaning, and went quietly downstairs, looking back as she reached the door, and nodding at Miss Christine, who stood at the head of the stairs, holding a candle; then she opened the door, and went out into the night alone.

There were two roads which led to the village. By the road proper, on which several residences bordered, the distance was about two miles; but there was a shorter one, called the bridge road, which led through several open fields, and crossed the B—— River, which was rarely frequented except by the school-girls and farmers on their way to and from market. This road kept a perfectly straight course to the village, and although far more lonely than the other, on that account Marion chose it.

It was a perfect night; clear and cold, very cold; but of that Marion thought nothing; she had braved New England winters all her life, and was almost as hardy as a backwoodsman. The moon was full, and shone down on as lovely a scene as one would wish to see; the trees with their delicate coating of ice glistened and gleamed in its beams, as though covered with myriads of jewels, and threw their fantastic shadows on the shining snow.

Marion hurried along the road, not giving herself time for fear, until she had left the school-house some distance behind her. At any other time she would have been wildly enthusiastic over the beauty of the night; but looking at the moon from a comfortable sleigh, snugly tucked up in buffalo robes, the stillness of the night broken by the jolly jingling of bells and the laughter of merry friends, is a very different thing from contemplating it on a lonely country road, no house in sight, with your loudly beating heart for your only companion, and the hour near midnight.

At least Marion found it so; and, brave as she was, she could not keep her heart from thumping against her side, or her hands from trembling nervously, as she clasped them inside of her muff. Every bush she passed took some fantastic shape, and as she strained her eyes before her to make it assume some rational form, it seemed to move stealthily as if about to spring upon her; the trees appeared to be stretching out their naked branches, like long arms with ghostly fingers to clutch her as she passed; now and then a twig, too heavily freighted with ice, would snap off and come crackling to the ground, the sudden noise making her heart stand still for an instant, only to start on again, beating more violently than before.

But still she pressed on, and soon the river, which was on the very verge of the town, gleamed before her, and she quickened her pace, thankful that so much of her journey was past; but who can describe the horror and dismay she felt, when, upon reaching its banks, she found the bridge was gone! The little river wound in and out for several miles, doubling and redoubling itself, as it flowed among the woods and fields, and was as quiet and placid a little river as ever could be, with the exception of a number of rods above and below the bridge; here its bed was filled with a quantity of rocks and stones, and the water, rushing over and between them, formed innumerable cascades and whirlpools, never freezing in the coldest weather. For some time the bridge had been considered rather unsafe, and that afternoon the workmen had taken away the floor, leaving the stays and beams still standing.

Marion looked at the skeleton frame in utter despair. There lay the town directly before her, the doctor's house being one of the first, and the only means of getting to it were gone. To go up the bank of the river and cross on the ice seemed out of the question, for there it was bordered by thick woods, in which she could easily lose her way, and to go back, and round by the regular road would take at least an hour longer. Meanwhile Rachel might be dying, for aught she knew. She went nearer the bridge, and inspected it more closely; the railings were perfectly secure, and built upon two broad, solid beams which spanned the river; the idea came into her head to cross the river on one of the beams, holding firmly to the railing with both hands. She tied her muff by the tassels round her neck, tightened the strings of her hood, and stepped cautiously on to the beam. It seemed a fearful undertaking; her heart almost misgave her; but the delirious cries of Rachel rang in her ears and spurred her on. Step by step, slowly and carefully, as a little child feels its way along a fence, she crept along; gaining confidence with every movement, until she reached the middle of the bridge; then she happened to look down. The black water seethed and foamed beneath her, touched into brightness here and there by the moonlight. For an instant her brain whirled, and she almost lost her balance. She shut her eyes, and with a tremendous effort of her will was herself again. Looking up to heaven, and inwardly beseeching God to sustain her, she kept on, slowly and carefully as ever, moving first one foot then the other, with both hands still firmly clasping the railing, until at last the opposite side was reached, and she stepped upon the snow.

Her first impulse was to throw herself upon the nearest rock, for now that she had fairly crossed in safety, the extreme tension to which her nerves had been subjected relaxed itself, and she was more inclined to be alarmed at the loneliness of her situation than before. When on the bridge all her thoughts had been concentrated upon getting over safely; by force of will she had conquered her nervous fear, calling up all sorts of imaginary dangers, which disappeared before the actual danger which assailed her, and which, by presence of mind, she had been able to overcome. But she would not indulge any of her wild fancies, though they crowded themselves upon her against her will. She felt herself growing weaker and weaker as she approached the end of her walk. The shadows made by the trees and houses seemed even more gloomy than those of the open road. Once a dog, chained in the neighborhood, broke the stillness of the night by a long, mournful howl, which echoed through the air, making Marion shudder as she heard it. At last the house was reached; running up the steps she gave the bell a tremendous pull. She could hear it ring through the house; then all was still again. She waited, what seemed to her, standing there alone

on the door-step, which did not even offer the friendly shadow of a porch, a very long time; then rang again, even more violently than before. In a moment she heard a window opened above, and looking up beheld a night-capped head, and the doctor's voice asked, "What's the row down there? Seems to me you're in a terrible hurry."

"Some one's sick, do let me in quick, Dr. Brown!—it's Marion Berkley."

"Marion Berkley!" exclaimed the doctor, in astonishment. "Here, catch this key; it's got a long string tied to it, and let yourself in; I'll be down directly."

Marion caught the key, and in a moment unlocked the door; once inside, her strength forsook her, and she sank on the door-mat in total darkness, perfectly thankful to be in a place of safety. Pretty soon she heard a movement above, a light gleamed down the stairway, and she heard the doctor's voice calling to some one in the back of the house to have the horse harnessed, and brought round to the door immediately.

In a few moments the doctor himself appeared, bearing a light in his hand, and exclaiming, as he made his way downstairs, "How, in the name of sense, did you come here at this time of night?"

"I walked by the road," answered Marion, her teeth chattering with nervousness.

"By the town road," said the doctor; "and who came with you?"

"I came alone, by the bridge road."

"By the bridge road!" exclaimed the doctor, stopping short, as he was putting on his great-coat. "Why, the bridge is down!"

"I didn't know until I got to it," said Marion, wishing he would hurry, and not stop to question her; "then it was too late to go back; so I crossed on the beam."

"The devil you did!" exclaimed the doctor; then catching up the candle in one hand, he led her by the other into the dining-room. "There! just sit down there! Your hands are shaking like old Deacon Grump's, and your teeth chatter as if they were going to drop out. Now drink every drop of that, while I go and wrap up."

While he had been talking, the doctor had gone to the sideboard, and poured out a generous glass of sherry, which he handed to Marion; she took it and drank it all. It sent a genial warmth through her trembling frame, and by the time the doctor called out to her that he was ready, she felt quite like herself.

After they were seated in the sleigh, and well tucked up with robes, the doctor said, "Well now, young lady, if it's agreeable to you, I should like to know who is sick enough to send you chasing over country roads, across broken bridges, to rout up an old fellow like me."

"Rachel Drayton, sir," said Marion; "she's had a bad cold for some time; this afternoon she went to bed with a terrible headache and sore throat, and now she's in a high fever, and out of her head."

"Rachel Drayton; that's the one with the great black eyes, isn't it?" said the doctor. "H'm! I remember her; very nervous sort of girl, isn't she?"

"No, I shouldn't think she was," replied Marion; "she has always seemed very calm and quiet; you know she's an orphan."

"Yes, I remember her. I saw her the last time I was there. She's just the one to be delirious with even a very slight illness."

"Then you don't think she's going to be very sick?" asked Marion, eagerly.

"My dear child," said the doctor, looking down at Marion, "how can I tell until I've seen her? But good heavens! what's the matter with you?"

Marion had burst into a fit of laughter, and the doctor sat and looked at her in perfect amazement.

"What *is* the matter, child? What are you laughing at?"

But Marion laughed and laughed; throwing her head down into her muff as if to control herself, and then looking up at the doctor, and laughing harder than before.

"What's the matter with you, child?" cried the poor man, really growing uneasy. "Have you gone crazy, or was the wine too much for you?"

"It isn't that, doctor, but you—you—"

"What in the devil's the matter with me, I should like to know!"

"You've—you've—got on your nightcap!" cried Marion, as well as she could speak.

The doctor dropped the reins, and put both hands to his head. Sure enough, in the hurry of dressing he had forgotten to take off the immense bandanna handkerchief he wore tied round his head every night; and over it he had put his cloth cap, which, fitting tight to his head, left the ends of the handkerchief sticking out each side like great horns, giving an indescribably funny

appearance to the doctor's jolly round face.

Now Dr. Brown, although he always considered himself privileged to say and do anything he had a mind to, was excessively particular about his toilet, and to take a moonlight drive with a young lady, with his nightcap on, was quite contrary to his usual habits. However, it was altogether too ridiculous a situation to do anything but laugh, and the doctor could enjoy a joke even against himself.

"Laugh on, Marion; I don't blame you a bit," he said. "I must cut a pretty figure."

"Just look at your shadow; then you'll see for yourself."

The doctor looked over his shoulder. "The devil!" he exclaimed. "Why, I look just like him, don't I? Depend upon it, that's what it is; I've called upon his Satanic majesty so often, that now he's after me in good earnest. Well, old fellow, I'll deprive you of your horns at any rate;" and the doctor brought the ends of the handkerchief down, and tucked them under his chin.

"Marion, don't let me go into the house with this thing on. I won't take it off now, as long as you've seen it, for it's very comfortable this cold night; but I shouldn't like to shock Miss Stiefbach's dignity by appearing before her in such a rig."

"Miss Stiefbach is away," replied Marion.

"You don't say so! And the cook sick abed too. Well, Miss Christine has her hands full."

"And both the other servants are half sick, and Martin went with Miss Stiefbach."

"And that accounts for your coming out on such a wild-goose chase."

"I was chasing after you, sir," answered Marion, mischievously.

"No insinuations, miss! There's the school-house; get up, Beauty; you're growing lazy."

Marion found the door unlocked, and entering the house quietly, only stopping long enough for the doctor to divest himself of his fantastic head-dress, she led the way upstairs.

"How is she?" anxiously asked Marion of Miss Christine, who met them at the chamber-door.

"She is more quiet, but I am *very* glad the doctor is here."

The doctor took off his gloves, rubbed his hands together two or three times, then went to the bedside.

Rachel looked at him; but seemed to pay no attention to him or any one else. He felt of her head and pulse, then asked Miss Christine if she had ever seen her in a fever before.

"No," replied Miss Christine; "but she often has severe headaches; she has a sore throat now."

"Bring the light nearer," said the doctor. "Now, my dear young lady, will you please open your mouth?"

But Rachel only moved her head, and showed signs of becoming restless. The doctor stooped down, opened her mouth himself, and tried to look down her throat; but she resisted him, and commenced sobbing and muttering incoherently. The doctor soothed her as he would a little child, and she became quiet.

"Has she complained of pain in her back and limbs?"

"None at all," replied Miss Christine. "I asked her particularly."

"Give her a teaspoonful of this mixture every half hour until the fever abates," handing a glass to Miss Christine, "I will come again to-morrow morning."

