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GROWING UP

A Story of the Girlhood of

JUDITH MACKENZIE

By JENNIE M. DRINKWATER

"Each year grows more sacred
with wondering expectation."

—Phillips Brooks.

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CONTENTS

I. The Horn Book
II. Square Root and Other Things
III. Was this the End?
IV. Bensalem
V. Daily Bread and Daily Will
VI. The Best Thing in the World
VII. A Small Disciple
VIII. This Way or That Way?
IX. The Flowers That Came to the Well
X. The Last Apple
XI. How Jean Had an Outing
XII. A Secret Errand
XIII. The Two Blessed Things
XIV. An Afternoon with an Adventure in It
XV. “First at Antioch”
XVI. Aunt Affy’s Experience
XVII. The Story of a Key
XVIII. Judith’s Turning Point
XIX. A Morning with a Surprise in It
XX. Judith’s Afternoon
XXI. Marion’s Afternoon
XXII. Aunt Affy’s Evening
XXIII. Voices
XXIV. “I Always Thought You Cared”
XXV. Cousin Don
XXVI. Aunt Affy’s Faith and Judith’s Foreign Letter
XXVII. His Very Best
XXVIII. A New Anxiety
XXIX. Judith’s Future
XXX. A Talk and What Came of It
XXXI. About Women
XXXII. Aunt Affy’s Picture
XXXIII. Nettie’s Outing
XXXIV. “Sensations”

GROWING UP

I. THE HORN BOOK.

“I remember the lessons of childhood, you see,
And the horn book I learned on my poor mother’s knee.
In truth, I suspect little else do we learn
From this great book of life, which so shrewdly we turn,
Saving how to apply, with a good or bad grace,
What we learned in the horn book of childhood.”

—Owen Meredith.

Judith’s mother sat in her invalid chair before the grate; she looked very pretty to Judith with her hair curling back from her face, and the color of her eyes and cheeks brought out by the becoming wrapper; the firelight shone upon the mother; the fading light in the west shone upon the girl in the bay-window, the yellow head, the blue shoulders bent over the letter she was writing.

“Judith, come and tell me pictures.”

About five o’clock in the afternoon, her mother’s weariest-time, Judith often told her mother pictures.

The picture-telling began when Judith was a little girl; one afternoon she said: “Mother, I’ll tell you a picture; shut your eyes.”

It was in this very room; her mother leaned back in her wheel-chair, lifted her feet to the fender, shut her eyes, and a small seven-year-old “told” her “picture.”

Telling pictures had been the amusement of the one, and the rest of the other, many, many weary times since.

As the child grew, her pictures grew.

“Yes, mother,” said the girl in the bay window, “I’ve just finished my letter; I’ve written Aunt Affy the longest letter and told her all you said.”

“Read it to me, please?”

Standing near the window to catch the light, Judith read aloud the letter.

At times it was quaint and unchildish; then, forgetting herself, Judith had run on with her ready pen, and, with pretty phrases, told Aunt Affy the exciting events in her own life, and the quiet story of her mother’s days.

“We are coming as soon as spring comes,” she ended, “mother is coming to get strong, and I am coming to help you and learn about your village. Beautiful Bensalem. Mother says I am learning the lessons taught out of school; but how I would like to go to school with Jean Draper in your big, queer school-room.” As she turned towards her mother, the firelight and the light in her face were all the lights in the room.

The home of these two people was in two rooms; one was the kitchen, the other was bed-room, school-room, parlor. It was a month since her mother had walked through the two rooms; several times a day Judith pushed the wheel-chair through the rooms. She called these times her mother’s excursions. Last winter her mother wiped dishes, sewed a little, and once she made cake; this winter she had done little besides teach Judith. The child was such an apt scholar that her mother said she needed no teacher—she always taught herself.

Judith loved housekeeping; she loved everything she had to do, she loved everything she was growing up to do; her mother she loved best of all.

She lived all day long in a very busy world; the pictures helped fill it.

“Now, mother, shut your eyes,” she began, gleefully.

“Now, mother, shut your eyes,” said Judith gleefully.

The eyes shut themselves, the restless hands held themselves still; there would not be many more weary days, but Judith did not know that.

Judith waited a moment until she could think.

“Mother, how do pictures come?”

“Bring me that paper Don brought last night; I saw something to show you, then forgot it.”

Her mother turned the leaves of the paper and indicated the paragraph with her finger. Judith read it aloud:—

“Some years ago I chanced to meet Sir Noël Paton on the shores of a beautiful Scottish loch, all alone, with an open Bible in his hand. He put his finger between his pages, as he rose to greet me, and still kept it there as we talked. Supposing he might be devoting a quiet hour to devotional reading in the secluded spot, I made no remark on the nature of his studies; but after a few minutes he observed, with a glance downwards, ‘You see, I am getting a new picture.’ He then proceeded to explain that it was his habit, before settling down to his winter’s work, to walk about in the neighborhood of his summer residence, wherever that might be, with his Bible in his hand, seeking for an inspiration. Sometimes the inspiration came almost immediately; at others, he was weeks before he could please himself. The following spring appeared ‘The Good Shepherd,’ one of the finest of his works.”

Her mother made no remark; she often waited for Judith’s thought.

“I think Aunt Affy sees things through the Bible, mother,” said Judith, speaking her first thought.

“I know she does.”

“I see a face,” began the picture-teller, dropping down on the rug, and resting her head against the padded arm of the chair.

“You love faces,” was the quick response.

“And voices, and hands, and hair. This face I see is a *good* face—but, then, I do not often see ugly faces—the eyes tell the truth, the lips tell the truth; perhaps it isn’t a handsome face; the forehead is low, rather square, the eye-brows dark and heavy; the eyes underneath are a kind of grayish blue, not *blue* blue, like mine, and they are looking at me very seriously; the nose is quite a large nose, and the mouth large, too, with such splendid teeth; the upper lip is smooth, and the cheeks and chin all shaven; the hair is blackest black; now the eyes smile, and it looks like another face; I do not know which face I like better. What is the name of my picture?”

“Strong and true.”

“That is a good name,” said the picture-teller, satisfied, “and who is it?”

“Our dear Cousin Don,” was the reply with loving intonation.

"You always guess."

"Because your pictures are so true. I like to look at people and places through your eyes."

Judith smiled, and looking a moment into the fire, began again: "A fence, an old fence, and a terrace, not green, but rather dried up, then a lawn, with a horse-chestnut, a big, big horse-chestnut tree on each side the brick path, and then up three steps to a long piazza: the house is painted white, with white shutters instead of blinds, and there are three dormer windows in the roof; these windows make the third story. I wish I could see inside, but I never did. Perhaps I shall some day. 'Some day' is my fairyland, and may you be there to see. That day Cousin Don came to take me walking he took me past the place; he said some day when you could spare me longer he would take me in, he wanted me to see the brown girl who lives there; but there she stood on the piazza, the door was open and she was going in; she *was* a brown girl, all in brown with a brown hat and brown feather; a brown face too—I love browns; she happened to turn and she tossed a laugh down to Cousin Don. It was a pretty laugh, with something in it I didn't understand; it was a laugh—that—didn't—tell—everything. I told Don so. He said: 'Nonsense!' I don't know what he meant."

"That was Marion Kenney, and the old house on Summer Avenue," guessed Judith's mother, who knew the story of the brown girl from Don's enthusiastic recitals.

Her mother's voice was more rested; Judith pondered again.

"That was a city picture; this is a country picture. It is the beautiful, beautiful country, even if the grass is dead, and the trees bare; it is the February country in New Jersey; there are clouds, and clouds, and clouds overhead; and a brook with the sun shining on it, and a bridge with a stone wall on each side, a little bit of a stone wall, and stone arches where the water flows through; perhaps it rushes because the snow is melting so fast; there's a garden with no flowers in it yet, but there are flower stalks, and bushes, and bushes; and a path up to the kitchen door, for the garden is down in a hollow; the kitchen shines, it is so clean, and *smells*, oh, how it does smell of graham bread, and hot molasses cake, and cup custards, and apple pie—but we can't *smell* in a picture," she laughed.

"I can—in your pictures," said her mother, echoing the laugh very softly.

"And the dearest old sitting-room—Aunt Rody will call it 'the room' as if it were the only room in the house; there's a rag carpet on the floor—Aunt Rody *dotes* on rag carpets; so would I if it were not for the endless sewing of the rags—and there's a chair with rockers, and on the top of the back of it a gilded house and trees almost rubbed off, and on the back a calico cushion tied on with red dress braid, and a calico cushion in the bottom, and the dearest old lady sits in it and sews, and talks, and reads the Bible and the magazines; there's a chair without rockers for the old lady who never rocks or does easy pleasant things, and hates it when other people, especially little girls, do any easy pleasant thing; and there's another chair, like an office chair, with a leather cushion for the dear old man with a rosy face like a rosy apple, and a bald head on the top, and long white whiskers that he keeps so nice they shine like silver, and make you never mind when he wants to kiss you; and there's a high mantel with a whole world of curious things on it that came out of a hundred years ago, and a lounge with a shaggy dog on a cushion on one end of it—how Aunt Rody *lets* him is a wonder to me—and a round table with piles of the 'New York Observer' on it. And just now the sweetest lady in the world in her wine-colored wrapper is lying on the lounge and the little girl in blue is flying about helping Aunt Affy and Aunt Rody get supper—O, mother," with a break in her voice, "how I *ache* to get you there and take care of you there; Cousin Don says it is the best place in the world for you and me,—we would grow fresh and green and send out oxygen like all the green things in Bensalem. I think I'd like to grow green and send out oxygen."

"Judith, you and I are always in the best place—for us."

"Then," said Judith, laughing, "I'd like a place not quite so good for us—only just as good as Bensalem."

"When I was a little girl, thirty years ago, the room was just the same, only Doodles was another Doodles, and Aunt Affy's curls were not gray, and Uncle Cephas was not bald or white—his whiskers were red then, and he was there off and on—and the other aunties came and went—and Aunt Becky died—the friskiest Aunt Becky that ever lived. I want my little girl to grow up in the dear old house, with not a stain of the world upon her; I want to think of my little girl there with Uncle Cephas and Aunt Affy."

Judith understood; her mother had told her she would be there without her mother; but that was to be years hence—sorrow was a long, long way off to-night to the girl who must hope or her heart would break; she brought her mother's fingers to her lips and kissed them; she did not worry her mother now-a-days even by kissing her lips or hair.

Cousin Don said to her that afternoon he took her to walk that she must not hang over her mother, or kiss the life out of her, and above all, never cry or moan when she talked about leaving her "alone." "Nothing makes her so strong as to see you brave," he said, watching the effect of his caution upon her listening face.

She had tried to be brave ever since.

"You can make pictures and see me there, mother," she said brightly, with a catch in her breath.

"I do—when I lie awake in the night, and give thanks."

“Tell me over again about when you were a little girl, there,” she coaxed.

Over and over again she had listened to the ever-new story of her mother’s childhood and youth in Bensalem; Aunt Rody was the dragon, Aunt Affy the angel, Uncle Cephas a helper in every difficulty, and all the village a world where something strange and fascinating was always happening.

“It was a very happy home for me when my father died and my mother took me there; she died before I was twelve; and then twelve years I was Aunt Affy’s girl; then your father took me away,” her mother said with the memory of the years in her voice and eyes.

“I wonder if somebody will come and take me away, or whether I shall stay forever and ever like Aunt Affy and Aunt Rody,” Judith wondered in her expectant voice.

“If somebody comes—if our Father in Heaven sends somebody as good and gentle and wise as your own father, I shall be glad of it up in Heaven, I think. You do not remember your father; in his picture he is like Don—Don is your father’s brother’s son; your fathers were much alike. Your father was only a clerk, his salary was never large; Don’s father was a business man, he died rich and left his only son a fortune; but your father and I never longed for money—Don has always given me money as his father did; he said you and I had a right to it. It has never been hard to take money from Don—he will be always kind to you; he thinks he has a right to you; you are the only children of the two brothers; they were only two—they never had a sister. Now you know all about your ancestry on both sides, I think; your grandfather and grandmother Mackenzie were born in Scotland; they died before you were born. Aunt Affy will be always telling you about the ‘Sparrow girls.’ My mother was a Sparrow girl. Just a year ago we were in that dear old home.”

“I was twelve then—I had my birthday there; perhaps I shall have another birthday there in April. Aunt Affy wants us to come so much. I can take better care of you now because I am older and I must not have lessons to make you tired; we will have a long vacation; I will only write poems for you and you needn’t even take the trouble to make the measure right. Aunt Rody said I was a silly baby to be always hanging about you; but she will see how I have grown up. Don says I am a little woman. Now I’ll tell you a picture. Shut your eyes, again.”