"O doctor," whispered Marion, who had silently watched every movement, "is it scarlet fever?"

Miss Christine said nothing, but her eyes asked the same question.

"Of course I cannot tell yet," said the doctor, rising and drawing on his gloves, "but I hardly think it is. I noticed her the other day, when I was here, and remember thinking at the time that even a slight illness would seem more severe with her than with most persons. She looks like a person who had suffered and endured without complaint. I don't like to see that sort of look on a young face. When she is ill this unnatural self-control gives way, and she's out of her head, when any other person would be all straight. However, I advise you to keep all the scholars away from her for the present. As for this young lady," taking hold of Marion's hand, "the best place for such adventurous young females, who go about crossing broken bridges at midnight, is bed."

"What do you mean by broken bridges, doctor?" asked Miss Christine.

"Only that the bridge was down, and she crossed on the beams, that's all. My prescription for her is a glass of hot lemonade with a drop of something in it to keep it; you understand, Miss Christine;" and the doctor nodded his head significantly as he left the room.

"My dear Marion," whispered Miss Christine, as she threw her arms around her, "you are the bravest girl I ever knew!"

"Nonsense!" replied Marion, "and please don't say anything about it downstairs in the morning; I won't be talked about."

"I understand," said Miss Christine; "but now you must go straight to bed. I'll heat the lemonade over the gas, and bring it in to you."

"Miss Christine, you go and lie down yourself, and I'll sit up; indeed, I couldn't sleep if I went to bed."

"Yes, you will, and don't talk of sitting up, for I won't allow it; go right away."

Marion obeyed; in a very few moments she was in bed, had drunk the lemonade, and, before she knew she was even drowsy, was fast asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE VICTORY.

The next day the scholars were all very much astonished to find Rachel was really ill, so much so that the doctor had been sent for in the night; but none were aware of Marion's midnight adventure, for Miss Christine had kept her promise to say nothing about it.

Recitations were given up until Miss Stiefbach should return, and the scholars were all requested to keep as quiet as possible. Every one went about with noiseless steps and hushed voices; some learning that Rachel had been delirious, and had a fever, were seriously frightened lest it should prove to be contagious, and it was as much as the older girls could do to keep the little ones in order.

About ten o'clock the doctor came, and the scholars all collected in the school-room and library, waiting to hear his verdict. Marion and Florence went to their own room, leaving the door ajar, that they might hear the doctor when he went down, and learn from his own lips his opinion of the case.

He came at last, and Florence beckoned him into the room; she tried to ask the question uppermost in her mind, but could not. The doctor knew what she wanted, and said:—

"She is not so bad as I feared; the fever is not so high, and she is not at all delirious."

"Then you don't think it's scarlet fever?" anxiously asked Marion.

"No, nor typhoid; I feared one or the other, but now I am confident it is nothing contagious. She is pretty sick, but not dangerously so; but how are you, Miss Marion? Walking over broken bridges at twelve o'clock at night isn't a very good thing for red cheeks, is it?"

"What did he mean?" asked Florence, as he left the room.

"Some of his nonsense," replied Marion, from whose heart a great weight had been lifted.

"Marion, you don't put me off in that way," said Florence, laying her hands on Marion's shoulders, and looking straight into her eyes. Suddenly an idea seemed to flash into her head: "Did you go for the doctor?"

Marion nodded assent.

"Tell me about it."

"There is nothing to tell. I woke up in the night, and saw Miss Christine, with a light in her hand, going downstairs. She told me Rachel seemed very ill, and I went in and stayed with her while Miss Christine was gone. Then she wanted to go for the doctor, for she would not call Bidy; but I preferred going to being left with Rachel; so I went; that's all."

"But what about the broken bridge?" asked Florence.

"The bridge was half down, and I crossed on the beams."

"Marion, how could you? How did you dare?" said Florence, throwing her arms round Marion, as if to shield her from present danger; "if your feet had slipped you would certainly have fallen in, and there would not have been a soul there to save you."

"But my feet did not slip," said Marion. "I was frightened; I don't pretend to say I wasn't; and once when I got to the middle of the bridge I came near falling; but I shut my eyes, and the thought of Rachel gave me strength and courage. O Florence! if you had heard her raving, and talking about her father as I did, you would not wonder I went;" and Marion bowed her head on her friend's shoulder, and gave vent to the tears which she had been struggling to keep back.

Florence held her close in her arms, saying nothing, but bending her own head until it rested against Marion's cheek, and lightly passing her hand over her hair until the violence of her emotion had passed away, and she looked up, with a faint smile, saying, "Don't think me a baby, Flo, but I haven't had a good cry with you for ever so long, and I believe I needed it."

"Think you a baby, darling! Indeed I don't; I think you're the noblest girl I ever knew."

"Yes, very noble, I should think!" exclaimed Marion, bitterly; "the way I have treated Rachel has been nobleness itself!"

"But, my dear Marion, you have been acting against your better nature all the time. I knew you would come out all right."

For a moment Marion was silent, then looking up suddenly, she said, "Flo, I've been awfully wicked; I might as well have it all out now, and done with it. When I heard Rachel was coming here I was provoked, because I didn't like the idea of having a new scholar, that was all; but when Miss Christine came in, and told us she was an orphan, it flashed into my head, like a presentiment, that your heart would warm towards her; that you would make her your friend; and from that moment I determined to hate her. Don't look so shocked, dear, or I can't go on, and I want to say it all now. It wasn't a very easy thing, you may be sure, after I saw her; but I would not listen to my conscience, and only steeled myself against her all the more, when I saw she had every quality that would make her lovable, and many that were particularly attractive to me. It was hard, you can't tell how hard, to see her day by day taking the place with you that had always been mine. I knew it was my own fault, because, if I had treated her as I ought, as I really wanted to, we might all three have been warm friends; but I wanted you all to myself. I was jealous, and I might as well say so! However, the night before Thanksgiving I determined to overcome my wicked feelings, and yield to my better nature. You know how I treated her that night, and I should have done the same ever since if I hadn't been a contemptible coward! I heard Georgie Graham tell Mattie Denton that I was *toadying* Rachel, because she was an heiress; and I was afraid if I began to treat her kindly the whole school would think the same thing. There! it is all out now; do you think I am a perfect wretch?"

At first Florence made no answer; then she said very gently, "'He that conquereth himself is greater than he that taketh a city.'"

"I know it, Flo," answered Marion, with tears in her eyes; "I've thought of that so many times. But this is such a *little* victory, and there really ought not to have been anything to conquer."

"But there was, and you conquered it; if it were possible I should say I love you more than ever."

"Then Rachel has never taken my place entirely away?"

"No, darling, never! I love Rachel very much, very much indeed; but still it is not exactly as I love you. I can't explain the difference, but I know it is there."

"I am satisfied," said Marion, kissing her friend softly. "Do you think Rachel will ever learn to love me?"

"I know she will," replied Florence; "only act your own self; *follow* your good impulses instead of driving them away from you, and you will make her love you whether she wants to or not."

For many days Rachel was very ill, and Miss Stiefbach and Miss Christine were very anxious about her; still the doctor assured them there was no cause for alarm; her illness would be likely to prove a tedious one, but after she was fairly recovered she would be much stronger than she had been for a long time. It seemed very sad to think of the poor girl, so ill, without a relative near her, for Miss Stiefbach knew there was no one for whom she could send, who would seem any nearer to Rachel, if as near, as herself and Miss Christine. They procured an excellent nurse to assist in taking care of her, but nevertheless devoted themselves to her as much as it was possible to do, without neglecting their other duties. It was a pity Miss Stiefbach's scholars could not have entered that sick-room, and seen their teacher as she appeared there; they would have learned to love her then as Rachel did. No one would have recognized, in the gentle-voiced, tender-hearted woman who bent over the orphan girl with almost a mother's watchful care, the cold, dignified superintendent of the school.

After a while the fever subsided, but Rachel was still very weak, and the doctor's prediction, that her convalescence would be very slow, soon proved itself true. She was very patient, yielding herself entirely to those who so kindly watched over her. As soon as the fever was past, Florence had begged permission to sit with her, promising not to talk, as perfect rest and silence were most especially enjoined by the doctor. One day when the nurse had gone to lie down, and Miss Stiefbach and Miss Christine both had something which needed their immediate attention, Marion offered to sit with her. She had not been in the room since the first night of Rachel's illness, and was not prepared for the change which had taken place in her: then a bright color burned in her cheeks; now her face was so thin and pale as to be pitiable to look at. She was sleeping quietly; so Marion seated herself at the foot of the bed, not going any nearer for fear of disturbing her. She sat there some time, her thoughts busy with the past, when she was very much startled at hearing Rachel say, in a weak voice:—

"Miss Christine, is that you?"

"No," answered Marion, rising, and going quickly to the bedside; "it's Marion; can I do anything for you?"

"You, Marion!" said Rachel, holding out her hand. "I'm so glad!"

"Why?" asked Marion, kneeling by the bed, and taking Rachel's hand in both of hers.

"Because I wanted to see you so much. Miss Christine told me who went for the doctor for me that night. I want to thank you."

"Don't Rachel! don't!" said Marion, her voice trembling despite her efforts to keep it steady. "Forgive me for all the unkind things I have done; that is what I want."

"Forgive you, Marion! As if after that night there could be anything to forgive! I'll do better than that; I'll love you."

Marion could not speak, but she bent forward and pressed a kiss upon Rachel's lips. That kiss was the seal upon a bond of friendship which was never broken by either.

And so a few words, a silent action, cleared away all the unkindness and doubt of the past. Why is it, that so often, in the lives of all of us, such words are left unspoken, such actions go undone, the want of which clouds not only our own happiness, but that of others?

Soon after this, Rachel was able to be moved on to a lounge, and every spare hour that Marion and Florence could get from their studies was devoted to her. Marion would seat herself on the floor by the couch, and Florence lean over the back as they talked of everything that was going on downstairs, or made plans for their summer vacation. Sometimes their conversation drifted on to quieter and graver subjects; then, as the twilight gathered round them, they would draw nearer together, and hand in hand sit in silence until Marion, fearing lest too much thinking would have a bad effect upon Rachel, with some jesting remarks, would jump up and light the gas.

Lying there, in the daily companionship of her two friends, Rachel regained her health and strength, and passed happier hours than she had known since her father's death.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WEDDING.

"I've got the greatest piece of news for you, you ever heard!" cried Marion, bursting into the room where Florence, Rachel, Mattie, and Sarah were sitting one morning in the early part of June. "Guess who's engaged?"

"Engaged!" echoed Sarah; "I'm sure I don't know."

"Yourself," said Mattie.

"Oh, pshaw! don't be ridiculous!" said Marion. "Come now, girls, guess somebody rational."

"Well, aren't you rational, I should like to know?" asked Rachel.

"I shouldn't be if I were engaged," retorted Marion; "but guess now; every one but Florence, for I think she would guess right."

"Oh, tell us, Flo, do," urged Sarah; "Marion will keep it all night."

"No, I won't," cried Marion; "it's *Miss Christine*."

"Miss Christine!" shouted every girl, jumping to her feet in astonishment,— "to whom?"

"Why, M. Béranger, of course," said Florence; "who else could it be?"

"Why, I never thought of such a thing," said Rachel.

"Well, I don't know where your eyes have been," said Marion; "for I've suspected it a long time, and so has Florence."

"Oh, I thought he liked her, and she him; but I never thought of *that*."

"Well, I think it is perfectly horrid!" declared Sarah.

"Why, Sallie, what do you mean?" said Marion; "I think it's splendid."

"Oh, of course, it's all very nice for you girls who are going away at the end of the term; but here I've got to stay another year, and I shall *die* without Miss Christine!"

"But you'll have her just the same," said Marion; "they're going to live here for a year at least; it almost makes me want to come back again."

"Going to live here?" cried Sarah, clasping her hands with delight; "then I *do* think it's perfectly magnificent!"

"Tell us all about it, Marion," asked Mattie; "how did you know it?"

"Miss Christine told me herself. You ought to have seen how pretty she looked! She blushed like any girl, and I just threw my arms round her and gave her a good hug. She told me I might tell the girls who were going to leave this term; but she didn't want the others to know it at present, and here I've been, and let the cat out of the bag; for I didn't see Sallie when I came in, and never dreamed she was here. Sallie, if you lisp a word of it, I'll have you shut up, and kept on bread and water for a week, and you shan't go to the wedding."

"Is she going to be married during school?"

"I shouldn't wonder; but I couldn't get it out of her when. Now, girls, we must give her a handsome present."

"It ought to be from the whole school," suggested Florence.

"Yes, so I think; but don't you think it would be nice if we six girls, who have been here four years together, should all work her something? My idea is to make an ottoman: one work the middle, four the corners, and the other fill it up; what do you say?"

"A capital idea!" said Mattie; "and I choose the filling up, for that's the only part I like to do."

"You're welcome to it," said Marion, "for we all hate it."

"Mab, couldn't you design it yourself?" asked Florence; "it would be so much handsomer, and Miss Christine would think all the more of it."

"Nothing I should like better, if you'll all trust me."

"Of course we will," said Mattie; "you designed your carpet-bag, didn't you? It is a perfect beauty!"

"Let me see it," said Sarah. "It's a new one, isn't it?"

"Oh, what handsome letters!" said Rachel. "There, now I see for the first time why the girls call you Mab. I always thought it was such a queer nickname for Marion."

"Why, didn't you know?" answered Marion. "M. A. B., Marion Ascott Berkley; but I never write my whole name; I like just the two, Marion Berkley, a great deal better."

"Do you know," said Sarah, in the most serious way, "I don't think 'Mab' seems to suit you so well as it used to? then you were sort of—well—but now you're kind of—I don't exactly know what, but different from the other."

"Sallie, you are a goose!" laughed Marion, as Sarah's lucid description of the change in her character produced a shout from the girls. "I shall have to muzzle you until you manage your tongue better;" and quick as a flash Marion seized her satchel, and clapped it over Sarah's head, who resisted violently; "will you be a good girl if I let you out?"

"Yes! yes!" cried Sallie, from the inside of the bag, her voice almost drowned by the laughter of the girls.

"Well now, behave yourself," said Marion, as she released her prisoner, "and next time don't talk of what you know nothing about."

"Well, you are, any way!" cried Sarah, brushing the hair out of her eyes.

"Take care!" laughed Marion, shaking the satchel at Sarah; "you know what you have to expect."

"Come, girls, let's go downstairs and tell the others," said Rachel.

"So we will," said Marion; "they ought to have known it as soon as we did;" and down they all went.

Miss Christine's engagement did not long remain a secret, and when the knowledge became general, the little woman was fairly showered with kisses and caresses. Her scholars had almost worshipped her before, but now she seemed invested with a new importance, and was quite enveloped in a perpetual incense of love and admiration. M. Béranger, in the comparatively short time he had been with them, had won the respect of all his pupils; but now that he was going to marry their Miss Christine they made a perfect hero of him.

It came out, at last, that the marriage was to take place the last day of June, two days later than the usual one for closing school. Miss Christine's first idea had been to be married very quietly in church, inviting any of the scholars who chose to do so to remain over; but the girls all begged her to have a "regular wedding," as they called it, and she had consented.

Every one of the scholars was perfectly delighted at the idea of staying over to the wedding, and all were anxiously looking forward to the important day. Invitations were sent to those of the parents with whom Miss Christine was personally acquainted, and the girls had great fun planning and replanning how all the guests were to be accommodated for the night, as they would have to come the night previous. Great was the delight of Marion, when Miss Christine told her that she wanted the six graduates to be her bridesmaids, and she immediately ran off to find the girls and plan their dresses. They had been as busy as bees ever since they knew of the engagement; there were but a few stitches more to set in the ottoman, and it was to be sent the next day to Mrs. Berkley, who was to get it mounted, and bring it up when she came.

As many of the scholars were very wealthy, while the parents of others were in moderate circumstances, Marion had suggested that all contributions for the present, from the whole school, should be put into a closed box, through a hole in the cover, thus preventing any one from having an uncomfortable consciousness that she had not been able to give as much as another. When the box was opened, it was found to contain a very large sum. This was forwarded by Marion, who seemed by general consent to be considered chief of the committee of arrangements, to her mother, with directions to use it in the purchase of a plain, but handsome, gold watch and chain. There proved to be a surplus fund, with which Mrs. Berkley bought a large album, in which were placed photographs of all the girls in the school.

Miss Stiefbach had so much to occupy her mind, that several times during the week of the wedding she was actually seen to hurry through the hall, quite forgetful of her usual dignified glide. In fact, she seemed quite another person; the prospect of her sister's happiness had wrought a great change in her, and made her quite unbend to those around her.

Aunt Bettie came down several times with butter and eggs, never going away without getting a glimpse of Marion, and for three or four days before *the* day, Jemima was at the house all the time, stoning raisins, beating eggs, and making herself generally useful.

At last the wedding-day actually arrived. Mr. and Mrs. Berkley, with several other fathers and mothers, had arrived the night previous, and every nook and corner of the house was filled to overflowing. Some of the scholars slept three in a bed, others on mattresses laid on the floor; but no one thought of complaining, and the more inconvenience they had to put up with, the better they seemed to like it; for wasn't it all for their Miss Christine?

The six bridesmaids, with the other older girls, had been busy every moment of the day before, making wreaths of wild flowers and roses; these they hung early in the morning all over the lower part of the house. The folding-doors were festooned, and trimmed with an arch of flowers, and the walls of the little room back of them, in which Miss Christine was to stand to receive her friends, were perfectly covered with wreaths, garlands, and bouquets; so that it looked like a fairy bower.

They had also decorated the church, although of that neither Miss Stiefbach nor Miss Christine was as yet aware. The chancel-rail was trimmed with garlands of white flowers; down the aisle were four arches, the one at the door being of bright, glowing colors, and each one growing paler, until the one in front of the altar was of pure, bridal white, and over that hung a "marriage bell" of marguerites.

The girls had had to work hard, and had scoured the country far and near for flowers; but they had done everything themselves, and not a bud was twined in those decorations that did not take with it a loving thought of the dear little woman in whose honor they were made.

At last everything was completed; the bridesmaids were all dressed, and collected in Marion's room, putting on their gloves, and Marion had gone to put on the bridal veil,—a favor which she had begged, and which had been most readily granted; in a few moments that was done and the party started for the church, where Miss Stiefbach and her guests were already arrived. I doubt it would be possible to find a prettier bridal party in all the world, than entered that little church that glorious June morning. First came Mattie Denton and Grace Minton; then Julia Thayer and Alice Howard; then Marion and Florence, and directly behind them M. Béranger and Miss Christine. The bridesmaids wore simple white muslins, short, the upper skirts looped with clematis and rose-buds, and delicate wreaths of the same in their hair. The bride also wore white muslin, over which hung the bridal veil of tulle, put on with a wreath of natural orange-blossoms and myrtle, the work of Marion's hands.

M. Béranger looked, and acted like a prince about to take possession of his kingdom, and his clear "I vill" could be heard in every part of the church. But the ceremony was soon over; the bridal party turned and faced the eager, happy faces before them, and passed slowly down under the arches of lovely flowers, out into the sunlight, the organ pealing forth the glorious old wedding-march. Such a wedding-reception was never seen before! There were no dignified ushers to lead you decorously up to the bride, and whisk you off again before you got an idea into your head; and if there had been, they would have been tremendously snubbed by that throng of impetuous girls, who all crowded round Miss Christine, or rather Madame Béranger, each one eager for the first kiss. All formality was set aside; every one was radiantly happy, and, literally, everything went merry as a marriage bell.

It would be useless to attempt to describe Miss Christine's delight at her many presents; for, in addition to those I have already mentioned, almost every girl in the school gave her some little thing she had made herself. M. Béranger also received many proofs of their regard.

But the time soon arrived when the bride and bridesmaids, who were to leave in the Boston train that afternoon, had to go and change their dresses. The girls' trunks were all packed, and there was little enough time for the adieu which naturally accompanied a final departure from school. The carriage for the bride was at the door, and behind it several wagons, of various descriptions, for the bridesmaids and their friends. Miss Christine came down, looking so lovely, in her gray travelling-suit, that there was a perfect rush at her for the final good-by; but the last one was said, and in a moment she and her husband were in the carriage and off. Sarah Brown threw an old shoe after them for good luck, the wagons followed on, and the whole party started down the road, amid the shouts and cheers of the girls, who crowded on to the piazza, almost hiding poor

Miss Stiefbach, as they waved their handkerchiefs, and threw their farewell kisses in the air.

CHAPTER XX.

THE JOURNEY.

Rachel's intention had been to stay with Miss Stiefbach until the return of her uncle, whom she expected during the month of October; but Marion had urged her to go home with her, and join their family party in their summer trip. Mrs. Berkley seconded the invitation so warmly that Rachel had accepted with great pleasure.

Finding that Mr. Stevenson's means were not sufficient to enable him to allow Florence to join the party, Rachel, with the utmost delicacy and tact, had invited her to go with them,—an arrangement which proved more than satisfactory to all.

I fear some of my readers have thought that Rachel's uncle must be a cold, hard-hearted man to leave his orphan niece so long to the care of strangers, and in justice to that gentleman I must give some explanation of his seeming neglect.

Although a man of great wealth, he had devoted himself to the study of surgery, throwing into the pursuit as much energy as if he depended on his skill for his daily bread. Having become quite famous as a surgeon, he had for several years given his services to a charity hospital in Berlin; but having been away from his native land for ten years, he notified the directors of the hospital, a month previous to his brother's death, that at the end of a year from that time he must leave them. He signified his intention of donating to the hospital a sum of money, the income of which would be sufficient to pay a handsome salary to any one whom they might find competent to take his place. When the news of his brother's death reached him, his first impulse had been to start at once for America, and make a home for the orphan girl so suddenly bereft of a father's care; but the same steamer brought him letters from his lawyer and business agent, stating that, according to a wish expressed in the will of his deceased brother, his niece had been placed at an excellent boarding-school, where she would remain for a year, unless other directions were received from him; so he deferred leaving until the time Rachel's school would close; but as she wrote him that she was well and happy, and had made such pleasant plans for the summer, he postponed his return still later, finding that until that time no surgeon could be procured whom he felt capable of filling his responsible position.