The tear-blinded eyes were shut again; Judith had been looking into the fire as she talked; she was afraid to look up into her mother’s eyes. It was being brave to look into the fire.

“I see a room up-stairs, a room with a slanting roof and only one window; the window looks down into the garden; it has a green paper shade tied up with a cord; there is a strip of rag-carpet before the bed, that is all the carpet there is; and there’s a funny old wash-stand with a blue bowl sunk down into a hole on the top, and a towel on the rail of the wash-stand with a red border—in winter a pipe comes up in the stove-pipe hole from the big stove in the sitting-room, but there’s ice in the pitcher very often; there’s a bureau with a cracked looking-glass on the top, an old bureau, everything is old but the little girl kneeling on the rag-carpet rug beside the bed, with her head on the red and white quilt, saying her prayers. That little girl is *you*, mother, a sweet, obedient little girl, that hasn’t a will of her own, and tempers, and tantrums like me.”

“I like to think that sweet little girl is you.”

“Then it *is* me; I’ve grown sweet in a hurry,” Judith laughed, “and left all my tempers and tantrums far behind.”

“There’s another T to go with them—*temptations*—through which you grow strong.”

Not seeming to heed, but in reality holding her mother’s thought in her heart Judith ran merrily on: “And I see a church, with a little green in front, and posts to hitch the horses, the two church doors are wide open, for in the picture it is Sunday morning; Aunt Rody is in the head of a pew in the body of the church, and Aunt Affy sits next, and Uncle Cephas is next the door, and there’s a girl between Aunt Affy and Uncle Cephas, a girl fifteen years old and her hair is braided, not in long, babyish curls—”

“Oh, my little girl, wear your curls as long as you can, because mother loves them,” her mother urged, bending forward to touch the soft, bright hair.

“Then her hair *is* curled, and she is trying to be good and listen. Perhaps she likes sermons—she looks so; in the picture the sermon is like the Bible stories you tell me when we read together—I *wish* ministers told Bible stories. And there’s the sweetest singing; it is like Marion Kenney’s singing; she sings like a bird, Don says; there are girls and boys all over the church, for the minister in the picture knows how to tell Bible stories to boys and girls and make them as real as the people and things in Summer Avenue and Bensalem; just as naughty and just as good. Jean Draper is there—in the pew behind me. Why, mother,” bringing herself back to the present and turning to look into her mother’s face, “Jean Draper was never in the steam cars, or on a ferry-boat in all her life—she has never been in New York or any where, only to Dunellen, which they call ‘town,’ and she walks there, or rides with her father. She wants to go somewhere as much as I want to go to boarding-school. It’s the dream of her life, as boarding-school is my dream.”

“Aunt Affy and Cousin Don will decide about boarding-school. Cousin Don and I have talked about it, and I will tell Aunt Affy what I think about it,” her mother decided with an unusual touch of firmness.

“But I wouldn’t leave *you*, mother, for all the boarding-schools in the world.”

"And I wouldn't let you for all the schools in the world."

"Well, it's only a dream, like Jean Draper's outing. You like pictures better than dreams. I think Don's friend, Roger Kenney, is the minister in the pulpit; Don said he had preached there almost all winter, coming home every Tuesday—Monday he visits the people. Don is sure Bensalem will give him a call. Uncle Cephas likes him so much, and Uncle Cephas is an elder. Now, here's another picture: on the same side of the street as the church, with only the church-yard and the locust grove between, it is the dear, dainty Queen Anne parsonage—only two years old, and so new and pretty; Jean Draper went with me through it—there was nobody there then—and nobody has lived there all this year; there's a furnace in the cellar like a city house, and a bay-window in the study, and a pretty hall with stained-glass windows, and a cunning kitchen, a cunning sitting-room, and sliding doors into the parlor, and a piazza in the front, and at the side—and out every window is the beautiful country. I hope I may go again. Mother, you like this picture?" she asked earnestly, "that house is another dream of mine. O, mother," with a comical little cry, "I'm so full of dreams, I'm full to bursting."

"I like that picture. I like to think of Don's friend there living a strong life; he has no worldly ambition. Don says it has been wholly rooted out of him. He was very fine in college, working beyond his strength—eaten up with ambition. Then he had an experience; Don said the fountains of the great deep were broken up in him, and he came out of it another man—as humble and teachable as any child. Don is afraid he will go there and be satisfied to stay."

"Now, here's another face," said Judith, with a new reverence for Don's friend: "brown eyes, and a brown curly beard, and a brown head, with laughing eyes, unless he is talking about grave things—he doesn't make you afraid to be good, but to love to. Still, I am so afraid he will *talk* to me some day and ask me questions; I don't know how to answer questions. Now, you know, I mean Don's friend, Mr. Kenney."

"Your pictures are very cheery. I hope you may tell some to poor old Aunt Rody."

"I shall never dare. She snaps at me. She shuts me up and makes me forget what I want to say. Her eyes go *through* me. I don't love Aunt Rody; I don't *want* to love Aunt Rody. She doesn't like baby girls," contended Judith, shaking her yellow head. "She doesn't like me and Doodles. We are shaggy and a nuisance."

"You will not always stay a baby girl."

"No; I want to grow up faster; I wish I might braid my hair. I want to write books and paint real pictures on canvas to earn money to take you to Switzerland. I'm sure you would get well in Switzerland. I see the pictures I would paint, and I think the books; but I am so slow about it. Sweeping, and washing dishes, and doing errands, do not help at all," she said with a laugh that had no discouragement in it.

"They all help. Every obedient thing helps. You must grow up to your book and your picture; living a sweet, joyous, truthful, obedient life is growing up to it. The best books and the best pictures are the expression of the truest and sweetest life; the strongest and wisest life; am I talking over your head, dear?"

"No," laughed Judith, "down into my heart."

"My little girl has been her mother's companion all these years; I fear I sometimes forget that you are only a little girl. But if you have grown old, you will grow young. I wish I could find a girl friend for you. But God knows all the girls in the world, and he will find one for you. If my daughter remembers all her life but one truth her mother ever said to her, I hope it may be this: The true life is the life hid with Christ; no other life *is* life, it is playing at life; this life is safe, still, hidden away, growing stronger every day; the expression of it, the making it speak he will take care of every hour of the day. You cannot understand this now—my words tell you so little, but they will come back to you."

"I will write it down," promised Judith, who loved to write things down, "and date it February fifteenth. Told in the Firelight. I know what it means better than I can say it. I often know what things mean, but I cannot say it."

"Any more pictures?" suggested her mother, in a voice as bright as Judith's own.

"An old face with pink cheeks and a long gray curl behind each ear, the softest step and the kindest voice—but I always forget and put sounds in my pictures. Those sounds are always in my picture of Aunt Affy."

"You have not made a picture of Aunt Rody."

"I don't like to tell a picture of Aunt Rody. She is so old, so old—and she isn't happy—and I don't believe she's good. If it were not for Aunt Rody I should think all old people were good; that all you had to do to be good was to grow up and grow old."

"She is not happy. Once, years and years ago, so long ago that almost everybody has forgotten, she had a bitter disappointment."

"What was it about, mother?" asked the girl, who always wove a love-story into the stories she planned as she stepped about the kitchen, or darned and mended the household wear.

“She was ready to be married—she learned that the man she loved—and Aunt Rody *could* love in those days—was a very, very bad man; he deceived her; it did not break her heart, or soften it; it made it hard. Unless we forgive, our hearts grow hard; she could not forgive; she has said that she does not know how to forgive. Only in forgiving do our hearts grow like God’s heart. He is always forgiving.”

“I forgave somebody once,” remembered Judith; “mother,” with a start, “I do not always forgive Aunt Rody when she is ugly to me; if I do not will I have a hard heart?”

“Yes. That spot toward Aunt Rody will grow harder and harder. You cannot love God with the part of your heart that does not forgive.”

“Oh, deary *me*,” groaned Judith, springing up. “Will you like milk-toast to-night? And prunes? Don says I know how to cook prunes.”

“Perhaps he will come to supper.”

“Then he must have a chop. Mother, I like to keep house. It’s easy. It’s easier than forgiving,” she said, with her merry little laugh, and a deep-down heartache.

II. SQUARE ROOT AND OTHER THINGS.

“Let never day or night unhallowed pass;
But still remember what the Lord hath done.”

—Shakespeare.

“Judith, would you like to go up to Lottie’s room for an hour?”

Judith’s mother was still sitting before the grate with her feet lifted to the fender; the tall figure of Donald Mackenzie stood behind the wheel chair, bending, with his folded arms upon the back of the chair.

“Yes, mother,” replied the voice from the kitchen, a busy, pre-occupied voice.

Don had wiped the dishes for her, brought up coal, taken down ashes, and declared that his three chops were the finest he had ever eaten.

“Lottie and her books just went up,” said Judith standing in the door-way, and untying her kitchen apron. “Don, will you call me when you go?”

“Yes, Bluebird; I can stay but an hour; I have to call for Miss Marion; she has gone to a King’s Daughters’ meeting, and I told her I would stop on my way home; I have to pass the house,” he explained in reply to an impatient movement in the wheel chair. Judith went out softly and ran lightly up the stairway.

“Aunt Hilda,” began the penitent voice above Aunt Hilda’s head, “I have come to confess.”

“Don, I wish I had warned you.”

“Why didn’t you?” he asked, miserably.

“Because I thought you had common sense.”

“It is a case of common sense.”

Judith’s fingers tapped lightly on the third story door.

“Come in,” called a girlish voice.

“Are you studying? May I stay and study too?”

“You are always ahead of me,” grumbled Lottie.

“Because I take longer lessons, and mother has no one else to teach. But she was tired to-day, and I couldn’t ask her about that dreadful thing in square root. Did you find out?”

“Yes, and it’s as easy as mud.”

Both girls laughed.

“Bensalem mud isn’t easy; you think you are going through to China every spring when the roads are bad.”

Judith had brought her pencil and pad; for half an hour the girls put their heads together over square root; then Lottie Kindare threw her book across the small room to the bed.

“Judith, I know something new to tell you; Grace Marvin told me to-day at recess, and once it came true. I’ll show you.”

On the lowest shelf of the little book-case Lottie found her Bible; it was dusty, but she did not notice that.

With their chairs very near together, the Bible in Lottie’s lap, the girls sat silent a moment; Judith’s luminous eyes were filled with expectation.

“Now wish for what you want most,” commanded Lottie, impressively.

“I wish most of all for mother to be strong enough to go to Bensalem with Aunt Affy when she comes next week.”

Lottie colored and looked uncomfortable; this evening before she came up stairs, her mother had told her that the doctor had stopped down stairs to say that Mrs. Mackenzie must be urged to make no effort to go into the country; it was too late.

“Not that; something else,” said Lottie, impatiently, “not such a serious thing.”

“But I want that *most*,” said Judith, piteously.

“Then choose what you want second.”

“Then I want second to go to boarding-school.”

“That’s good,” exclaimed Lottie relieved, “now, shut your eyes and open the Bible and put your finger down, and if it touches: ‘*And it came to pass*,’ it *will* come to pass.”

“How queer,” said Judith delighted, “what an easy way to find out things. I wish I had known it before.”

“So do I, for then I might have known that I *couldn’t* have had a navy blue silk for Christmas; and I hoped for it until the very day.”

Without any misgiving, Judith closed her eyes and opened the Bible; her heart beat fast, her fingers trembled; she dared not open her eyes and see.

“No, you haven’t your wish,” said Lottie’s disappointed voice; “it reads: ‘And a cubit on one side, and a cubit on the other side’—that’s dreadful and horrid; I’m so sorry, Ju.”

So was Judith; sorry and frightened.

“Now, I’ll try. I wish for a gold chain like Grace Marvin’s,” she said, bravely. Judith looked frightened; but what was there to be afraid of? It was not like fortune-telling; it was the *Bible*.

Judith watched her nervously; she was disappointed if it said in the Bible that she could never go to boarding-school; but, oh, how glad she was that she had not asked the Bible if her mother would ever be strong enough to go to Bensalem. She could not have borne nothing but a cubit about that. She would hate a “cubit” after this.

“There!” cried Lottie jubilantly, “I have it. See.”

Over the fine print near Lottie’s finger, Judith bent and read: “*And it came to pass*.”

“Isn’t that splendid?” said Lottie, “but I wish you had got it. Do you want to try again?”

“No,” hesitated Judith, “it frightens me, and I’m afraid it’s wicked.”

“Wicked,” laughed Lottie, “how can it be wicked?”

“I cannot explain how—but I’m sure mother would not like it.”

“But your mother is so particular,” explained Lottie, “everybody isn’t. She thinks there’s a right and wrong to everything.”

“But *isn’t* there?” persisted Judith.

“No,” contended Lottie boldly, but with a fear at her heart; “there isn’t about this. This is right.”

“I hope it is,” said Judith, brightening.

“We tried it at noon recess one day, and John Kenney came and looked on. He didn’t say what he thought.”

“Who is John Kenney?”

“The brightest and handsomest boy in the High School. He’s up head in Latin and everything. He was at my New Year’s Eve party. Don’t you remember? He sang college songs.”

“He’s the big boy that found a chair for me, and gave me ice cream the second time. I shall always remember *him*,” said Judith, fervently. “I did not know his name; when I think about him, I call him John. John is my favorite name for a man; it has a strong sound, a generous sound, and I like the color of it.”

“The *color*,” repeated Lottie, amazed.

“Don’t names have color and sound to you?” asked Judith, surprised. “John is the deepest crimson to me, a glowing crimson. John belongs to self-sacrifice and generous deeds. John is a hero and a saint.”

Lottie laughed noisily. Judith was the queerest girl. Her *things* were always getting mixed up with *thoughts*. Lottie did not care for thoughts. School, dress, parties, Sunday-school, summer vacations, John Kenney, dusting and making cake, jolly times with her father, and home times and making calls with her mother, were only “things” to this girl of fifteen; if there were “thoughts” in them, she missed the thoughts. She was daring and handsome; Judith admired her because she was so different from herself.

“I don’t believe my mother would care,” said Lottie, honestly, as she laid her Bible in its place upon her book-shelf.

“But your mother is different,” pleaded Judith.

“Yes, my mother is well; I suppose that makes the difference.”

With a sigh over her disappointment, for, somehow, she thought the Bible could not be wrong, Judith went back to pad and pencil and another hard example in square root.

“Lady bug, lady bug, fly away home,” chanted Don’s voice in the hall below.

“He has a different name for you every time,” said Lottie. “Don’t tell your mother if it will worry her.”

“I never tell her things that worry her,” replied Judith; “I’ve been waiting three months to tell her that I have burnt a hole in the front of my red cashmere and do not know how to mend it. When I go to Sunday-school she sees me with my coat on, and after Sunday-school I hurry and put on a white apron.”

With her arithmetic and pad, and a very grave face, Judith hastened down stairs.

“Your mother is full of hope about Bensalem,” comforted cousin Don; “I have said good-bye, for I expect to sail for Genoa on Saturday. She gave me your photograph to take with me. I will write to you at Bensalem; and if anybody ever hurts you, write to me quick and I’ll come home and slay them with my little hatchet.”

“Are you going—so soon?” she asked, in an unchildish way; “what will mother do without you?”

“She will have you and Aunt Affy. I wasn’t going so soon, but I found it is better. Kiss your cousin Don.”

“Shall you stay *long*?”

“Long enough to go to London to buy me a wife,” he laughed; “kiss your cousin Don.”

She kissed her cousin Don with eyes so filled with tears that she did not see the tears in his eyes. The street door fastened itself behind him; in the quiet street she heard his quick step on the pavement.

Her mother was sitting in the firelight with her head resting upon her hand.

“Mother, Don’s *gone*,” burst out Judith.

“Yes, for a while. He will never forget his little cousin.”

“Genoa is a long way off.”

“Only a few days’ travel. It is good for him to go. He is engaged to do some work on a paper, and he has always desired to see the world afoot. It is good for him,” Don’s Aunt Hilda repeated.

“But it isn’t good for us, mother.”

“I hope it is not bad for us.—But I would be glad for him not to go—just yet,” she sighed.

“Will Miss Marion, his brown girl, like it?” inquired Judith, unexpectedly.

“She is not—why do you say that?”

“I don’t know, I saw her; I shouldn’t *think* he would like to go and leave us all,” said Don’s little cousin, chokingly, keeping back the tears.

“He has a heartache to-night, poor boy. Now, little nurse, mother’s tired. We will have prayer and go early to bed.”

III. "WAS THIS THE END?"

"The worst is not
So long as we can sing: *This is the worst*."

—Shakespeare.

The two parlors were swept and dusted; Marion Kenney enjoyed the Friday sweeping; she stood in the center of the back parlor, cheese-cloth duster in hand, taking a satisfied survey of the two comfortable, old-fashioned rooms.

"Well, you *are* picturesque!" exclaimed a voice from the doorway of the back parlor.

With all her twenty-one years, Marion Kenney was girlish enough to give a swift, shy look the length of the rooms to the long mirror between the windows in the front parlor. But picturesque was only—picturesque.

"I don't see what a girl has to dress herself in furbelows for," he went on, ardently, and with evident embarrassment, "when there's nothing more becoming than the housekeeping costume; you are as bewitching in that red sweeping-cap as in your most fashionable headgear."

"I like my morning dresses, too," she said, with a flutter of breath and color, "perhaps because I'm nothing but a humdrum girl at home."

"The humdrum girl is getting to be the girl of the age," he ran on, his words tumbling over each other in the desire to say, for once in his life, the least harmful thing; "all her education tends to bring her down, or up, to the humdrum, if you mean the hum of housekeeping ways. With a sensible education, literary and musical tastes (not talents), a sweet temper, a pretty manner, and the tact that brings out the best in a man, if that is humdrum"—he broke off abruptly, for he had kindled a light in her face that he had no right to see.

"Have I told you about my little cousin Judith? But I know I have. She's a womanly little thing—too womanly. She's the sweetest prophecy of a woman. Oh, I remember I promised to take you to see my Aunt Hilda. But that's another thing to be laid over. If I live to keep all my promises I shall live forever."

"Don't say that," she urged, "you are not just to yourself. That is the only promise you have failed to keep to me, and there's time enough for that."

"I fear not," he answered, seriously, "she is going away, and so am I."

He came to her and laid the photograph in her hand.

"Oh, how sweet!" was Marion's quick exclamation.

"It *is* sweet; but she is better than sweet; she has courage."

"The eyes are too sad for such a girl—how old is she?"

"Nearly thirteen. I took her to New York for a day's outing, and we had the picture taken. She was anxious about leaving her mother so long; the people in the house were with Aunt Hilda, but Lottie, the girl in the house, is a flighty thing, and Judith was not trusting her. I saw the look, but I couldn't hinder it. It will go about through Europe with me. Did Roger tell you last night—I asked him to—that I'm off for my long-talked-of tour around the world?"

"*No*," replied Marion, startled out of her self-command.

"Perhaps he came home late. I wanted to prepare you. It is not so sudden in my thoughts. But I always do things suddenly after years of thinking about them. My father wanted me to do this. He said if I were not careful, money and literary tastes would make me an idle dog. That set of Ruskin in my room I have left for you. You have made my winter here so home-like, so refreshingly 'humdrum,' that I don't know how to thank you. When Roger begged me to come Thanksgiving Day I feared that I would be one too many, but you all took me in so naturally that I feel as if I had grown up in your old house with you and Roger. It's awfully hard to go, now I've come to the point; somehow I hated my ticket as soon as I took it into my hand. But I knew Aunt Hilda and Judith were going to Bensalem, and I cannot be with them there. But—you will write to me?" he asked, pausing in his rush of words.

He had vowed that he would not speak of letters, but the unconscious appeal of her attitude, the look that he felt in the eyes that could not lift themselves had given his heart an ache, that, the next instant, he hated her for making him feel. What right had she to hold him so? He was Roger's friend. He had only been kind, and frank and considerate toward her, and grateful, because she had touched his life with a touch like healing—he was a better fellow than he was last winter; he had told her one confidential Sunday twilight that he almost wanted to be a Christian.

"When will you—come back?" she faltered, speaking her uppermost thought.

"Oh, I don't know," he answered, roughly. "They may keep me there years, if I do well for the paper—or

I may study there—Judith and her mother may bring me home—I have promised Aunt Hilda to take Judith for my sister; that is a rousing responsibility for a bachelor like me. I have been near them this winter, which was one of my reasons for coming here. Now I think of it, perhaps it would have been better if I had never come.”

“*I think it would.*”

The slow, impressive words uttered themselves. She heard them as if another voice had spoken them. They told the whole truth, the whole, terrible, sorrowful truth, and he knew it.

“Good-bye,” she said, with a flash of defiance.

“Good-bye,” he said, not seeing the hand held firmly toward him.

“I will not write to you—you have no right to ask it.”

“No, I have not,” he answered humbly, “I have no right to anything; not even to ask you to become my wife.”

She lifted her proud eyes; her lips framed the words that her tongue refused to speak.

“I beg your pardon. I hardly know what I said.”

“It is hardly necessary to tell me that.”

“And you will not write to me?”

“No.”

“I am unhappy enough,” he blundered, “I never thought our happy winter would end like this. I did not mean it to end like this.”

It was ended then. She herself had ended it. He would never hear the new music she was practicing for him; they would not read together the “Essays of Elia” he had given her last week; she could never tell him—

“I must catch the next train; Roger and I have a farewell dinner in New York to-day. Old fellow, I’m sorry to leave him. I suppose when I return I shall find him rusting out in Bensalem; for he’s determined to go there against all the arguments I can bring up. Good-bye, Marion.”

“Good-bye,” she said, again, allowing her fingers to stay a moment in his hand.

“God bless you, dear.”

She remembered the blessing afterward; afterward, she remembered, too: “and forgive me.” Or did she imagine that? Why should he say that? How had he hurt her? He had only been like Roger.

She had said—what did she say that he should ask her to become his wife when he had not once thought of it all winter—when he was going away for years without thinking of it.

In her bewilderment she could not recall the terrible and true words she herself had spoken, she imagined them to be beyond everything more dreadful than she would dare think; they burned her through and through, these words that had said themselves. Were they hurting him every hour as they were hurting her?

Impetuous she knew herself to be; frank to a fault Roger plainly told her that she was; often and often her outbursts were to her own heart-breaking; but nothing before had she ever done like this; there was no excuse for this, no healing; he would despise her as long as he lived, and she would have no power ever to forget.

Shame that he understood, that he had all the time understood, was burning her up like a fever; that he was gone she was unfeignedly glad, that she might see his dear face no more, she sometimes prayed. Still, with it all, her life went on as usual; the errands down town, the calls, her Sunday-school class, her King’s Daughters’ meetings, her regular hours for practice, the cake-making, the sweeping, she even began to read one of the volumes of Ruskin she found on the table in his chamber, with her name and his initials written in each book; her life went on, her life with the heart gone out of it; her life went on, but herself seemed staying behind somewhere.

It was a relief that Roger was away a part of every week, Roger, whom nothing escaped; the others saw nothing,—she believed there was nothing for them to see.

IV. BENSALEM.

All service ranks the same with God;
If now, as formerly he trod
Paradise, his presence fills
Our earth, each only as God wills
Can work.

—Robert Browning.

In large black letters the word Post Office stared down the Bensalem street from the end door of a small white house. A plump lady in gray pushed open the door; the bell over the door sharply announced her entrance; she stepped into the tiny room; straight before her a door was shut, at her right were rows of glass pigeonholes with numerals pasted upon them; no head was visible at the window the pigeonholes surrounded; while she stood ready to tap upon the closed door that led into the sitting-room, the sound of a horn clear and loud gave her a start and betrayed her into a quick exclamation: "Why, deary me. What next?"

"Come in here, come in here," called a shaky voice from the other side of the closed door.

She pushed the door open, to be confronted by the figure of an old man lying in bed with a tin horn in his hand.

"Come right in, Miss Affy," the old man said cheerfully; "I've got one of my dreadful rheumatic days and can't twist myself out of bed; I've had my bed down here for a week now. I've got all the mail in bed with me. Sarah had to go out and milk and feed the chickens, so she brought the few letters and papers that were left over in here for me to take care of. Doctor says I'll be about in a week or so, if he can keep the fever down. I never had rheumatic *fever* before. Nobody comes this time of day for letters. Nothing happens about five o'clock excepting feeding the chickens. Sarah milks earlier than most folks so as to tend the mail, when the stage gets in. She went out earlier than usual to-day because she forgot the little chickens at noon. She just put her head in to say she had taken a new brood off. Do sit down a minute. Didn't Mr. Brush tell you I had rheumatic fever? Sarah must have told him when he came for his paper, night before last. She tells everybody. I blew the horn to call Sarah in, but I don't believe she'll come until she gets ready. The mail doesn't mean anything to her excepting getting our pay regular. There's all the letters on the foot of the bed; you can pick yours out. Sarah said you had a letter, and she guessed it was from your niece, Mrs. Mackenzie, or her little girl. Yes, that's it. Mr. Brush's paper is there, too."