Mr. and Mrs. Berkley, Marion, Florence, and Rachel, with Fred and Mr. Thornton, made up the travelling party. Mr. Berkley secured a drawing-room car for their exclusive use, and in the best possible spirits they set out for New York. The day after arriving there they went up the Hudson to West Point, spending a week at that delightful place, made up of enchanting scenery and still more enchanting cadets. It would be useless to say the girls did not enjoy the latter quite as much as the former, for what girl of eighteen ever could resist brass buttons?

For a day or two, Mr. Thornton and Fred escorted them about town, took them to the review, and everywhere else that there was anything worth seeing, but never introducing one of their military acquaintances, notwithstanding said acquaintances gave them plenty of opportunities for doing so. But such a state of things was not likely to last long; for the young women, although apparently unconscious of the admiring glances with which they were favored, in their secret hearts knew perfectly well that those spruce cadets never met them whenever they went out, or passed in front of their hotel-windows so many times a day, for the sole purpose of getting a bow from Fred or Mr. Thornton.

"The idea," exclaimed Marion, as the three girls were putting on their hats for their usual walk, "of our going away from West Point without having been introduced to a single cadet! I think it's outrageous!"

"But, Marion," said Rachel, "don't you suppose if they wanted to know us very much, they'd find a way to get introduced?"

"How can they, when Fred and Arthur Thornton mount guard over us every time we go out? Papa doesn't know any one but the old officers. Arthur Thornton knows ever so many cadets, and I think it's *very* strange he doesn't bring them to call on us."

"I'm sure," said Florence, "Mr. Thornton is very polite and attentive himself; I think he's very nice."

"Oh, so do I," replied Marion; "he's nice enough, but aren't we going to have *him* all summer? I tell you just how it is; he doesn't intend to introduce any one, because he feels so grand taking us everywhere himself!"

"O Marion," laughed Rachel, "I'm afraid you're growing conceited."

"No, I'm not, but what I say is true. If we didn't dress in the fashion, and look pretty nice all the time, he'd be only too glad to get us off his hands."

"Seems to me you're rather hard on Mr. Thornton," said Florence, smoothing the feather in her

hat. "Why is he any more to blame than Fred?"

"Of course he is! Fred doesn't know any one, but some of the little fellows, that Arthur Thornton hasn't introduced to him; besides, he's just the age when it makes him feel important to have three young females under his charge. But I tell you I'm going to put a stop to this; I know there are plenty of young men here actually dying to be presented to us. I think it is positively cruel to let them languish any longer, and if there isn't more than one cadet introduced to us before night, then my name is not Marion Berkley."

That morning the whole party went to the armory with an old officer, who was at West Point making a visit to his son, a member of the graduating class. When they started from the hotel, Marion took her father's arm, and joined with him in his conversation with the officer. Before they reached the armory Col. Stranburg was perfectly delighted with her, and the interest she evinced for his profession, and quite devoted himself to her during the morning.

"My dear young lady," he said as they were returning to the hotel, "I should like to call on you and your friends this evening, and bring my son with me."

"I should be delighted," replied Marion, who had been wondering how she should ask him to do that very thing without appearing too eager; "for as yet we do not any of us know a single cadet."

"What!" exclaimed the old gentleman, in unfeigned astonishment; "you don't mean to say you've been at West Point three days, and don't know a cadet! Why, I supposed that by this time you had a whole necklace of brass buttons."

"I haven't," laughed Marion, "and I don't think I care for one; but I should like to know some one here."

"Of course you would; and I don't understand it at all. Ah! now I see!" he exclaimed, with a meaning glance at the two young men who were walking in front with Florence and Rachel; "you have been monopolized, but we'll alter the state of things."

Col. Stranburg was as good as his word, and called that evening, bringing with him, not only his son, but two other cadets, who proved to be the very young gentlemen the girls had so often noticed. The next day the young men called again, each bringing a friend, and so it went on; every evening their parlor was crowded, and the girls were showered with attentions and bouquets till the end of the week, when Mr. Berkley carried them off, declaring that their heads would be completely turned if they remained any longer.

From West Point they went to the Catskills, spending several weeks there. Marion, who had never travelled to any extent, was perfectly delighted with everything she saw, but above all with the exquisite beauty of the scenery. She would often wander away from the others, find some unfrequented spot, and sit for hours drinking in the loveliness about her, her whole nature expanding under its influence.

From the Catskills they went to Saratoga, giving only one day and night to that abode of fashion; from there to Montreal; then down the St. Lawrence to Niagara, and from there home, arriving in Boston about the last of September.

It would be useless for me to attempt to give an account of all they saw and did that summer; it would fill at least one small volume. Suffice it to say, that every one enjoyed themselves to the utmost; that Rachel could never thank Mrs. Berkley half enough for inviting her to join their party; and Florence could never express half her gratitude to Rachel for inviting her to go with her.

I think I conveyed to my readers the idea that Mr. Thornton was somewhat in love with Marion the first time he saw her; and the more he saw her the better he liked her. Every one knows how easily people get acquainted who are thrown together as they were, and before the summer was half over, they felt as if they had known each other for years.

Marion liked Mr. Thornton very much; in fact, once or twice she had been guilty of indulging in certain little day-dreams, in which that young gentleman figured quite extensively; but she had been heartily ashamed of herself afterwards, and resolved in the future not to let her imagination take such ridiculous flights. But she could not help noticing, that, polite as he was to her friends, he was still more so to her. There was a difference in the very way he spoke to her; not that he was ever sentimental or tender; Marion would have had too much good sense to allow anything of the kind, even if he had been inclined to be so foolish, which I am happy to say he was not. But she remembered, that throughout their whole journey she had never expressed a wish to go to any particular place, or see any lovely view which the rest of the party considered rather unattainable, but what, somehow or other, Mr. Thornton cleared away all difficulties, and almost before she was aware of it the wish was gratified. She would have been something more than human, if such very chivalrous attentions had not been agreeable to her.

CHAPTER XXI.

RACHEL'S UNCLE RETURNS.

"There, Rachel, I flatter myself that hangs just about right," said Marion, walking across the room to display the train of her new black silk.

"And so it does," replied Rachel, turning away from the glass where she had been putting on her fall hat; "the slope is quite perfect. Why, you look positively queenly!"

"Don't I though?" laughed Marion, only glancing now and then with an air of great satisfaction at the folds of her train as it swept gracefully beside her chair. "I've held out all summer, and would not put on a long dress until I could have a train, and now I've got one."

"I should certainly say you had," said her mother, entering at that moment with her bonnet and shawl on. "Come Rachel, are you ready? The carriage is at the door. I suppose Marion will spend her time, while we are out, walking up and down the room, learning how to manage her train, so as not to stumble over it the first time she goes downstairs."

"You horrible mamma!" laughed Marion; "as if I could be so clumsy! Besides, you know I am staying home on purpose to finish papa's slippers in time for his birthday."

"Oh, yes, we know," said Rachel, "I don't suppose there's any danger of your having a caller while we are out."

"No, I don't suppose there is," retorted Marion, knowing well the meaning of Rachel's mischievous glance, "unless your uncle should happen to come; if he does, I'll entertain him until you get back."

"Oh, there's no danger of his interrupting the tête-à-tête," laughed Rachel, as she ran downstairs; "your father said the steamer would not be in until to-morrow morning."

"O mamma," called out Marion, "won't you please stop on your way back, and get me a cherry ribbon? I haven't a bright bow to my name, and papa will have a fit to see me all in black."

"I'll get you one," replied Mrs. Berkley, as she was closing the front door; "but there's one in my upper drawer you can wear until I get back."

"It's not worth while," said Marion to herself, as she fastened her sleeve-buttons; "I'll just put in this jet pin, for I know there won't be any one here, and I haven't got time to prink."

She seated herself at her work, and sewed away very industriously, only glancing now and then at the folds of her alpaca, as they swept out so gracefully beside her chair, looking "almost like a black silk." Her mother and Rachel had not been gone very long, when Bridget, the cook, came up, and said there was a gentleman downstairs.

"Who is it, Biddy? didn't he send his name?"

"Indade an' he didn't, miss. Ellen is out, and Sarey's just afther changin' her dress, an' it's meself as had to go to the door, an' I always gits so flustered that I laves me wits in the kitchen."

"I should think you did," replied Marion, as she brushed the bits of worsted off her dress. "Do you think it's Mr. Thornton?"

"Misther Thorington! An' haven't I sane the likes o' him too many times not to know him? Indade an' it aint, miss; it's a much oulder man than him."

"Oh, I know who it is!" exclaimed Marion. "I'll go right down;" and she ran downstairs, not stopping to give a glance at the glass as she certainly would have done if it had been Mr. Thornton, and thinking to herself, "It must be Rachel's uncle. I am so glad the old gentleman has got here at last; I do hope he will be like her father."

She entered the parlor hastily, but before she had a chance to speak, or even see who was there, she found herself encircled by a pair of strong arms; a bearded face bent over her, kissing her repeatedly, and a manly voice exclaimed: "My darling! have I got you at last?"

Marion disengaged herself as quickly as possible, and sprang back, looking at the stranger with an expression in which astonishment and indignation were equally blended.

He was a very handsome man, apparently about thirty-five; tall, and of a commanding figure. His features were fine, that is, his nose and eyes; the latter, when one could get a good look under the long black lashes which shaded them, showed themselves to be clear, blue-gray; but the lower part of his face was concealed by a soft, wavy beard and mustache of rich, chestnut-brown. There was an air of dignity about him which did not seem to be assumed for the occasion, and altogether he was the last man to suspect as an impostor, although such Marion had mentally styled him, deciding at the first glance that he could not be Rachel's uncle. Before she could collect her bewildered ideas sufficiently to speak, he again stretched out his arms as if to embrace her, saying in a reproachful tone:—

"What! your astonishment at seeing me is greater than your joy? I assure you, my dear, that is not the case with me."

"Can you wonder at my astonishment, sir?" exclaimed Marion, retreating as he came near her, and motioning him back with a haughty gesture; "explain your singular conduct."

"Have not I explained it sufficiently?" he asked. "You are a little unreasonable, I think, although that queenly manner sets well upon you, I must confess."

"Sir!" exclaimed Marion, with flashing eyes, "if you do not instantly leave this house, I will find means to compel you to do so."

"Come, come, my darling," he answered, stepping forward and taking possession of her hand, "your joke has gone quite far enough. I acknowledge you're as perfect a little actress as I ever saw; but I want something more than acting;" and he attempted to kiss her.

But Marion sprang from him, throwing her head up, and looking at him with a face expressive of the utmost scorn, as she exclaimed, "Sir, you have the appearance of a gentleman, and for such I first took you, but I find I was mistaken; if you do not instantly leave the house I will call a policeman to put you out!" and Marion pointed to the door with a gesture that would have done honor to a queen, as she stood waiting to see him obey her command.