The plump lady in gray, with a long gray curl behind each ear, picked among the letters and papers at the foot of the untidy bed, and found a letter in a pretty hand addressed to Miss Affy S. Sparrow, and a newspaper bearing the printed label, Cephas Brush.

"That is all," remarked the Bensalem postmaster; "never mind fixing them straight; I get uneasy and tumble them around."

"I will sit here and read the letter, if I may."

"Oh, yes, do. I haven't heard any news to-day."

"I'm afraid I haven't brought you any," said Miss Affy, "and you will not care for my letter."

"Oh, yes, I shall," he answered, eagerly. "I was wishing I could read all the letters to amuse me. I did read Mr. Brush's paper. I tucked it all back smooth; I knew he wouldn't care."

"He will call and bring you papers," promised Miss Affy, tearing open the envelope with a hair-pin.

"I wish he *would*. And a book, too. I wanted Sarah to take my book back to the library to-day, and get another to read to-night if I can't sleep, but she said she hadn't time; and, she can't now, because there's supper and the mail coming in," he groaned. "I had an awful night last night; and if it hadn't been for 'Tempest and Sunshine,' I don't know how I should have got through it."

"That was enough for one night," laughed the lady at the window reading the letter. "I will try to find you something better than that for to-night."

"Will you go to the library for me? That's just like you, Miss Affy."

"Yes, I will go. If I cannot find anything I like I will call somewhere else. There should be books enough in Bensalem to help you through the night."

"Is your letter satisfactory?" he questioned, curiously, as she slipped it back into the envelope.

"Mrs. Mackenzie is very feeble; she wishes to come to Bensalem for the change, and asks me to go and bring her and Judith."

"But you and Miss Rody will not want the trouble of sick folks."

"We want *her*," said Miss Affy, rising; "I will leave your book in the post-office, Mr. Gunn, so you need not blow the horn when you hear me open the door."

"But it may not be *you*; how shall I know?"

"True enough. Blow your horn, then."

"You can *look* in if it's you, and Sarah isn't there."

"Where is the book to take back?"

"'Tempest and Sunshine.' Oh, Sarah hasn't finished it yet. I forgot that," he said disappointedly. "She read it yesterday and gave me nothing but bread and milk for supper, and I wanted pork and eggs. She was on it long enough to finish," he grumbled.

"No matter, then. I'll get one for myself. It will be the first book I have taken from the library."

"And you such a reader, too. How many magazines do you take? I'd like some of your old magazines while I'm laid up."

"Mr. Brush will bring you a big bundle. But I will go to the library now, for he may not wish to bring them to-night."

The school library was kept at the house of one of the school trustees; the errand gave Miss Affy another quarter of a mile to walk, and it also gave her the opportunity of a call upon Nettie Evans, whose small home was next door to the school-library. Cephas Brush had told her that she knew how to kill more birds with one stone than any woman he knew.

She walked past the syringa bushes of the school trustee's front yard, and knocked on the front door with the big brass knocker; there was no response excepting the sound of rubbing and splash of water that came through the open kitchen window. Miss Affy knocked the second time with more determined fingers. It was a pity to take Mrs. Finch from her washing, but it would be more of a pity to let that old man toss in pain and groan for a book to read. As she gave the second knock she wondered if his lamp were safely arranged, and if the reading by lamp-light did not injure his eyes; she would look for a book with good type.

The kitchen door was quickly opened, a woman with rolled-up sleeves and dripping, par-boiled fingers called out pleasantly: "Why don't you come to this door?"

"Excuse me, Mrs. Finch," said Miss Affy, walking past another syringa bush, "I came to the Circulating Library."

"The Circulating Library is where I am. I keep it in the kitchen, because I cannot circulate about my work to attend it," replied Mrs. Finch, extending a hospitable wet hand; "You see I'm late to-day; usually my washing is all out at eleven o'clock. But his folks came to dinner, three of them, unexpectedly—Monday, too, and I had to spring around and cook a dinner; the Sunday left-overs wouldn't do. They didn't leave the house until half-past two, so I had to leave the dinner dishes, piled them up in the shed, under a pan, and put on my boiler again. It don't often happen, and I put a good face on it."

"You turn a very cheery face toward life, Mrs. Finch."

"Well, I try to. It's all I've got to give anyway;" Mrs. Finch replied, removing the cover from the boiler and poking at the clothes with a long clothes-stick; the steam rolled out the door and windows; as the room was cleared, Miss Affy discovered a high mahogany bureau with brass rings, the top of which was covered with books in neat piles.

"You are welcome to look at the books and take one. I wish you *would* sit down, Miss Affy, I can talk while I work. I wish I might stay and wash the dishes for you."

Miss Affy prayed every day, "Use me, Lord, any way, any where."

"With that dress on?" said Mrs. Finch, regarding the new spring suit with favor. "I couldn't help looking at you in church, if it *was* Sunday, and thinking that you looked sweet enough to be a bride."

"Thank you. I am fond of this dress," replied Miss Affy in her simple, sweet way.

"When you are married, you must be married in gray. I was married in white. Thirty years ago."

"I remember it," said Miss Affy, "Cephas and I were there."

"Don't think about the dishes. It's just like you."

"I would more than think about them, but I must call on Nettie, and then I promised to read awhile to Mrs. Trembly; she is more blind than she was, and Agnes breaks her heart because she cannot find more time to read to her and amuse her."

"They should come before dishes. People first, I say. That's why I'm behind with my washing. People first, I say to Jonas, and he looks scornful. But it will pay some day."

"You have not a catalogue?"

"A seed catalogue? We've never had a call for that. I thought everybody had one."

"So we have, dozens. I meant a catalogue of the books. I would like to know what our boys and girls are

reading.”

“Grown people, too. Everybody reads the books. Every time Mr. Gunn is laid up he is crazy for books. Look them over; lots of them are out. No matter how you put them back, if you only pile them up.”

“But you have a book in which to put down my name and the number of the book I take.”

“Oh, no; take any you like. I couldn’t be bothered that way. We expect new books. The last entertainment the school children had was to raise money for books. We don’t get anything for keeping the books, but Jonas is the greatest reader that ever was; he has read them all. But I never have time. I don’t know what is in any of them.”

“Your husband knows. I am glad he reads them. Our young people must be taken care of. Books have been everything to me. These books are an influence in Bensalem.”

“I hope so,” replied the keeper of the books, not thinking for an instant that they could be otherwise than a good influence.

“Excuse me if I go on with my work; that is the last boiler-full.”

“I would not stay if I interrupted you,” said Miss Affy. “I may take considerable time, for I want to know what our boys and girls are reading. I know every book in the Sunday-school library, but I had forgotten that Bensalem boasted a public school library.”

After a half-hour’s search, Miss Affy’s choice was made; the type of the book was not large enough for the old man’s reading at night, but the story was excellent: “Samuel Budget, the Successful Merchant.”

“I’m sorry about the type,” she said, “but it is better than the newspapers.”

“The type? Is that the name of the story?” questioned the woman at the wash-tub.

“The print I should say. Thank you for letting me come. But I am sorry to leave those dishes.”

“Don’t be sorry. My kitchen will be very sweet when the syringas are out. And don’t think I’m always so late with my washing. It was all his folks.”

“How is Nettie these days?”

“Miserable enough. She doesn’t know how to get outside of her poor little self. But then, who of us does, until we are *pulled* out?” she asked, with cheerful philosophy, as Miss Affy went away past the syringa bushes.

Miss Affy spent an hour in Nettie Evans’s chamber, telling the little girl stories about her great-niece, Judith Mackenzie, who lived in the city with her dear, sick mother, and they both were soon coming to Bensalem, and Judith would love to visit her often, and Judith told stories, that were worth telling; last summer in the evenings, in Summer Avenue, she had a dozen boys and girls on the steps, listening to her stories continued from one evening to another. Nettie’s white face grew glad, and in the night she was comforted by the thought of the coming of the story-teller. Then Miss Affy crossed the street to the one-story yellow house and read from a Sunday-school library-book to blind Mrs. Trembly, whose only daughter had little time to spare her mother from her housekeeping and dressmaking, and on her way home, stopped at the Post-office with “Samuel Budget.”

At the supper table, she remarked to Cephas and her sister Rody: “I do hope our new minister will have a good wife. Bensalem needs the ministry of a woman—a real deaconess.”

“As if you weren’t one,” said Cephas, with admiration in his eyes.

“But I’m not the minister’s wife.”

“Nor anybody else’s,” retorted Aunt Rody, sharply, with a look at the bald-headed, white-whiskered man opposite her at the foot of the table. The look passed over him instead of going through him, as he gave a laugh, a contented laugh that hurt Aunt Rody, even more than she had intended her look to hurt him.

Those two would circumvent her some day; the longer she lived the more sure she was of it, and the more would it cut her to the quick. Every year she fought against it (if one can fight with no antagonist), the more rebelliously she was set against it. There was but one hope for her: that she would outlive one of them; she hoped to outlive both of them.

V. DAILY BREAD AND DAILY WILL.

> “We walk by faith and not by sight.”
>
> “Creatures of reason do not necessarily become unreasonable when they consent to walk by faith; nor do creatures of trust necessarily become faithless when they are gladdened in a walk by sight.”

Judith sat in the bay-window with a book in her lap; a box of books had come by express to Miss Judith G. Mackenzie the very day her Cousin Don sailed for Genoa; they were books written for children; they were all Judith’s own.

With the light of the sunset in her face, Judith sat reading Jean Ingelow’s “Stories Told to a Child.”

“O mother, it is too splendid for anything,” she exclaimed; “when you are rested I will read it to you.”

“Is your ironing all done?”

“Yes, mother.”

“And Aunt Affy’s bed made?”

“All made. Mrs. Kindare put up the cot herself and lent me two blankets. It is a cunning room; Aunt Affy will like it; Mrs. Kindare said she could spare the room better than not, and Aunt Affy may stay a month, waiting until we can go home with her.”

“Put away your book, dear; and come and sit on the rug close to me. I want to be all alone with my little girl once more before Aunt Affy comes.”

Reluctantly Judith closed the book; she remembered afterward that she thought she would rather finish the story than go and sit on the rug and talk to her mother.

“Mother,” she began, as brightly as though a minute ago she had not wished to finish the story first, “Don might have stayed with us all winter and had that room to sleep in.”

“Yes, I thought of that. It would have made a difference in somebody’s life.”

“Whose life?” Judith questioned.

“In his own,” replied her mother, “and other people’s. I did not intend to speak my thought aloud.”

The sunset was in the room: it was over Judith, and over her mother.

“Was he sorry he did not come here?” Judith persisted.

“I think he was. He said we would have made him so comfortable. He would have taken his meals with Mrs. Kindare.”

“Are you sorry, too?”

“No—not exactly. If it were a mistake, it will be taken care of—it is very queer to trust God with our sins and not with our mistakes.”

“I made a ‘mistake’ that night he was here, mother; I did not mean to make a sin.”

“Tell me, dear.”

“I thought I would never tell. I was afraid it would worry you. But I cried after I went to bed. You will think me naughty and silly.”

“Do I ever?”

“Yes, oh, yes,” smiled Judith, “you always do every time I am.”

“I could not lie down in peaceful sleep to-night if I believed that my little daughter kept a thought in her heart she would rather not tell her mother.”

“But I shouldn’t keep silly thoughts in my heart.”

“That is what mothers are for—to hear all the silly things.”

“Then I’ll tell you,” decided Judith, bringing herself from a lounging posture, upright, and yet not touching her mother’s knees; “that night Lottie said there was a good way to find out what would happen to you next—to wish for a thing and shut your eyes and open the Bible and put your hand on a verse, and if it said *And it came to pass* you would certainly have it. We both did it, and she got her wish and I didn’t get mine. My heart was heavy, for I was afraid you wouldn’t like it as soon as I did it.”

“I do not like it. But I am glad you did it.”

“Why, *mother*!”

“Because I can talk to you about something I might never have thought about.”

“I like *that*,” said Judith, comforted; “I hope Cousin Don’s mistake will be good for him.”

“It is already. What do you want to know about yourself?”

“Things that will happen, grown-up things. I make castles about grown-up things. When I make an air-castle I am never a little girl, but a big girl, fifteen or eighteen, and that kind of things happen; the kind of things that happen to girls in books. Is that silly?”

“No; it is only not wise. It spoils to-day, and to-day is too good to be spoiled. God has made to-day for us, and we slight his gift by passing it by and trying to find out the things that will happen to us to-morrow. Suppose you would not read the children’s books Cousin Don sent you, but coax him to give you grown-up books.”

“I couldn’t be so mean,” said Judith warmly.

“But questions do come to us, wonders about our grown-up time. Is it not trusting God more to wait for His answers?”

“Oh, yes, I *am* waiting—unless I can find a way—like that way—to find out.”

“That is not God’s way; he never told us to find out his will that way. When he said, ‘And it came to pass,’ it was about something that had happened, not about something that will happen; and about someone else, and not about you. The Bible was not written to tell us such things.”

“But I didn’t know that really,” said Judith, miserable, and ready to cry.

“That was a mistake, not a sin. We all make mistakes before we know better. If you should do so again, it would be a sin, because now you know better.”

“But people did cast lots in Bible times. Don’t you know about finding out about another disciple to make up the twelve after Judas killed himself? I read that to you this morning.”

“Yes, I remember that. Casting lots was one of God’s ways in old times to discover his will. The lot was cast into the lap, and the disposal thereof was of the Lord. They knew God was willing for them to cast lots.”

“Yes,” said Judith, in her intelligent voice.

“And this, I just thought of it. That time about choosing another disciple was the last time. After the Holy Spirit was given there was no need; the Holy Spirit always reveals the will of God.”

Judith’s eyes grew dull; she could not understand; she felt dimly that she had done wrong in not trusting God to tell her about her “wish” in his own way.

“Whenever, in all your life to come, a question about your future comes to you, a longing to know about something that may happen to you, or may not happen—but I should not say that; I should say about something God may will to give you, or may will to keep from you, say this to yourself: I need not think about it; God knows all about it, for he *makes* it; he will tell me as soon as he wants me to know.”

“Yes,” said Judith, with a child’s confidence.

“After that, it would be not only ‘silly,’ but faithless to think about it. Every day brings its own answer; your daily bread and God’s daily will come together; his bread gives us strength to do his will. Will mother’s little girl remember?”

“Yes,” said Judith gravely; “and when you see me forgetting you must remind me. Will it be wrong if I say ‘daily will’ when I say ‘daily bread’?”

“Not wrong,” answered her mother, smiling, “only that it comes in the prayer before daily bread.”

“Does it?”

“Repeat it and see.”

Judith repeated: “Our Father, who art in heaven; Hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread—Why, so it does. But I didn’t put them together before.”

“The *will* comes first. If we do his will, he will not forget the things we long for every day. Love his will better than your own will and wishes.”

“That’s hard,” said Judith, “I don’t know how.”

“That is what you are in the world for, *to learn how*.”

Judith arose and stood before the grate with sweet, grave, troubled eyes.

The yellow hair, the innocent face, the blue dress, the loving touch of lips and fingers, the growing into girlhood; how could she give them up and go?

“O, mother, mother!” cried Judith, turning at the sound of a stifled cry, “Are you worse? What shall I do?” then in a tone of quick, astonished joy, “Oh, here’s Aunt Affy at the door!”

VI. THE BEST THING IN THE WORLD.

> “What’s the best thing in the world?
> Something out of it, I think.”
>
> —Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

From Genoa there came a note to Marion:—

> “Dear friend Marion:
>
> To-day’s mail brings me saddest and most unexpected news. I believed my Aunt Hilda would live years; I would not have left her had I thought she would be taken so soon. She died in Summer Avenue before she could be taken to Bensalem. Judith has written herself, the bravest child’s letter. She is in Bensalem with two old aunts of her mother.
>
> Roger hopes to have you for his housekeeper; you will be near Judith; will you take her under your wing? Her mother especially wished her not to go to boarding-school. She has always been a child of promise; she may fizzle out as promising children do and become only an ordinary girl; but she will always be sweet and brave, which is better than being brilliant. One sweet woman is worth a thousand brilliant ones; that is the reason there are so many more sweet ones. I would change my plans and return for her sake, but what can a bachelor cousin do for her? She will be sheltered from harmful influences in Bensalem. She will write me regularly. I have written to Roger about her money affairs.
>
> Your friend,
> Don.”

In reply Marion wrote the briefest note:—

> “Dear friend Don:
>
> I will do my best for Judith.
>
> Yours truly,
> Marion.”

“It will be the best thing in the world for Marion,” replied the voice of Marion’s mother.

“There is no best thing in the world for Marion,” Marion told herself wearily, rising from the back parlor sofa, where she had thrown herself to be alone, and stepping softly across the room to the door.

To be alone in the dark was the best thing in the world for her; to be alone in the dark forever. For something had happened to her that had never happened to any girl before. With a light tread she went up stairs: she would not have her mother know that she had overheard the remark made to her father—her mother could not know all, only herself and Don Mackenzie knew her cruel secret; he would never tell, not even Roger, and she could sooner die than let the words pass her lips to any human creature. Girls had gone through terrible things before; but no girl ever had gone through this; no girl could, unless she were like herself, and no girl was like herself, so impetuous, so headlong, so frank that frankness became a sin.

In her own chamber she found the darkness and solitude she craved; the darkness and solitude she thought she would crave forever. The voices in the front parlor went on low and steadily, planning a best thing for Marion for whom no best was possible.

“Yes, it will certainly be a good thing,” her father answered in a relieved tone; “she hasn’t been herself since Donald Mackenzie went away.”

“I was afraid when he came,” was the low uttered response.

“Mothers are always afraid,” returned the father, who had urged his coming.

“But I was specially afraid; Don is so attractive, so unconscious of himself, and I know Marion well enough to know that she would make an ideal of him—”

“Nonsense,” was the sharp interruption.

“It may be nonsense, but it is true; it has proved true. Marion is imaginative, as I was at her age: I know how I idealized *you*—”

“And the reality of me broke your heart,” he said, with a light, fond laugh.

“Yes. Sometimes it did. But I lived through it and learned that you were human, and deliciously human, and, if you will allow me to say so, a great improvement on my girlish ideal.”

“At any rate, I was not afraid to let you try,” he answered; “but Don has gone without giving her the trial. I suspect he saw it and went.”

“I know he did,” said Marion’s mother.

“Does Roger know it?” asked Marion’s father.

“Roger always knows everything and looks as if he knew nothing,” replied the motherly voice; “I think he was relieved when Don went away.”

“You think she will soon get over it?” her father asked. It would have broken Marion’s heart to hear the solicitude in her father’s voice.

“I’m afraid there’s no ‘over it’ for a girl like her; but she is plucky enough to get through it; the worst of it is, Don is such a fine fellow.”

“He had no right to care for her—” her father began angrily.

“He couldn’t help that,” argued her mother.

“Then he should care more, and be a man, and speak his mind—”

“I think he *must* care for some one else; if he hadn’t he couldn’t resist Marion.”

“Marion is like other girls,” said Marion’s father impatiently; “not a whit prettier—”

“No, not prettier,” she assented, with protest in her tone.

“Or more accomplished,” he insisted.

“She hasn’t accomplishments, beside her fine education, and music—”

“All girls play, I suppose he sees other girls—”

“And she saw but one man. That was the trouble. I wonder how fathers and mothers can help that. Roger wanted him to come to board through the winter, said a boarding-house was dismal, and his mother had just died—well, we can’t help it now. Don has cared for all the children—he was great friends with Maurice and John. If she will go to Bensalem and keep house for Roger, it will be just the thing.”

“I think so myself,” he answered, reasonably.

“Roger will be only too happy; his sister Marion has always been his sweetheart.”

“Bensalem will do,” replied her father, hopefully, shifting all his responsibility; “when we visit them next summer she will be as rosy as ever and singing about the house like a bird.”

“Then Roger must accept that call,” decided Roger’s mother positively. “A year in the country will brush off his student ways—it will be the best thing in the world for both of them.”

“And poor Bensalem?”

“It isn’t poor Bensalem,” she retorted, indignantly. “They knew what they wanted when they called Roger.”

“Roger is a good boy, but he isn’t the least bit brilliant,” said Roger’s father, cheerfully.

“He is something better,” said Roger’s mother.

“But how can you get along without her?”

“Better than Roger can. Besides, Martha and Lou will soon be through school; Roger and Marion are not our only children.”

“You talk as though they were, sometimes,” he retorted. “Anyhow, let the sky fall, but do something for Marion.”

VII. A SMALL DISCIPLE.

"Who comes to God an inch through doubtings dim,
In blazing light God will advance a mile to him."

—From the Persian.

Aunt Rody gave Judith a nudge. The nudge startled the absorbed reader into dropping, with a thud, the book she held in her hand upon the carpeted floor of the pew; with a crimsoned face Judith stooped and picked up the book; after a moment of deliberation and a defiant flash toward Aunt Rody, stiff and straight in the end of the pew, she re-opened her book and was again lost in the fascinating story. Aunt Rody glared at her, but she turned a page, only half conscious of the wrath that was being heaped up against her; this time it was not a nudge, but a large hand that startled her; the large hand, brown, strong, was laid across the page.

Judith gave a glance, not defiant, into the kindly, grave eyes, then shut the book, straightened herself and tried hard to listen to the minister.

The figure at the other end of the pew, the man's figure, settled back comfortably to listen, and listened without trying hard.

The kindly, grave eyes under the shaggy black brows never stirred from the minister's face; once in a while the brown, strong hand stroked the long white beard; Judith watched him as he listened, and then she watched Aunt Rody, unbending, alert, with her deep-set black eyes, her hard-working hands very still in her new, black kid gloves.

When the sermon was ended Judith gave a sigh of relief; she could sit still, she had sat still; but her mind had not followed the minister.

She wished she could like sermons. She liked the Bible. This sermon was not like the Bible.

As she stood in the church doorway, waiting for Aunt Rody, who always had something to tell, or something to ask in the crowd in the aisle, she overheard a loud whisper behind her: "Oh, that's Judith Mackenzie. She has come to stay with the Sparrow girls. Her mother was their niece. Father died long ago; mother last winter." To escape further details, the listener stepped forward and down one step; there was a stir and some one stood beside her, a tall young man, not like any one else in Bensalem: she knew without raising her eyes that he was the new minister. She flushed, thinking that he had noticed that she was reading her Sunday School book in church.

"Would you like to be a Christian?" he asked, with something in his tone that made it hard for her to keep the tears back.

This was worse than a rebuke for reading; she might have excused herself for that; for this she had no words. The voice was very low; perhaps no one heard beside herself.

Too startled to speak at first, she kept silent; then, too truthful to speak one word that she was not sure was true, and thinking that she hardly knew what it was to *be* a Christian, she could not say "Yes"; not daring to say "No," she stood silent.

"Pray for the Holy Spirit," he said, moving away.

She knew how to pray; she had prayed all her life; but she had never once prayed for the Holy Spirit. She was afraid to do that.

What would happen to her if she did, she wondered, as she walked down the paved path to the gate; would a tongue of flame come down from heaven and settle on her head? Would she speak with tongues, right there, before them all, in the crowd? Would she heal the sick by prayer and anointing with oil? Would she pray in prayer-meeting, and go about from house to house talking about the Lord Jesus, whose dear, sacred name she seldom took upon her lips?

What a strange thing to say to a girl of thirteen!

There were no young disciples in the Bible; they were all grown up and old.

Just now all she wanted to do was to tell Jesus and his Father everything that troubled her, and everything she was glad of, and read the Bible, and,—"Come Judith," interrupted Aunt Rody's shrill voice. She sat on the back seat of the carriage with Aunt Rody; Mr. Brush sat alone on the front seat; Aunt Affy had not come to church to-day; it was her turn to stay at home.

Aunt Rody insisted that some one should always stay at home; there was the silver, and her will, and a great many other things to be guarded from Sunday marauders.

"Judith Grey Mackenzie," began Aunt Rody, in her most revengeful voice, "you must behave in church or stay at home."

"I was behaving—I read to help behave; when I cannot understand I think everyday thoughts; isn't that

worse than reading?”

“Nothing is so bad behaved as reading. And all the folks seeing you. What do you suppose the new minister thinks of you?”

“He thinks I am not—”

Her shy lips could not frame the words “a Christian.”

“Not very well brought up,” tartly finished Aunt Rody.

“I brought myself up, that’s the reason then,” replied Judith, her eyes filling with resentful tears. “Mother was always too sick. Cousin Don said my mother was the sweetest mother in the world.”

“You act like a sick mother; but you’ve got an aunt that isn’t sick; and if I ever see you read again in church you shall not go to church for six months. Tell your Cousin Don that.”

“I wouldn’t mind church,” replied Judith.

“To Sunday School then, if that hurts more.”

“Oh, tut, tut,” came good humoredly from the front seat. “Don’t forget your own young days, Rody.”