But the stranger only looked at her a moment in silence, then said in an injured, reproachful tone, "I expected to find you changed; a young lady in fact; but that you should have chosen our first meeting for an exhibition of what seems to be your favorite accomplishment is more than I expected. I entreat you to drop this haughty indifference, which I sincerely hope is assumed for this occasion only, and be once more the little Rachel I left ten years ago."

At the mention of the word Rachel, Marion's arm dropped to her side; her haughty bearing gave place to an air of confusion, and she exclaimed:—

"Rachel! Can it be that you thought I was Rachel Drayton?"

For the first time it occurred to the stranger that he too might be laboring under a mistake, and he bowed slightly, as he said:—

"I certainly took you for my niece, Rachel Drayton; but I see by your face I am wrong. I most sincerely beg your pardon for what must have seemed an act of unparalleled impudence."

Marion bowed, flushing crimson at the recollection of the very affectionate greeting he had given her; but she said in a charmingly frank way:—

"No apology is necessary, sir; it was a mistake all round,—you took me for Rachel, and I took you for an impostor, which certainly was not so complimentary; but now I know you must be Dr. Robert Drayton."

Dr. Drayton smiled, as he said, "And you are Miss Marion Berkley, I presume?"

"Yes," replied Marion, offering him a chair, and seating herself at the same time. "Rachel is staying with me; she has gone out riding with mamma. She did not expect you until to-morrow morning; but when the servant told me a gentleman was down here, I thought it must be you, but was sure I was mistaken when I saw you."

"And why, may I ask?" inquired Dr. Drayton.

"Oh!" laughed Marion, a trifle confused, "because I thought you were quite an old gentleman; at least old enough to be my father."

"And so I am, almost," replied Dr. Drayton, smiling; "but tell me, does Rachel want to see me?"

"Indeed she does; she has talked about you every day this summer, and has hardly been able to wait for you to get here. But how did you mistake me for her? We are not in the least alike."

"You must remember it is ten years since I saw her; then she was a little, dark-eyed thing with golden hair, something like yours; your black dress, too, misled me."

"Golden hair!" exclaimed Marion, wishing she had put on her mother's bright bow, thus saving herself all her embarrassment,—"golden hair, I can't imagine such a thing; she has jet-black now."

"I dare say I don't remember it very correctly; has she grown much?"

"She is very tall; much taller than I am."

"I thought you were very tall just now when you ordered me out of the house," said Dr. Drayton, with an amused smile.

"I beg you will never allude to the subject again," said Marion, raising her head involuntarily, with a slightly haughty gesture, as she invariably did when she was annoyed, but did not wish to appear so; "it was a mistake for which I sincerely beg your pardon."

"As you said to me," replied Dr. Drayton, "no apology is needed. I promise never to allude to the subject again without your permission."

"Which I certainly shall never grant," laughed Marion, ashamed of her unnecessary hauteur. "Now I shall be able to apply to you my one great test of the worth of humanity, that is, try your powers of keeping a secret."

"I am willing to stand the test," laughed Dr. Drayton, "and feel sure that before morning I shall have no secret to keep, for by that time you will have told Rachel all about it."

"I shall do no such thing," replied Marion, warmly; "but there is the carriage. Excuse me, Dr. Drayton, and I will tell Rachel you are here."

The meeting between Dr. Drayton and Rachel was far different from his interview with Marion. Rachel had longed for his coming, for although she could not remember him very distinctly, she could not feel him to be a stranger to her; her father was very fond of his younger brother, and had always been in the habit of talking with his daughter a great deal about her Uncle Robert, until he had become almost a hero in her eyes. She had been in the habit of associating him in her mind with her father, so that she had quite forgotten he was many years his junior, and was not prepared to find so young a man; in fact, only thirty-two, although his beard gave him the appearance of being a few years older. There was a certain sense of strength and power about him, which led her to look upon him with the same feelings of deference and respect with which she would look upon an older man, while at the same time, the fact of his being younger put her upon an easier, more familiar footing with him; in short, Rachel was delighted with him, and felt she would receive from him all the affection and watchful care of a father, combined with the more demonstrative attentions of an elder brother.

CHAPTER XXII.

DR. DRAYTON'S HOUSE-KEEPER.

"Mrs. Berkley, I'm in a dilemma," said Dr. Drayton, as he entered the library one morning where that lady was sitting, and took a chair near her.

"Can I help you out of it?"

"If you can't, I don't know of any one else to go to," said Dr. Drayton, who had become a daily visitor at the Berkleys'. "I have bought a house, and now I want a house-keeper. Even if I felt inclined to brave the opinion of Mrs. Grundy, and settle down with Rachel at the head of my establishment, I would not do it; she is too young to have so much care on her shoulders; I want the rest of her life to be as bright and happy as it is possible for me to make it. My idea is to get some cultivated, refined, middle-aged lady to come and take the care of the house-keeping, and be a person who would make it pleasant for Rachel, and any young friends she might wish to have with her. But how can I get such a person? I answered two advertisements last week, and had interviews with the females themselves at the Tremont House. One of them was old and thin, and had a sharp voice that sent a chill through me every time she spoke,—would be about as cheerful a member of society as an animated skeleton; the other fair, fat, and forty, but an incessant talker, and looked as if she had not brushed her hair for a week. Now, Mrs. Berkley, what shall I do? Here I am, a poor, forlorn bachelor, who throws himself on your hands. You must help me somehow or other."

"Well, the best thing I can advise," replied Mrs. Berkley, with an amused smile, "is for you to cease to be a bachelor."

Dr. Drayton shrugged his shoulders. "Impossible, madame!"

"And why, I should like to know? You certainly are not bad-looking; your name is quite surrounded by a fast-increasing halo of fame,—something which is always attractive to the young ladies, you know,—and, what would be above all to many, you have money."

"Exactly," replied Dr. Drayton, with considerable energy. "When I first settled down in Berlin, through some very influential friends the very first society of the place was open to me, and I found myself the recipient of marked attention from the heads of several families. I was delighted with them. Such cordiality! such hospitality! I really felt proud of myself for calling it forth, for then I was young, and the little halo which you speak of had not shed its benign influence over me; of course it was to my personal attractions, and nothing else, I owed my popularity. I happened to speak to a young American friend of mine, of the attentions I was constantly receiving,—invitations to this, that, and the other house, and wondered why it was he was not equally fortunate. 'My dear fellow,' said he, 'don't you know I haven't got any money?' His answer was certainly a damper to my feelings; but it was a good thing for me. I gave less time to balls and parties, and more to my profession; gradually, as I showed myself less and less in society, I received fewer invitations, and those from gentlemen all having marriageable daughters. No, Mrs. Berkley, don't ask me to get married; at least not at present. I don't know anything about American girls; but I suppose they are all very much the same as other young ladies, and not until I can find one who will love me for myself, and not my money, will there ever be a Mrs. Drayton at the head of my table."

"That is certainly a good resolution," replied Mrs. Berkley, laughing; "but I am afraid I could find you a wife much easier than a house-keeper, such as you want. Of course you will want to put your house in order, and furnish it; meanwhile we are delighted to keep Rachel with us."

"You are very kind, very kind indeed, and I certainly shall benefit myself by your offer, for I don't like the idea of taking her to a hotel. But you haven't asked me where my house is."

"Sure enough," replied Mrs. Berkley; "but my mind has been too full of your house-keeper to think of your house. Where is it?"

"That house on the corner of Beacon Street and the street just below here, I can't recall the

name."

"The free-stone house we noticed for sale the other day?" inquired Mrs. Berkley.

"Yes, that is the one. It is larger than I really need; but the arrangement of the ground-floor suits me admirably, for I must have an office."

"Then you intend to practise?"

"Certainly, I should be ashamed of myself if I gave up my profession; but I do not intend to do anything out of office-hours, so it will not confine me at all. I intend to take the entire charge of Rachel's property until she is of age; meanwhile I want to give her a clear idea of the value of money, so that she may be able to make a good use of her immense fortune."

"I will look about me," said Mrs. Berkley, "and if I hear of any lady that I think will suit you in every way, I will let you know; but here come the girls; they have been out to see Florence Stevenson."

Rachel was delighted with the house her uncle had bought, for it was only a few moments' walk from Mr. Berkley's, and she would be able to be with Marion every day. The two girls commenced making plans for the winter, Rachel deciding that the first thing she would do, when they got into their new house, would be to have Florence in for a long visit.

A few days after the conversation between Mrs. Berkley and Dr. Drayton, Mr. Berkley received a letter from a distant cousin of his, a lonely widow, who having lost her property, had written to him to see if he could get her a situation as house-keeper in some refined family. Upon showing this letter to his wife, she at once exclaimed that the lady was the very person for Dr. Drayton.

The necessary arrangements were soon made; the house was put in perfect order, and elegantly furnished; and Dr. Drayton took his niece to as delightful a home as one could wish to have, for Mrs. Marston proved to be all that he desired. Cultivated and agreeable, she soon won his heartfelt esteem, and Rachel loved her from their very first meeting.

After the new household had got fairly settled, Dr. Drayton proposed to Rachel that she should continue her German and French under his direction. He spoke both languages as fluently as he did English, and suggested that the lessons should consist entirely of conversation, and reading aloud from some of the best French and German authors. Rachel was very much pleased at his proposition, and asked if Marion might not join with them.

"Yes, if she likes," replied Dr. Drayton, in answer to her request; "but I'm afraid her head will be too full of balls and parties, for her to ever keep up a regular course of studies."

"Why, Uncle Robert!" indignantly cried Rachel; "you don't know Marion at all, or you would not say that!"

"I don't pretend to," quietly replied the doctor; "but I suppose she is very much like all other young ladies."

"Indeed she is not," replied Rachel, energetically. "I don't know of a girl that has as much strength of character as Marion."

"Not even excepting Miss Florence?"

"No, not even excepting her. I love Florence dearly; she is a lovely girl, but there is something about Marion which *she* has not got."

"I should say so, decidedly," replied Dr. Drayton, with provoking coolness.

"Why, Uncle Robert, I never dreamed you didn't like Marion!"

"Did I say I did not?" asked her uncle, as he unfolded the newspaper, and glanced down its columns.

"No, you didn't say exactly those words, but you implied it."

"I was not aware of the fact," said the doctor, as he lighted his cigar. "You said there was something about her different from Florence, and I agreed with you. I suppose, with feminine perversity, you would have preferred that I should have disagreed, thus giving you an opportunity to make an argument in favor of your side of the question; next time I'll remember."

"Uncle Robert, you are perfectly provoking!" exclaimed Rachel, jumping up, and taking the paper away from him; "there!—you shan't have it until you've said something in Marion's favor."

"Very well," replied her uncle, slightly raising his eyebrows; "you enumerate the catalogue of her virtues, and I'll subscribe to all I can."

"In the first place, she's very handsome," commenced Rachel.

"Well, no, not exactly what I call handsome," said the doctor in a deliberating tone; "she's not large enough for that."

"Beautiful then; that's better still."

"Well, yes,—I suppose you think so."

"But it isn't to be what I think," impatiently replied Rachel. "You certainly *must* acknowledge she has beautiful eyes; true as steel; the kind of eyes you could trust!"

"I'll examine them the next time I see her," replied Dr. Drayton, as he laid back in his chair, and puffed a cloud of smoke into the air. "Excellence No. 3, if you please, Rachel."

"She's very intelligent, and an excellent scholar," replied Rachel, tapping the floor with her foot, and trying not to get provoked.

"As yet I have never had any conversation with her of any deeper import than the shade of your window-curtains; but I've no doubt she's at home with any subject, and is a perfect walking 'Encyclopædia Americana.'"

"Uncle Robert, you are incorrigible! you are determined *not* to see any good in her."

"Not at all, my dear; the difficulty is, that after a six weeks' acquaintance, you expect me to be as enthusiastic over her as you are after a lengthy *school-girl* intimacy."

"I know what you mean to insinuate by a 'school-girl intimacy,' and I agree with you that as a general thing they don't amount to anything; but just let me tell you what Marion did for me, and then see if you'll wonder that I'm '*enthusiastic*' over her."

"Go on; I am prepared for anything. I suppose she rescued you from a 'watery grave' in true novel fashion."

"She did more than that; she risked finding one herself. She walked all alone, at midnight, from our school to the doctor's house, which is at least a mile and a half, and crossed the river on a bridge *that the flooring was taken off, and nothing for her to walk on but the beam where the railing was!*"

"A heroine, as I live!" cried the doctor, holding up both hands; "something of which I've always had an innate horror."

"Uncle Robert," said Rachel, really hurt, "I thought after that you'd at least show some regard for her, if only for my sake."

"My dear girl," he replied, drawing her towards him, "I certainly will acknowledge that it was very brave in her; now give me my newspaper."

"You don't deserve it, but you shall have it, if you will let Marion join our lessons."

"I should be delighted to have her; and Miss Florence too."

"Florence won't be able to give her time to it, I know. She can't come to make me a visit until spring, for she was away all summer, and her father can't spare her yet."

"Very well; you arrange everything with Mrs. Berkley; only the time must not interfere with office-hours; before or after that I am at your service."

"You're the dearest uncle in the world!" exclaimed Rachel, kissing him.

"Even if I don't worship your heroine."

"Oh, don't call her a *heroine*, for mercy's sake! and above all don't ever let her know that I told you."

"My lips shall be sealed on the subject. Now run off, and let me read my paper in peace."

Marion was very much pleased with the plan for the French and German lessons, and it was arranged that they should devote two hours, twice a week, to each language, meeting alternately at Marion's and Rachel's houses. Marion was a very good French scholar, and could manage to make herself understood in German; but she was really afraid of Dr. Drayton, and never did herself justice at the lessons. He was very patient and kind, but nevertheless very critical, and corrected the pronunciation of their German so many times, that Marion at last declared she never would say another word, for she knew she never could suit him; but she found him even more determined than M. Béranger, and soon learned, that if the lessons went on at all, his directions must be strictly attended to; and after a while the girls never thought of speaking English, during their French and German hours. Mr. Berkley, who happened to look in upon them one day when they were carrying on quite an excited argument, declared they were all jabbering just to hear themselves talk, for he knew perfectly well they couldn't any one of them understand a word the others were saying.

The intimacy between the two families increased daily, and the Berkleys welcomed Dr. Drayton most cordially to their family circle, finding him in every way a most delightful companion. Intelligent, cultivated, and refined, and having travelled over almost every country in Europe, he had the rare gift of describing everything he had seen in such a manner as to bring it vividly before the minds of his hearers, without incessantly introducing the personal pronoun, which, as a general thing, finds its way so often into a traveller's account of his journeyings.

He became a general favorite with the family. Charley always ran to meet him, and commenced a

raid upon his pockets, sure of finding something stowed away there for his especial benefit; the baby crowed with delight whenever he came near him; and Fred bestowed upon him, after their first meeting, the highest compliment he could pay a man,—“he was a regular brick!” But Marion declared “she thought they made altogether too much fuss over him, and she did not intend to join with the family in setting him up as a perfect hero; she must say she thought he was rather conceited, for he never paid her any attention, and when young people were there, and they were all having a nice time in the parlor, he always sat off with papa and mamma, in the library, as if he thought himself above such childish follies.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DÉBUT INTO SOCIETY.

“And so it is to be a regular ‘come-out party,’” said Dr. Drayton one evening as he sat smoking with Mr. Berkley in the library, the rest of the family being in the parlor.

“Yes, a regular ‘come-out party,’” repeated Mr. Berkley; “but I don’t intend to dash out, and make a great spread; hire Papanti’s hall, etc. I don’t like that sort of thing. I shall invite enough to fill the house, and yet not have it a perfect jam; have half-a-dozen pieces of music, and a good supper; that’s my idea of a party.”

“And a very correct idea, I should say,” said the doctor.

“Mrs. Berkley rather objected to giving it at all this winter. Marion is still so young, she wanted me to wait another year; but you see, doctor, I’m pretty proud of my only daughter, and I want her to go about in society, before I get too old to go with her.”

“How old is Miss Marion?” asked Dr. Drayton.

“Eighteen last May.”

“Older than Rachel; I thought her younger.”

“She looks younger, I think myself, and sometimes seems younger still; but there’s good stuff there. She’s like her mother, and if I do say it, she’ll make a noble woman.”

“If she proves to be like her mother, she certainly will,” replied Dr. Drayton. “Mrs. Berkley is just my idea of what a wife and mother ought to be.”

“That remark proves you a man of sense and discernment,” said Mr. Berkley, highly gratified, both by Dr. Drayton’s words, and the warmth of his tone. “But about this party; of course you will come, and dance the ‘German.’”

“I certainly agree to come. It will be my first real entrance into Boston society; but as for dancing, that’s quite another thing; I gave that up years ago.”

“Why, man alive!” exclaimed Mr. Berkley; “any one would think, to hear you talk sometimes, you were a perfect Methuselah! Here, Marion!” he cried, calling her in from the other room, “I want you to give Dr. Drayton private lessons in dancing, so that he will be able to get through the ‘German’ at your party.”

“I am much obliged to Miss Marion,” said Dr. Drayton, quietly; “but it is too late for me to begin now; I must decline her services.”

“Perhaps it would be as well if you waited until I offered them,” replied Marion, haughtily, piqued at the coolness of his manner. “I certainly had no intentions of becoming a dancing-mistress for you or any one else!”

The doctor made no reply, but Mr. Berkley laughed aloud, as he exclaimed: “Look here, Marion, that Thornton has spoiled you! You are so used to having him consider it an honor to be allowed to pick up your handkerchief, that you begin to think that every one else must do the same.”

“Papa, how unkind!” said Marion, flushing to the roots of her hair; “I don’t know as Mr. Thornton ever picked up my handkerchief in his life, and he wouldn’t be so foolish as to consider it an honor if he had.”

“No?” replied her father, in the most provoking way; “but there,—you shan’t be teased any more! Just turn round, and smile sweetly on the doctor, and tell him you don’t think he’s too old to come to your party, and you’ll let him, if he’ll promise to be a good boy.”

“I don’t care whether he comes or not,” cried Marion, struggling to get away from her father.

“If that is the case,” said Dr. Drayton, “I shall certainly come, simply for my own amusement. I didn’t know but my presence might be particularly disagreeable to you; but as you seem so thoroughly indifferent, I shall come, and look on with the other old folks.”

Marion bit her lips, and said nothing; but as her father still held her hand, so that she could not get away, she seated herself on the arm of his chair with her face turned towards the fire.

"Doctor," said Mr. Berkley, "why don't you shave off that beard? It makes you look five years older than you are."

"That is my mask," replied the doctor, stroking his beard with his right hand; "I could not part with it."

"What, in the name of sense, do you want of a mask?"

"Unluckily for me, my mouth is the telltale feature of my face. I found, when I first became a surgeon, that my patients could tell by its expression whether they were to live or die; so I covered it up with this beard. After I had been at the hospital several years, and had seen sights that the very telling of them would make you shudder; when I performed operation after operation without flinching, or even having the slightest feeling of repugnance, I thought I must have got my mouth under perfect control, and so ventured to trim my mustache and shave my beard. That very morning I had to attend a poor fellow who had had his leg amputated the day before; during the examination I never looked at him, for I felt his eyes were fixed on my face. Suddenly he exclaimed: 'It's no use, doctor; you can keep your eyes down, but you can't hide your mouth,—that says death.' It was the truth; mortification had set in, and he died the next morning. After that I let my beard grow, and so long as I remain a surgeon, which I shall so long as my hand is steady enough to guide the knife, it will stay as it is."

"Well, I think you are right," said Mr. Berkley; "but by and by, when you get a wife, perhaps she will think differently, and the beard, and the profession too, may have to go. The last, I hear, pays you nothing."

"If ever I get a wife," replied Dr. Drayton, "she will probably think as I do,—that, as I have been blessed with more than an ample fortune, I should be a heartless wretch, if I did not devote my skill to the relief of the suffering poor."

Marion, who had listened silently to the above conversation, finding her father had released his hold of her hand, slipped quietly away.

The weeks flew past, and the eventful day, when Marion was to make her *début* into fashionable society, at last arrived.

Rachel, of course, would not go to the party, as she was still in deep mourning; but Florence was to stay all night with Marion, and Rachel went round early with her uncle, that she might see her two friends in the full splendor of their first ball-dresses. She went directly to the drawing-room, where she heard the voices of the girls, leaving her uncle to find his way to the dressing-room.

"Hands off these two pieces of dry-goods!" cried Fred, who was capering round his sister and Florence, in a perfect state of delight, and all the glories of his first dress-coat, when Rachel entered the room. "You may admire as much as you please; but you can't touch 'em with a ten-foot pole."

"Get out of the way, Fred," said Marion, putting him aside as she went forward to meet Rachel; "she shall touch me as much as she pleases. How do you like it, Rachel? Is it just the thing?"

"I should say it certainly was!" exclaimed Rachel, enthusiastically. "I never saw anything so lovely in my life; and you two look so pretty together!"

"You see our dresses are made just alike," said Florence, buttoning her gloves; "only my flowers are pink, and hers white."

The two girls certainly did look lovely. Their dresses were of white tarlatan, puffed and ruffled sufficiently to be quite *à la mode*, but still so light and delicate as to give them a floating, airy appearance, and not make them look like exaggerated fashion-plates. Marion's was caught, here and there, with white daisies and delicate grasses, a wreath of the same in her hair; while Florence's was trimmed with pink roses and buds.

"May I be allowed to come in at this early hour?" inquired Dr. Drayton, as he appeared on the threshold.

"Yes, indeed," laughed Marion, advancing to meet him, and stopping in the centre of the room, to drop him a profound courtesy; "you are my first arrival."

"And as such claim your acceptance of this bouquet, which I hope you will honor me by carrying during the evening."

Marion looked up very much surprised, as he held towards her an exquisite bouquet. He was the last man from whom she would have expected such an attention.

"I am very sorry, Dr. Drayton, but you see Fred has one in his hand which I promised a week ago I would carry to-night; but I am just as much obliged, and will set it on the stand close to where I sit in the 'German.'"

"No, indeed," replied the doctor, without the slightest appearance of annoyance; "my poor bouquet shall not be so set aside. Mrs. Berkley, will you honor me?"