“I never had any. Just as I shall never have any old age. I’ve never had time to be young or old.”

Judith laughed. Aunt Rody was eighty-four years old.

“Don’t you deceive me about the book, Judith, for I don’t always go to church.”

“Aunt Rody,” with girlish dignity, “I never deceived any one in my life.”

“That’s a good deal to say.”

“I haven’t lived to be eighty-four, but I think I never *shall* deceive. I would rather *die* than not be true,” she burst out.

“H’m, you haven’t been tried.”

Judith thought she had; did not this grim, hard old woman try her every day of her life?

The long village street was lined with maples and locusts; inside the yards were horse-chestnut trees, lilacs, and syringas.

All over the beautiful country the fruit trees were in blossom; Judith revelled in the fragrance and delicate tints of the apple-blossom; she called it her apple-blossom spring.

The story and a half red farmhouse, with its slanting roof and long piazza, marked the “Sparrow place”; it had been the Sparrow place one hundred and fifty years. The red farmhouse was built one hundred years ago; the Sparrow girls, the eight sisters, were all born there long before many of the village people could remember.

As Judith stepped up on the piazza the bowed gray head at the window was lifted; the girl went to the open window and stood; Aunt Affy took off her spectacles and laid them in the book she was reading.

Judith thought Aunt Affy read but one book. How could anyone be wise and read only one book?

“Well, dear,” said Aunt Affy in her welcoming tones. To Aunt Affy Judith Grey Mackenzie was the sweetest picture of girlhood in all the world; she was as fresh as the dew, tinted like an apple-blossom, as natural as a wild rose. To everyone else she was a girl of thirteen, with the faults, the forgetfulness, the impetuosity, the thoughtlessness, and above all, the selfishness of girlhood. Her yellow hair fell in long curls to her waist, because her mother had loved it so; her eyes of deepest blue were frank and truth-telling; in her lips, flexible, yet strong, was revealed a world of loving; a world that she had not yet learned herself.

She was impatient, passionate, rebellious; but never was it in face, voice, or attitude when under the witchery of Aunt Affy’s appreciation.

“Aunt Affy, I’ve been wicked,” she confessed in a humiliated voice.

“So have I. I’ve been sitting here grumbling, when I should be the happiest old sinner in the world.”

“I’ve been wickeder than that.”

“How much wickeder?”

“I borrowed a Sunday-school book to take to church because I do not understand Mr. Kenney.”

“Did that help you understand him?”

"I did try at first," Judith explained, laughing at Aunt Affy's serious question, "but it was about the things in Revelation, the hard things—"

"Did he not say anything you *could* understand?"

"No—" said Judith, thinking that his message to her, her own private message, was the hardest of all to understand.

"You were very rude."

"How was it rude?" Judith questioned, surprised.

"He was speaking to you, and you refused to listen."

"I was listening to someone else," said Judith, troubled.

"That was more rude still. That was premeditated rudeness."

"I hope he did not notice it."

"You may trust him for that."

"But I cannot tell him I am sorry; it would choke me to death."

"And another thing—if he is Christ's ambassador, and you refused to listen—"

The girl's eyes filled, and her lips trembled; was it *that* she had done?

"It's time to set the table," were Aunt Affy's next words, in an unconcerned tone, polishing her glasses with a corner of her white apron. That small, clean old kitchen; how Judith loved it. She loved every kind of work that was done in it, even the wash-tubs, the smell of the suds was exhilarating, and baking and ironing days were her delight. Every nerve and muscle responded to the call to labor.

The south door opened on a flagged walk that led to Aunt Affy's flower garden, the north door led you out into a deep, square, grassy yard, where the clothes were hung and bleached; a tall, shaggy pine stood sentinel at one side of the door, on the other side ran the bench upon which the milk-pans shone in a row; beyond the grass rose a stone wall, and then there were fields and woods; woods in which the thrush hid, and the whip-poor-will; a brook started from a spring in the woods and tumbled over the pebbles down into the meadows, then out, below the flower garden and across the road, where it was bridged with a stone arch.

In the kitchen was a brick oven, its iron door stood out black among the white-washed bricks; the uneven boards of the kitchen were always scrubbed clean, the stove was brushed into a shining blackness every day, the two tables were as spotless as sand, the scrubbing-brush and Aunt Affy's strong hands could make them.

Out of the three windows were pictures of which the city-bred girl never wearied. Her apple-blossom spring was the spring of her new birth.

"Aunt Rody, please excuse me," Judith said, rising from the dinner table.

"You haven't eaten your custard, and you like it with crab-apple jelly."

The yellow custard in the big coffee-cup with a broken handle, and the generous spoonful of jelly quivering on top was a temptation; she looked at it, then pushed it away. Nobody would ever know that she was punishing herself for being "rude" in church; it was easier to punish herself than to apologize to Mr. Kenney; and something had to be done.

"I want to study my Sunday-school lesson," she evaded, and then her heart sank at her deception; she had not told Aunt Rody all the truth.

She fled into the parlor with a question from Aunt Rody pursuing her; her cheeks were burning, and she was trembling with shame and anger.

Why couldn't Aunt Rody leave her alone? Sometimes she almost hated Aunt Rody. A corner of the stiff, long, horse-hair sofa was her retreat; it was often her retreat; she called it her valley of humiliation.

In her lesson to-day she found the loveliest thing. Aunt Affy was teaching her that the Bible was a treasure-house.

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

All men know—just by loving—not by doing any great hard thing—by loving—but that was hard, if it meant bearing with Aunt Rody's misunderstanding and sharpness and fault-finding, and being always on the watch to find evil in you.

But "all men know" was the comfort of it; she need not pray in prayer meeting as Miss Kenney did, nor do the wonderful things the disciples did; all men would know that she wanted to be a Christian, if she tried to be loving.

She repeated the words of Christ in a soft monotone, her small Bible in her hand, and her head pillowed on her hair on the hard sofa-arm.

Aunt Affy pushed the door wider and entered, bringing a glass half filled with crab-apple jelly.

“I saved your custard—it’s on the hanging shelf in the cellar,” she said, opening the door of the chimney cupboard to set the glass in its own space in the row of jelly glasses.

“Aunt Affy,” lifting her tumbled head, and with grave eyes asking her question: “what is—who is a disciple?”

“A disciple is one who learns. You are my disciple when you learn of me. The disciple of Christ is the man, or woman, or child who learns of him. When you are about the farm with Cephas, you are his disciple, in sewing and mending you are Aunt Rody’s, in housekeeping generally you are my disciple.”

Aunt Affy went out, and the tumbled head dropped back to the hard sofa-arm again. Would Christ let her be a “disciple” a little while, and then be a Christian when she grew up, she pondered.

She wanted to learn of him; she would read the Gospels through and through and through. She would learn them by heart. For her lesson to-day she would learn these seven verses he had spoken to his own, real, grown-up disciples.

That afternoon in Sunday-school, after the lesson was ended, the new minister left his class of boys and came to the pulpit stairs and stood and talked to the children; his opening sentence thrilled one small listener:—

“*The disciples were called Christians* first at Antioch.”

If you were a disciple, only a disciple, learning and loving, you were called a Christian. Then he spoke of the Holy Spirit; he was the very heart and will of Christ; he spoke in a low, sweet voice to children, a constraining voice, making known the things Christ the Lord would have them do; he showed them the things of Christ.

Had she dared she would have stepped out of her pew and gone up the aisle to the new minister and told him that she *did* want to be a Christian, and she would not be afraid to ask the Holy Spirit to tell her all the things Christ wanted her to do. Miss Kenney, her teacher and the minister’s sister, noticed the start and flush, the hesitancy, the eager look, as the minister came down the aisle and paused to speak to her girls; she saw Judith’s eyes drop as he took her hand, and then her shy withdrawal of herself.

Suddenly the girl turned, and with the flash of decision in her voice, said bravely, detaining the minister with her trembling little hand:—

“I am sorry I read in church this morning; I will never do it again, even if I don’t understand. Please excuse me.”

“I saw you,” he said, smiling, and taking the brave little hand into both his own; “I will try to talk to *you* next Sunday. Thank you for the lesson.”

Then shy Judith slipped away, and never told even Aunt Affy that she had apologized to the new minister.

That evening in the twilight, sitting on the piazza alone, she wrote on the fly-leaf of her small Bible, in pencil:—

Judith Grey Mackenzie; A Disciple.

And the date, May 15, 18—.

She thought she would like to tell somebody that she was a disciple. But if they should ask how it happened, she could not tell. It had happened as still as a leaf fluttering in the wind, as softly as the apple-blossoms came; nobody could tell about that. She thought the Holy Spirit must know how it happened.

VIII. THIS WAY, OR THAT WAY?

“My times are in Thy hand, and Thou
Wilt guide my footsteps at Thy will.”

It was six o’clock that May evening, and Joe was running away. He did not know he was running away. He had never been taught to read, and no one had ever told him a story, and his own experience of life was so limited, that he did not know that he was starting out in the world to find adventures, to find good or evil, to find a new life, and that new life, shaped more by what was inside of himself, than what

was outside of himself. If the man who just passed him had asked him what he was doing, he would have said, had he not been overcome by one of his fits of shyness, that he was “gittin’ out.”

The air was damp, and sweet with the scent of blossoms. At his right ran a range of low hills, abrupt and green; at his left, as far as he could see, stretched the swamp, miles of meadow, over-flooded in the spring, waving with grass in the summer, and homely with unpainted one-story houses, and out-buildings in various stages of decay; it was a pasture land for the cattle of the farmers in the upland district, and Joe’s bare feet had trodden its miles morning and night ever since he had been old enough to drive the cows.

He went on slowly, with his hands in his pockets, too heavy-hearted to whistle, not thinking about anything, only feeling, with something in his throat that would not be swallowed down, miserable and defiant; remembering nothing in his past to regret not having learned that there was anything in his future to hope for, he was conscious only of something stirring within, stirring to action, to wideness, to freedom, and therefore he must “git out” to find it; therefore he was getting out.

His plan, if he had a plan, was to find a woman in the village who had once spoken kindly to him, and given him a huge slice of warm bread and butter; in the swamp he knew he might find work among the Germans, but the swamp was so lonely at night, and he did not like the ways of the Germans; in all the world he had but one friend, this woman who had spoken kindly to him.

She might not give him work, or a bed, but she would *look* at him, as no one else ever looked, and she would speak kindly. The road over the hill drew his lagging feet, then he stood, hesitating, at the turn of the hill road and swamp road; the hill road led to people, and a church, a store, where boys and men gathered at night to read the newspaper, and smoke, and have fun; to the blacksmith’s shop, and, most of all, to the little house next door, where the woman lived who had cut that large slice across her big, hot loaf.

A German, in the swamp, had told him to come to him for a home and work, if he ever wanted to leave his place; work he must, and a home—the woman’s face came between him and the German, his heart began to beat very fast, he wondered why his heart beat so fast sometimes, and he took his life in his hands, and started on a run for the road over the hill, where was the only thing in the world that seemed like love, although of love he had never had one thought. Then he began to walk slowly again; he had decided there was no need of hurrying, there was no need of doing anything—he had never been given a reason for doing anything excepting that one or the other of the old men with whom he had lived all his remembered life bade him do it. He had done things because he was told; he did not know why, excepting that because he was told.

If he were being told now to run away, he did not know; he had never thought that he might tell himself to do things. Not for a moment did he believe that the two old men would take the trouble to look for him, or to wish him back; every day, one, or both, said to each other or to him that he was not worth his salt, and would never amount to anything; they must be glad he was gone. But the cows. They would be sorry, especially Beauty; one of the old men would milk her to-night, but they would not pat her and talk to her, and ask her if she were glad she was a cow and not a boy, and was worth her salt, and all her feed beside; she had no friend but him, and she would look around for him with her big eyes; again he stood hesitating—Beauty wanted him—his tears fell fast; but he must go on, he wanted something better than Beauty.

So he went on down the hill, past the pretty parsonage and the church—wondering, if he had no place to sleep, if he might sleep in the church; then past the school-house, with its large play-ground, and turned by the liberty-pole, and walked very slowly along the street until he reached the blacksmith’s shop, and there, in the doorway of the small house, stood the woman looking for him.

“Why, Joe, what are you doing here at milking time?” she asked in a brisk tone, as the boy stopped before the gate.

“I’m done milking for them two old men,” he said, in a voice he tried hard to make brave. “Chris and Sam don’t want me any longer; I’m gittin’ out.” And then, big boy as he was, feeling lost in a strange world, he began to cry.

“There! there! Sonny,” soothed the voice, changing from its briskness into sympathy, as the woman stepped down the three steps; “Come and eat supper with me; I know what I’ll do with you. I’m glad you happened to come along this way.”

Pushing open the gate, she laid her hand on his arm and drew him into the house by his soiled and ragged sleeve.

“We don’t want a boy, haven’t work enough; but I know somebody who does, late in the season as it is. Mr. Brush, Mr. Cephas Brush, he farms the Sparrow place, you know; while he was waiting at the shop this very morning, he came to the well for a drink, and I went out to give him a glass so he needn’t drink out of that rusty tin cup, and he asked me if I knew where he could find a boy. His boy went off in March. *He’s* a good master, and that’s a good home; Miss Affy is like a mother to every stray thing and you won’t mind if Miss Rody does scold, she never means any harm. I’ll take you down there right after supper. Mr. Evans had his early because he wanted to go to town, and I was feeding my chickens, two hundred and five now,—Nettie puts down every new brood in a book—and couldn’t stop to eat. I didn’t think I was going to have company for supper. Nettie had hers earlier than usual because she was tired,

and wanted to go to bed." She pulled him through the narrow hall as she talked, Joe, once in a while, giving a quick, hard sob, and opened the door into the tiny kitchen.

The tea-kettle on the stove was singing a cheery welcome, the white cloth and pink dishes on the round table in the centre of the room gave him another welcome, and the touch and tone of the woman who had been kind to him brought him the cheeriest welcome of all, as she pushed him down into the chair opposite her own at the table, saying: "I know what men's cooking *is*, and I know you are half-starved. Who made the bread?"

"I got that at the store."

"You had potatoes, of course."

"Oh, yes, and fried pork, lots of it, and pan-cakes. My! can't Chris make good pan-cakes!"

"Can he?" inquired Mrs. Evans, doubtfully, taking the tea-pot off the stove and setting it on the table.

"Now, here's hot fried potatoes for you, and good bread and butter, and a big saucer of rice pudding—Mr. Evans is *never* tired of rice pudding,—and sponge cake that little Judith brought to Nettie to-day because it is her own baking. Nettie took a bite and said I must put the rest on the supper-table. And you can have tea or milk, or both."

After bustling about in the shed, Mrs. Evans seated herself at the table opposite her guest.

"Who would have thought I was going to eat supper with you, Joe? The world does turn on its axis once every twenty-four hours, and unexpected things do happen. I'll tell Nettie all about it tomorrow; it will make a happening in her poor little life."

Joe gave her a shy, quick glance, then bowed his head; some time, somewhere, not with the old men, certainly, he had bowed his head and said something at the table; he did not remember where it was, or what words he said, or why he said anything at all, but the pretty tea-table, or the savory food reminded him of a life he had once lived; he listened for a chorus of voices:—

"For what we are about to receive—receive—truly thankful."

It was like music in the boy's heart; he lifted his head with a light shining in his tear-blurred eyes.

"Well, I never," ejaculated Mrs. Evans.

The boy held his knife and fork with a grace her husband had not acquired, taking his food as slowly and daintily as a girl.

"Those Tucker men, that old Chris and Sam have no claim on you, and they haven't done as well by you as they promised they would when they took you, a little fellow, out of the Christie Home. I've often spoken to Mr. Evans about it, but he's so easy going I might as well have talked to the wind. I told our new minister that he must 'high-way and hedge' you; he has noticed you; but he is feeling his way among the people, and couldn't make a stir as soon as he came."

"Is *that* where I was?" asked astonished Joe. "I thought I used to be somewhere. *They* never told me. I seem to remember things that happened before I can remember. They told me that I hadn't any father or mother, and wouldn't have any home if they had not taken me in."

"People thought you ought to be sent to school and Sunday-school, but what is everybody's business is nobody's business. I'm glad enough you have left them, but you should have told them you wanted to leave."

"It wouldn't have done any good," he muttered "they wouldn't have said anything."

"Now, I'll put out the cat, and leave the table standing, and bolt the shed door, and lock the front door, and put on my things, and we'll be off. Nettie is fast asleep and will never miss me."

"I will wash the dishes for you; we put them under the pump, then wipe them on anything."

"That wouldn't suit me, thank you," laughed Mrs. Evans; "you can hoe corn better than wipe dishes, and Mr. Brush has acres and acres of corn to hoe, and potatoes too: he's making that old Sparrow farm pay."

Joe did not know that he had been lost, but he began to feel very much found.

"I'm glad you went out to the well with that glass," he said, as his hostess wrapped a shawl about her shoulders and tied the blue ribbons of a blue wool hood under her chin.

"I'm usually glad of kind things I do; I suppose that's one reason I do them."

Joe unlatched the gate, holding it open for her to pass through, then pushed it shut; Beauty and this woman seemed to belong to the same order of creaturehood; the woman's eyes were like Beauty's, soft, and big and brown, and *they answered you*. She took his hand and drew it under her arm in a sort of comradeship, and then they went on, the woman and the boy, to find the gate that would swing open into a world of which it had never entered the boy's heart to dream.

The gate was shut and a man in shirt-sleeves with a pipe in his mouth was standing on the mysterious and happy side of it resting his elbows on the pickets, and, attracted by voices, looking up the road in the starlight towards the two figures.

"You stay here, Joe—that's Mr. Brush. I'll tell him all your story."

"My story?" repeated Joe, in amazement.

"You didn't know you had any," she laughed. "Well, folks don't usually until it is all lived through. I didn't know I had any girlhood until I married and lost it."

"I haven't lost anything," said Joe, bewildered.

"No; and I think you have got something—stand back, till I call you."

She went on, and Joe heard the two voices exchange a friendly "Good evening," and then to escape his "story" climbed up the steep, green bank, and waited under a cherry tree. Cherry blossoms were not as pretty as apple blossoms, he meditated; it was queer how the blossoms would fall off, and the hard, green fruit come—but it always did, somehow.

He wished Mrs. Evans would come back and take his hand again, making him feel ashamed and glad, and say, "Joe, you are going home with me. That man doesn't want you, and I do."

And there he stood, not still, but first on one bare foot, and then on the other, and then he whistled; the stars shining down through the cherry blossoms were almost as kind as Beauty's eyes, but they were so far off.

The low voices talked on and on; at last, to the great relief of the boy who was waiting to know if anybody in the world wanted to own him, the man's voice was raised in a cheerful: "Well, I'll see Mr. Chris Tucker to-morrow, and make it right."

And, then, in her brisk way, Mrs. Evans called, "Come, Joe; it is all right."

The barefoot, ragged boy emerged out of the shade of the cherry limbs and went, faint-heartedly to answer the call.

"Well, Joe," welcomed the old man, unlatching the gate and throwing it wide open, "come in and stay with me awhile. I guess I want you and you want me."

But Joe begun to cry, and rub his eyes with the back of his dirty brown hand: "I am sixteen years old, and I am a stump of a thing, and will eat you out of house and home, and shan't never amount to much."

"Tut, nonsense!" exclaimed the old man; "don't you like to work?"

"I never did nothing else; I don't like nothing else," replied Joe, dropping his hand, somewhat reassured.

"Who said you are sixteen? Come in and let me have a look at you."

Joe stepped inside the gate; kind, strong hands drew him within the light that streamed from the kitchen windows and open door.

"Good night, Joe," said Mrs. Evans.

"Good night," said Joe.

He had not learned how to say "thank you."

"They said so," he replied to the latest question.

"Those men. The Tucker twins. They are seventy, and hale old fellows. I'll warrant you know how to work. You are not fourteen. You shall do a boy's work and *be* a boy. You *may* grow to be as tall as old Christopher himself. There's plenty of man-timber in you. Now come and see what the women-folks will say to you."

Joe shrank back.

"I thought I was going to live with you."

"And you thought I lived alone like the other old men? I'm a miserable old bachelor, but I've got plenty of women-folks, thank the Lord."

A little girl rushed to the door, and a barking Scotch terrier made a spring at the new-comer.

"Oh, what a dog," Joe exclaimed, stooping to catch frisking, curly Doodles into his arms. Homesick for Mrs. Evans, frightened and glad, he followed the old man into the kitchen with the curly dog in his arms.

"Affy, here's the boy I've been looking for, and you've been praying for, I've no doubt."

Aunt Affy turned and looked at the boy: short, stout, dirty, ragged, with a shock of uncombed black hair,

a lock falling over his forehead, long black eyelashes concealed the eyes he kept shyly fixed upon the curly bundle in his arms.

“What is your name, dear?” she inquired.

Joe had never heard “dear” before, but supposed she must be speaking to him; he raised his eyes and smiled; they were shy, honest eyes; Aunt Affy smiled too.

“I am Joe,” he said, pulling Doodles’ ears.

“Do you remember your father and mother?”

“No; I don’t remember nobody but Chris and Sam.”

“Is your name Joseph?”

“I don’t know; I never thought. I guess it’s Joseph—or Jo—no, now I remember another name: *Josiah*. Is that a boy’s name?”

“A boy’s name, and a king’s name. I am glad your name is Josiah. I will tell you about him some time.”

The little girl stood near the lady, but she did not stare at him, and Joe gave her glances now and then from under his long lashes; he would like to know her name, and what she was here for. A man’s fur cap covered the black head; when he left the house, angry and discouraged, he had put upon his head the first thing he seized.

“Doodles hasn’t given you time to take your hat off, Joe, or did you forget?” suggested Aunt Affy’s unreproachful voice.

“Didn’t forget it,” said Joe, pulling it off and dropping it on the floor. “They used to eat with their hats on, but I always took mine off.”

“I should think you would,” exclaimed indignant Judith.

Joe put his cheek down upon Doodles’ head, smoothing the sleeping head with his brown cheek.

“What is the dog’s name?” he inquired.

“Doodles,” answered Judith, hastening to speak to the rude, strange boy who had traveled from an unknown country.

“O, Doodles, Doodles, Doodles,” whispered Joe, in a fond voice, rubbing his cheek on the soft head.

“Well, Joe, do you love cows as well as dogs?” inquired Mr. Brush.

“Yes,” said Joe, thinking of the cow that was missing him to-night. He hoped she was asleep now. “But I’m glad I found Doodles.”

“Now, Joe, drop Doodles,” said Aunt Affy, “and follow me up these kitchen stairs. I have a room ready for an obedient, truthful, industrious boy.”

“Now, Joe, drop Doodles,” said Aunt Affy,
“and follow me up these kitchen stairs.”

“Where is *he*?” asked Joe, lifting his shaggy head.

They all laughed, and laughing, also, Joe followed the plump, sweet-faced lady up the kitchen stairs.

IX. THE FLOWERS THAT CAME TO THE WELL.

“He might have made the earth bring forth
Enough for great and small,
The oak tree and the cedar tree,
And not a flower at all.”

—Mary Howitt.

Nettie Evans sat in her invalid chair leaning forward with her chin on the window-sill looking down into her father’s untidy back yard.

The only pleasant thing in it was a lilac bush that was a marvel of beauty when it was in bloom, but that had faded many weary days ago, leaving ugly brown bunches where the lilacs had been; there were two well-worn paths, one leading to the kitchen door, and the other to the well, and nothing besides, excepting weeds with a background of apple orchard. If Nettie had raised her eyes she would have seen woods, and hills and fields of grain, a bit of road, a wooden bridge, and a deep blue sky full of puffy, white clouds, but she would not raise her eyes; when her back ached as it did to-day she never saw anything but the weeds in the yard, especially those tall rag-weeds growing close around the well. Her father had promised to “clear up” the yard after planting, but planting had come and gone, and he was still too busy.

“Oh, if I were only able to pull weeds,” she sighed.

It was a very gentle sigh, she was not strong enough to sigh heavily. Three years ago she could shout and run, to-day she could not move her feet, and there were many days during the year when she must lie still in bed.

In winter, she had a south room, at the front of house, where she saw the rising and the setting sun, and had a good view of all the people who passed back and forth from the village; in summer, she had this cool north room that looked out on the back yard.

The back yard was full of interest to her—when she could forget the weeds. Twenty times a day her mother came to the kitchen door to look up at her, and tell her how the work was going on; she knew what was cooking by the odors that came up to her and what all the noises meant, from the click of the egg-beater to the thud of the churn-dasher, and she saw old Mrs. Finch when she came to borrow baking

powder, and the pedlars, and book-agents, and apple-tree men; but best of all she liked to watch for her father to come in to dinner and supper.

In blue flannel shirt and big straw hat, tired and dusty and warm, he never failed to look up and call: “Why, hello, you there, daughter?” just as if she were well, and had only run up stairs for a moment. And her weak, “I’m here, father,” made the sadness and the happiness of his life.