"I say, Marion," exclaimed Fred, as Marion took her bouquet from his hand, "what a pity you promised Thornton you'd carry his! The doctor's is twice as handsome!"

"So it's Mr. Thornton who has got ahead of me?" said the doctor. "Miss Florence, I hope I am not to be equally unfortunate with you;" and he presented her with a beautiful bouquet, which he had until that moment held behind him.

"Oh, thank you!" cried Florence, perfectly delighted; "you know it's not my *début*, and no one else has thought of honoring me; it was very kind of you. See, Marion, isn't it lovely?"

"Yes, very," replied Marion, as she bent over it, inwardly provoked with herself for being annoyed because the doctor had not only handed over her bouquet to her mother with such perfect nonchalance, but had also brought one for Florence.

But guests were soon seen passing through the hall on their way to the dressing-rooms, and Rachel was obliged to hurry off; soon the rooms began to fill, and before long the wonderful "German" was at its height.

The doctor felt himself a stranger in a strange land; he had been introduced to, and conversed with, several young ladies, but now all conversation was broken up by the "German," and he stood leaning against the door-way, and watched the dance as it proceeded. He noticed several men, much older than himself, dancing with fair young girls; and he wondered within himself if they were really enjoying themselves, and why it was that he stood like one shut out from all the pleasures of youth, young in years but old in feelings; in fact, he was getting a trifle misanthropical, when Marion floated slowly past him, waltzing with Arthur Thornton. As they passed, so near that her draperies touched him, he heard Mr. Thornton say, in a low tone full of meaning, "Marion you are enough to make a man mad, to-night! You are almost too lovely!"

"So," thought the doctor, as he turned away, "it is all settled. Well, I supposed as much."

He did not see Marion as she abruptly stopped dancing, and looked at poor, infatuated Arthur with a frigid glance, which made his heart leap to his throat, as she said, "Mr. Thornton, you forget yourself; will you lead me to my seat?"

Poor Arthur! it was his first rash act; he had loved Marion so well, and tried so hard to conceal it until he was sure of her feelings; but to-night as he said, she was almost too lovely, and before he had thought of the consequences he had called her by name and told her so. It was his first act of tenderness and his last, for now he knew as well that to her he could never be anything more than a friend, as if she had refused him point-blank. Poor fellow! it was a hard blow, but he did not stagger under it; he danced the "German" with as much apparent gayety, and hid his grief under as bright a smile as ever graced a ball-room. But though he flattered himself that no one knew the pain he suffered, there was one, who, although she neither heard his remark, nor Marion's answer, witnessed the little scene between them, saw the frigid look in Marion's eyes, and the light die out of his, and her heart ached for the poor fellow, as only the heart of a young girl can ache, over the sorrows of a man whose happiness is dearer to her than her own.

The next morning Rachel was in the dining-room, waiting for her uncle to come to breakfast. She had watered and arranged the plants, and now stood tapping impatiently on the window-pane, and wondering why he was so late; but he soon made his appearance, coming in with Mrs. Marston.

"O Uncle Robert!" she exclaimed, "I began to think you were never coming; don't you know I'm dying to hear about the party?"

"My dear, if I had known you were in such a terrible state of mind and body," replied her uncle, as he seated himself at the table, "I would have come down at six; but if you will take the trouble to look at the clock, you will see it is you who are early, not I who am late."

"Well, never mind that," impatiently replied Rachel; "how did Marion look?"

"Didn't you see for yourself?"

"Oh! that was before any one had got there, and she was not at all excited; she's always lovelier then, she has such a beautiful color, and it makes her eyes handsomer than ever."

"I don't think it's necessary for me to say anything, do you, Mrs. Marston?" said the doctor, as he calmly stirred his coffee; "just imagine her as you saw her, only a little excited, and you'll know exactly how she looked."

"Did she have much attention?"

"You could hardly expect anything else, as the party was at her house."

"Oh! of course people would be polite; but wasn't there anybody particularly attentive? Didn't she get 'taken out' a great deal?"

"Taken out?" repeated the doctor, with a puzzled expression. "Mrs. Marston, can you enlighten me?"

"Oh, yes!" laughed Mrs. Marston; "that is only one of the mysterious phrases of the 'German,' which being interpreted means, did a great many gentlemen ask her to dance?"

"Oh, thank you," replied the doctor. "Yes, Rachel, she got 'taken out' a great deal; in fact she seemed to be out all the time."

"There! *that's* what I wanted to know," said Rachel, in a tone of satisfaction; "now tell me about Florence."

"I'll try to answer you in the most approved style. She looked very charming indeed; seemed to have plenty of admirers, for I noticed that Miss Marion managed to have her share her honors, and made her the guest of the evening; she was 'taken out' a great deal, and above all, continued to carry my bouquet the whole evening without dropping it."

"I'm so glad," cried Rachel, "but wasn't it a shame that Arthur Thornton should have sent his bouquet to Marion first?"

"A shame? Why, no indeed," answered her uncle, with the utmost composure; "for if he had not, she would have been obliged to carry mine, and I know she preferred Mr. Thornton's."

"I don't believe it; yours was a great deal handsomer."

"Oh! that's not the point! Of course you must see that Mr. Thornton is to be *the* man."

"Uncle Robert, how absurd! I don't believe Marion would ever have him in the world!"

"And why not, I should like to know? He is handsome, intelligent,—in fact, a very good fellow every way, and has plenty of money."

"But Marion never will marry for money!" cried Rachel.

"I don't say she will; but what is your objection to Mr. Thornton?"

"I haven't any at all; I like him very much, but he would never do for Marion. She wants a much stronger man than he."

"Well, perhaps he will develop his muscle," replied Dr. Drayton, coolly.

"Uncle Robert! you know I don't mean that kind of strength!—mental strength; some one in every way superior to herself; in fact, some one that she could feel was her master."

"Master! I can't imagine Miss Marion yielding her own sweet will to any one."

"Rachel is right," said Mrs. Marston; "when Marion marries she will choose a man much older than herself."

"Well, time will show," said Dr. Drayton; "but Rachel, if Marion Berkley is not engaged to Mr. Thornton at the end of six months, I'll give you the handsomest diamond ring I can buy at Bigelow's."

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

The days and weeks flew by like hours, and Marion found herself surrounded by a crowd of admirers, and one of the acknowledged belles of the season. Balls, parties, receptions, matinées, and formal calls took up all her time, and what with lying abed in the morning to make up for her late hours, the days were fairly turned into night, and night into day. Mrs. Berkley remonstrated as she saw her daughter drifting farther and farther out on the sea of fashionable society, but it was now too late; she could not refuse all the invitations that were showered upon her, and those that she would have been glad to decline, her father would not allow her to, for fear of giving offence. She had at first made a struggle to keep up her French and German, but at last gave it up as useless, for if she had no engagement for those hours, she was too tired and worn out by her dissipation to attend to them properly.

Rachel felt extremely sorry to be obliged to tell her uncle that his prediction had proved true; that Marion's time was too much occupied with balls and parties for her to attend the lessons; but she added a saving clause, to the effect that when Lent put an end to the extreme gayeties of the season, Marion would be glad to join them.

"If she wishes to join us then, well and good," said Dr. Drayton; "but Rachel, I want you to fully understand, that you must never ask her to do so; she must come back to us as she left us, of her own free will."

Marion felt far from satisfied with the life she was leading. At first it was very delightful to find herself so much admired; to know that the honor of her hand for the "German" was sought days in advance by the men who were considered the bright, particular stars of the fashionable world; to have hardly a day go by that did not bring her an exquisite bouquet, or basket of flowers; never go to the theatre or opera that several young exquisites did not come to her seat for a chat

between the acts! Oh, it was very delightful indeed; and for a while she thought she had never been so happy in her life. But only for a while; she grew tired at last of hearing the same things said to her night after night, over and over again; she knew she was wasting her life; the precious moments and hours that would never come again. Her health, too, began to give way under this constant dissipation. She had frequent dull headaches, and could not keep herself from being irritated at trifles that she would never have noticed before. Even her father began to complain that "she was going out almost too much; he never had a quiet evening at home, and as for her music he had not heard her touch the piano for weeks."

Just about this time she received a letter from Mme. Béranger. She wrote in a bright, happy strain, giving an account of what was going on at the school, alluding with a little conjugal pride to the beneficial influence which M. Béranger exerted over the scholars, and the respect which he inspired, not only from them, but from Miss Stiefbach also.

She concluded by saying:—

"And now, my dear Marion, I am going to speak of yourself, a subject about which I know very well you do not care to have much said; but you will bear it patiently I feel sure from your old teacher, who says with truth, that, dear as all her scholars have been to her, none ever came so near, so completely won her love, as you have done.

"I wanted to tell you, before the close of school last autumn, how much I rejoiced in the victories which I saw you were daily gaining over yourself; but the opportunity never seemed to arrive when I could do so without appearing to force myself upon you.

"It would make you happy, I know, if you could hear yourself spoken of as I am almost daily in the habit of hearing your name mentioned by one or more of the scholars, in the kindest, most affectionate terms.

"It is a good thing when a girl leaves school carrying with her the love and admiration of her school-mates, and leaving behind her nothing but regret that she is no longer there to join in their studies, or lead them in their fun and frolic.

"Now you have done with school-days, and it is very probable that many of your school-mates you may never meet again; you will form new friends wherever you go, and to a certain extent owe some duties to society; but I cannot imagine you as among the class of young ladies, who, the moment the doors of the school-room close behind them, consider their education finished, and so straightway give up all sensible occupations, and fritter away their time in fashionable dissipation. I have seen too much of you, understand your nature too well, to believe you capable of such folly; but temptations of various kinds will come to you in the future, as they have come in the past, and the same sense of right, the same determination to conquer yourself, which helped you to overcome the faults of your girlhood, will strengthen and sustain you in your endeavors to attain a pure, noble womanhood.

"But I fear you will think I am writing you a sermon, and that I have forgotten that you have passed from under my authority, but 'the spirit moved me,' and so I have spoken; if I have said more than I ought, forgive me, and take it kindly from your old Miss Christine.

"My sister wished to be kindly remembered to you, and my husband says: *Faites mes amitiés à Mlle. Berkley.* Good-by, my dear,

"From your true friend,

"CHRISTINE BÉRANGER."

Marion's conscience smote her as she read the letter, and thought how far short of all Mme. Béranger had hoped she would be, of all she had determined for herself, was the life she was now leading. Day by day she became more and more discontented with herself, as she saw how completely she had given her time to what her teacher had rightly called, "fashionable dissipation."

Lent at last arrived, and Marion, although not an Episcopalian, welcomed it with delight, for now there would be few if any, large parties, and she would have a chance to rest. She was determined to commence a course of history; practise at least two hours a day, and, if Rachel proposed it, commence again her French and German, in which her friend had made such astonishing progress as to make Marion thoroughly ashamed of herself. But, much to Marion's surprise, Rachel did not propose it, neither did Dr. Drayton, before whom she had mentioned several times how sorry she was to find herself so far behind Rachel. She thought it very strange that the doctor did not again offer to teach her with his niece, and resolved, if she could ever manage to humble herself sufficiently to ask a favor of him, she would tell him herself she wanted to rejoin the class.

An opportunity offered itself sooner than she had expected. The doctor had a fine baritone voice, and was extremely fond of music. Rachel, as a general thing, was able to play his accompaniments for him, but now and then he bought a new song too difficult for her to manage, and he often brought them, at Mr. Berkley's suggestion, for Marion to play for him. One evening he made his appearance with a piece of music in his hand, and said, as he shook hands with her:

—
"Miss Marion, I have a song here that is most too much for Rachel: will you do me the favor of playing the accompaniment?"

"Yes," replied Marion, as she took the music, and glanced over it; "on one condition."

"And that is?" said the doctor.

"That you will let me come back to the French and German readings."

"Are you quite sure you want to come?" asked the doctor, looking down upon her, and speaking very much as he would have done to a naughty child.

"Very sure," replied Marion, almost provoked with herself for not being able to say the contrary.

"Very well then, come," said the doctor, in a lower tone, as he arranged the music for her. "You must want to very much, if you would be willing to ask it as a favor from me."

Marion bit her lips and said nothing. She had intended to make it appear that she was granting the favor; but the doctor had reversed the order of things. The next day the old studies were commenced, and Marion took hold with a will, determined to conquer all difficulties and put herself by the side of Rachel. She was at first extremely mortified to find how many mistakes she made, and how much she had forgotten; but the doctor was more patient than ever before, and she soon made great improvement.

Of late Marion had seen very little of Mr. Thornton, and now that she was not going about so much, she began to miss his bright, pleasant face, and many little attentions: and as Saturday after Saturday went by, and he did not make his appearance with Fred, as he had formerly been so often in the habit of doing, she asked her brother what had become of him. Fred's answer was, that "Thornton was cramming like blazes; he meant to leave college with flying colors."

At first Marion felt a little chagrined that he could so soon have forgotten her, and had half a mind to write him a charming little note, inviting him over to spend Sunday; but she knew it would only be holding out a prospect of encouragement which she never really meant to give him, and so she refrained.

Summer at last arrived, and the Berkleys and Draytons were making preparations for spending it among the White Mountains. Fred had urged them to stay for "Class-day," as Arthur Thornton graduated this year; but Marion's unusually pale cheeks told too plainly that either the dissipations of the winter, or some other unexplainable cause, had made a deep inroad on her health, and her parents were glad to get her away from the city.

Florence's father had married again, and had taken a cottage at the beach for the summer; so she had declined Rachel's invitation to again make one of their party.

They travelled slowly through the mountains, stopping for days at a time at whatever place seemed to them as particularly pleasant. It was too early for the great rush of fashionable visitors, and they enjoyed themselves the more on that account.

After having spent several weeks in this manner, they settled down for the rest of the summer at a little hotel unknown to fame, and rarely visited except by pedestrians and artists wandering about in search of the most beautiful views.

Marion had by this time entirely regained her strength, and could climb about the mountains, and take as long walks as any of the party; but still she did not seem the same as in former days. Her father and mother did not notice the change, for with them she was always as gay as ever, and they were perfectly happy to see her so well,—slightly tanned with the summer's sun, and a bright color always glowing in her cheeks.

But Rachel wondered what had come over her, for when they were alone she seemed so much more quiet and preoccupied, that her friend could hardly realize it was the same Marion Berkley she had known at school. The doctor, too, silently noticed her altered manner, and had his own opinion as to the cause.

One day towards the close of summer, Marion was sitting on a little piazza, which belonged exclusively to the private parlor used by their party. A book was in her lap, but her hands lay idly on its open pages, as she sat lost in a reverie, from which she was roused by Dr. Drayton as he came round the house, and stood holding a letter over her head, exclaiming, "See what I have for you, Miss Marion! Can you tell the writing from here?"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Marion, in a delighted tone, reaching up her hand to take it; "it's from Florence. Do let me have it."

"Not until you promise me," said the doctor, holding the letter out of her reach, "that you will tell me how you honestly feel about the most important piece of news this letter contains."

"I promise," said Marion, smiling. "It will probably be that her new mamma has given her a lovely picture, and she is the dearest mamma in the world."

"Never mind what it is," said the doctor; "you have promised;" and he leaned against the pillar opposite Marion, apparently engaged in reading a letter which he had held open in his hand

during their conversation, but in reality furtively watching the expression of her face, for he knew what news the letter contained, and wanted to judge of its effect upon her.

She read on, smiling to herself as Florence went into ecstasies over the kindness of her new, darling mamma. Then suddenly an expression of intense surprise passed over her face, which was succeeded by one which it would be difficult to define, as the letter dropped into her lap, and she sat looking straight before her, but evidently seeing nothing, and entirely forgetful of the doctor's presence.

"Poor child!" he thought, as he watched the tears slowly gathering in her eyes; "it has come at last, and she so young! It is cruel in me to watch her; but I *must* know how deeply it affects her."

Suddenly Marion sprang up with the letter in her hand, and was running through the long parlor-window, when the doctor called to her:—

"Miss Marion, have you forgotten your promise?"

"No, indeed!" answered Marion, without looking round. "Stay there; I'll be back in a moment."

Dr. Drayton put his letter in his pocket, and folded his arms across his breast as he leaned against the pillar, like Marion looking straight before him, but seeing nothing. "If she can hide her wounds so bravely, cannot I do the same?" thought he; "it would be too cruel for me to make her tell me herself; I can at least spare her that." He was so lost in thought, that Marion had again stepped on to the piazza, and stood beside him before he was aware of her presence.

"Now, doctor," she said, startling him by the brightness of her tone, "I'm ready to be questioned. There *was* quite an important piece of news in the letter."

"You need not tell me," he said very gently, "I know it already."

"And how did you know it?" asked Marion, in a disappointed tone of voice. "I was to be the first one told, and then *I* was to tell Rachel."

"Your letter was delayed probably, and mine from Fred, written the next day, when every one knew it, came in the same mail."

"But you don't seem a bit glad," said Marion. "*I* am perfectly delighted."

He looked down at her silently for a few moments. Could she be acting? He would put her to the test.

"Miss Marion, I *will* hold you to your promise; you said you would tell me honestly how you felt about this piece of news."

"And so I will," replied Marion, surprised at his serious manner. "Mr. Thornton is as fine a young man as I know, and has always been a good friend of mine. When I tell you that I think him in every way worthy of Florence, you may know that is the highest compliment I can pay him; and I am perfectly delighted they are engaged."

"And this is on your honor?"

"On my honor," answered Marion, looking up at him with her clear, truthful eyes.

"I believe you," he said; "but forgive me if I ask why, feeling so, the tears should have come into your eyes when you read the letter?"

"Dr. Drayton," cried Marion, her face flushing, "it was too bad of you to watch me! It is cruel in you to ask me."

"I know it is cruel," he answered; "but nevertheless I *must* ask you."

"I will tell you," replied Marion, hurriedly, "or you will misunderstand me. Florence and I have been very, very dear friends; we have loved each other all our lives, as I think few girls rarely do love; there has never been a cloud between us that was not soon cleared away; and when I first read that she was engaged to Arthur Thornton, I could not help feeling a little bit of sorrow, in spite of my greater joy, to think that now she would have some one to take my place away from me. But that feeling is all gone now—or will be soon," she added, choking down a sob, that would come in spite of her.

"Marion," he almost whispered, as he bent over her, "are you sure you never loved Arthur Thornton?"

"Very sure," answered Marion, not daring to raise her eyes, and blushing crimson as he for the first time called her by name.

He bent lower still, and was about to lay his hand upon her arm, when Rachel rushed through the parlor-window, exclaiming, "Uncle Robert, Marion can't marry Mr. Thornton, if she wants to ever so much, and I want my diamond ring!"

"The six months are past," replied her uncle.

"I don't think that's fair, do you, Marion?" But Marion had slipped away, and was nowhere to be seen.

A few evenings later the three were sitting on the piazza, enjoying their last night at the mountains. Mr. and Mrs. Berkley had retired early, so as to feel bright and fresh for their homeward journey the next day, but the rest had declared their intention of sitting up to watch the moon, as it went slowly down behind the distant hills.

"Rachel," said Dr. Drayton, as he threw away his cigar, "how should you like to go to Europe next spring?"

"Like it!" exclaimed Rachel, clasping her hands with delight. "I should be perfectly happy!"

"Well, I thought so," replied her uncle, "and I am going to take you."

"O Uncle Robert! you are too good! Marion, isn't that splendid?"

But before Marion could answer, Dr. Drayton went on, as if he had not heard Rachel's remark. "Of course, it will not do for you to go travelling over Europe with only me."

"Take Mrs. Marston!" exclaimed Rachel, determined to surmount all difficulties; "take Mrs. Marston; she's just the one!"

"Oh, no!" replied her uncle, in a very decided tone; "she wouldn't do at all; she's too old. I've been thinking about it for some time; you want a young person, and so I am going to get married."

"O Uncle Robert!" cried Rachel, jumping up, and taking hold of his arm; "don't get married! please don't! I'd rather never go to Europe as long as I live, than to have you do that!"

"I am sure you are very kind indeed," replied her uncle, "to give up your pleasure on my account; but really I don't see as I can very well help being married now, for I've asked the lady, and she said yes."

"O uncle! uncle! to think of your getting married just for the sake of having some one to go to Europe with me! It's dreadful!"

"Yes, dear, I think it would be, if that were the case; but to tell you the truth I am very much in love with the lady myself."

"Then I shall hate her!" exclaimed Rachel, dropping her uncle's arm,— "I know I shall hate her!"

Marion had been sitting perfectly quiet during this conversation, with her back turned towards the speaker; she now rose, and attempted to pass by Dr. Drayton into the parlor; but he caught her with both hands, and turned her round towards his niece, saying, as he did so, "Allow me, Rachel, to introduce you to your future aunt; if you don't love her for my sake, try to for her own; she's worth it."

Rachel stood in speechless astonishment, and Marion, also, could not utter a word.

"This is a pretty state of things, I must say," said the doctor. "Rachel, won't you kiss your Aunt Marion?"

"Kiss her!" exclaimed Rachel, finding her voice, and throwing her arms round Marion's neck; "I thought I loved her before, but *now* I shall fairly worship her! I never was so happy in my life!"

"Nor I either," whispered Marion, very softly.

"But I don't understand it," cried Rachel, still in a state of bewilderment. "I never thought of such a thing. I thought you didn't like Marion at all, Uncle Robert."

"I know it, my dear, and she thought the same; but I have satisfied her to the contrary, and I guess I can you."

"Ah! Uncle Robert," said Rachel, archly, "I guess I *shan't* have the handsomest diamond-ring at Bigelow's; I suppose Marion has that."

"No, she has not," replied the doctor, lifting Marion's left hand, on which Rachel could see in the moonlight a heavy, plain, gold ring.

"What!—not diamonds?"

"No," replied the doctor, as he held the hand in both his own; "my wife shall have all the diamonds she wants, but this ring must be plain gold."

"Are you satisfied, Marion?" asked Rachel.

Marion gave a quick glance up at the doctor, then looked at Rachel, as she answered, "Perfectly."



*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MARION BERKLEY: A STORY FOR GIRLS ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you

follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.