Nettie moved her head slightly, and gained a view of the pasture where three cows were feeding; she could not see the brook, but she knew that it ran through the pasture, and she knew there were blue lilies all along the brook, some of them growing in the water.

How she longed to see those lilies growing in the water!

She was only ten years old the last time she saw those lilies: she was driving home the cows at night, in her pink calico dress and stout leather shoes, with her father’s old straw hat on the back of her head, “a picture of a happy, healthy, country lassie,” her father thought as he watched her standing by the clump of lilies while she waited for the cows to drink. She was thinking she would gather a big bunch of the lilies as soon as they were opened the next morning—but the pet calf came behind her and butted her down, and her father carried home in his arms a helpless little daughter. And there were tiger lilies in bloom; she could not see the place where they were growing, but it was only a quarter of a mile away in a fence corner, such a patch of them! Oh, how she longed to see those tiger lilies growing! The last time she saw the tiger lilies was the Sunday before she said good-bye to the blue lilies—she was walking home alone from Sunday-school in white dress and blue ribbons, and brown kid shoes, and when she came to the fence corner with the great clump of tiger lilies, she thought of picking a large bunch of them, but just then she heard a noise behind her, and turning, saw a neighbor’s three little black and white pigs; they had followed her all the way from the corner, and it was so funny to think how she had walked along unconsciously, with those pigs in single file behind her, that she just stood and laughed, and then she clapped her hands at them and chased them back, and forgot all about the tiger lilies.

“Oh, blue lilies, oh, tiger lilies, I’ll *never* see you growing any more,” she sighed.

“Why, hello, daughter, you up there?” called the voice below her.

Nettie did not answer; she felt too discouraged to speak, but she looked down and tried to smile at her father.

Her father looked just as usual, only he had a scythe over his shoulder.

“I came in a little earlier to cut down your weeds,” he called cheerily.

Nettie watched him as he swung the scythe, and listened to the swish, swish, as the tall weeds fell; when the weeds around the well grew less she caught a glimpse of something blue, and then of something red; she pulled herself up to the window, and leaned out, and then she shrieked:—

“Father, don’t cut down the *lilies*!”

There they were, blue lilies and tiger lilies, growing together, close by the well!

“How did they *get* there, father?” she called.

“They must have been in the sod that I put around the well last fall,” he replied; “I remember now that I got it from two different places. If I had cut down the weeds before the lilies bloomed, I shouldn’t have known they were there, and should have cut them all down together.”

Nettie fell back in her chair with a sigh of delight, watching her father while with his hands he pulled all the weeds away from the lilies.

“Mother,” she called, lifting herself forward, and resting her chin again on the window-sill.

“Well, Deary,” came in a quick voice from the shed, and her mother appeared in the shed doorway with the dish of boiled potatoes she held in her hand when Nettie’s voice reached her.

“Mother, will you ask Judith to stop and see my lilies the next time she goes past?”

“Your lilies, child?”

“Yes, my own lilies, there by the well. They came and grew just for me.”

Mrs. Evans gave a glance toward the well, then hastened to set the potato dish on the dinner table.

“Of all things! And how she has wanted to see lilies grow! The blessed child is watched over and done for as her father and I can’t do. I declare,” in a shame-faced way, all to herself, “when such things happen I wish I was a Christian.”

“Mother, mother,” called the happy voice again; “I want Joe to see my lilies too.”

“Yes, Deary,” promised her mother from within the shed.

X. THE LAST APPLE.

> “God loves not only a cheerful giver, but a cheerful worker as well.”
>
> —Fletcher Reade.

That afternoon as Nettie was slowly rousing herself from her afternoon nap in her chair, she heard a low, joyful exclamation under her windows.

“Oh, lovely. Mrs. Evans, it’s like—a poem.”

Then a light flashed over the pale face, and Nettie lifted herself forward to look, and to speak.

“O, Judith, I wanted you to see them. You do love pretty things so.”

Judith came through the shed, and up the narrow rag-carpeted stairs to the open door of Nettie’s chamber.

“I wish you would write a poem for me.”

Nettie Evans was Judith’s “public,” and a most enthusiastic one; the young author looked very grave one day when Nettie told her that she liked her poems better than the ones she read to her from the Longfellow book.

“I have brought a poem for you; no one has seen it yet; I’ve copied it to send to my Cousin Don; you know he’s in Switzerland, climbing mountains, and having splendid times. It happened one Thanksgiving—I was here in the country, you remember, with my mother. I saw one rosy apple left on the top of a tree, and I felt so sorry for it. One day I thought of it again, and I wrote this.”

Judith drew her chair close to Nettie’s and took the folded sheet of note paper from her pocket.

“Oh, I wish I could make poems and sew carpet rags,” moaned Nettie.

Judith dared not say she wished she might, she dared not pity her, or look at her; she unfolded her poem and began to read:—

THE LAST APPLE.

I am a rosy-cheeked apple,
    Left all alone on the tree,
And in the cold wind I am sighing,
    ‘Oh, what will become of me.’

Nettie nodded approval, and the poet read modestly on:—

They’ve picked my sisters and cousins,
 But I was too little to see;
Now, they will be eaten at Christmas,
 But nothing will happen to me.

The beets are pulled, and the parsnips
 Are cosily left in the ground—
When the farmer counts up his produce,
 No record of me will be found.

I was as pretty a blossom
 As ever gave sweets to a bee;
But ’mong the good things for winter,
 No one will be thankful for me.

There’s place for radish and carrot,
 Though common as common can be,
And I wonder, wonder, wonder,
 Why *I* was left on the tree.

Oh, here comes poor little Sadie,
 With her face all wet with tears;
A face so pale and hardened,
 But not with the lapse of years.

Now, fly to my aid, dear cold wind,
 And receive my last command,—
With a twist, and turn and flutter,
 Just drop me into her hand.

In Nettie’s radiant face and tear-filled eyes Judith found the appreciation for which her soul thirsted.

“That’s *lovely*,” exclaimed Nettie, “may I keep it and learn it?”

“Of course you may. I’ll copy it for you.”

“And I’ll say it in the night if I cannot go to sleep. How much I’ve had in one day. The lilies and the red apple. Don’t you believe that if you can’t go out and get things *they always come*?”

“But part of the fun is going out to get them,” said Judith, and then, in quick penitence, “but it must be so lovely to have them come to you.”

“Agnes Trembly came yesterday to make me a new blue wrapper; I like to have her sew here with me. Her mother is blind and that is harder than my lot. Agnes said she wished she was a queen. But I never thought of that.”

“Now I’ll tell you a story. There is a little girl somewhere who *is* a queen, and sometimes she has to sit in state and receive people, and do other queenly things. One day when she was playing with her dolls, what do you think she said?”

“What?” asked Nettie, her face beaming.

“*If you are naughty again, I will make you a queen.*”

Nettie laughed to the story-teller’s content.

“Now, I’ll tell you a chicken story. This happened to me. Aunt Rody often lets me help her feed the chickens. We had a brood of little chickens, and all died but two of them; I don’t know why, I took good care of them. One morning I found the mother dead. And what do you think?—those two poor motherless little sisters cuddled under their dead mother’s wing. I would like to write a poem about that, only it breaks my heart, and I like to write about happy things. The next day one of them died, and the left one hadn’t any chicken companion. And then, what do you think? A hen mother who had only one chicken, deserted that and went to roost; and this one little black chicken tried to make friends with the sisterless little white chicken. It was too pretty to watch them. The one whose mother deserted went into her little coop and called and called to the other one; but the white chicken didn’t understand at first; when she *did* understand, the black chicken made it so plain, and she ran to the coop, and the little black chicken and the little white chicken cuddled together as loving and happy as could be.”

“You can put that into a poem,” suggested Nettie, her eyes alight with Judith’s presence and stories.

“Nettie,” said Judith, impulsively, “I love to have you to tell things to.”

XI. HOW JEAN HAD AN OUTING.

> "Is it warm in that green valley,
> Vale of Childhood, where you dwell?
> Is it calm in that green valley,
> Round whose bourns such great hills swell?
> Are there giants in the valley,
> Giants leaving foot-prints yet?
> Are there angels in the valley?
> Tell me—I forget."
>
> —JEAN INGELOW.

Jean had been crying; in fact, she was crying now, but the tears were stopped on their way down her cheeks by the rush of her new thought. She was always having new thoughts; but this was the most splendid new thought she had ever had in her fourteen years of life.

"I'll do it!" she exclaimed aloud, springing to her feet. "I'll just do it, and nobody will know but myself. I'll go away to a new place and stay two weeks."

In her delight she clapped her hands and whirled about the room. It was such a small room to clap your hands and whirl about in. That was the cause of her tears—that small room; that and the house, the farm, and everything she had to do—and doing the same disagreeable things every day, and never going anywhere.

School closed yesterday; and this morning Sophie Elting, her best friend, had gone away, for an *outing* she called it, with a little city air she had caught from her cousins. She was going to the sea-shore to be gone two weeks.

"I'll play go," cried Jean, "and I'll stay at home and do all the things here that people do when they go on an outing."

The first thing was to pack up. Sophie had a new trunk, and had shown her all her pretty things packed snugly in it: cologne, a box of paper, new handkerchiefs, and ever so many things to go on an outing with. How could Jean play she had things which she hadn't? And she had no trunk. She would "pack" in a shawl-strap.

She put in her Sunday dress, her morning gingham, two white aprons, her Bible and tooth-brush. She had ever so many things to take on an outing. In half an hour her shawl-strap was packed. She looked down at it with a sigh of relief and pleasure. Now she had started.

"Jean," came up the stairway, "do you want to go to town?"

Of course she did! The coming back would be "getting there." She was going into the country for two weeks to board. The boarding was a part of it. She had never boarded in her life; she would be a summer boarder at Daisy Farm.

"There's the butter to take," the voice at the foot of the stairs went on, "and you may as well get your shoes, and I'll give you twenty-five cents to spend as you like."

"Oh, thank you!" cried Jean, delightedly. That would buy a box of paper and envelopes, and she had twenty cents for stamps. She could not think of another thing she wanted.

At six o'clock that afternoon, when Jean drove back into the yard with her father, she had two packages, her shoes and the box of paper. She had not been her usual talkative self on the way home. This gentleman sitting beside her was the farmer to whose house she was going. He had met her at the train. She was looking about the country and admiring things; she found seven things to admire which she had never noticed before. At the tea-table she intended to talk about them—"rave," as the summer boarders did.

She went up to her little room and gravely unpacked her shawl-strap, putting the things into the drawers and the closet.

Her sister Lottie was setting the tea-table,—not in her play, but in sober reality,—and it was Minnie's turn to milk to-night. The four sisters shared the housework with their mother; Jean was number three. Pet, eleven years old, was the youngest.

"I must take a great interest in everybody," Jean said to herself. "Boarders always do. I must try to do good to somebody, as Mrs. Lane helped me last summer."

At the supper-table she began to talk about the beautiful five-mile drive from town, and the sunset from the top of the hill.

"It *is* pretty," said Minnie.

"And the bridge with the willows. It is pretty enough for a picture; and the ducks sailing down the

stream.”

“I always said we had pretty things near home,” remarked her father.

Then Lottie found a nook in the woods to talk about, and Pet told of a place like a cave, and the view on the top after you climbed the big rock. The tired mother brightened. After supper Jean followed her father out the back door and stood beside him.

“How is the watermelon patch doing?” she asked, in a voice of great interest, after thinking a minute.

“Finely! Never so well before. Come and look at it.”

It was a pleasant walk. Jean imagined that she had a white shawl thrown about her, and once in a while gave it a twitch as she listened while the farmer talked about his melons. She asked questions she had never thought of asking before, and learned several new things about the farm.

“It’s a good thing to be a good farmer,” she said. “I never thought before how much farmers had to know.” Her father looked pleased.

It was Jean’s work to wash the milk-pails and milk-pans. She did it that night with a sense of enjoyment which she had never had before, for she was simply “helping” of her own accord. She would be very helpful; she would try to make these strangers care very much for her. She would watch every day to see what she could do for them. Mrs. Lane last summer had taught the class in the Sunday-school to which Jean belonged, and had said that “all must try to be a blessing to every one whom their life touched.” It appeared to Jean that her life touched everybody’s in this house.

Sunday was a wonderful day. She listened to the new preacher, and the new Sunday-school was certainly very pleasant. She spoke to a little girl she had never noticed before, and gave a rose to Julia Weed, whom she had always disliked. She was trying to be like Mrs. Lane.

In the evening she stayed at home from church with her mother, because her mother’s head ached; and when, for the first time in her life, she proposed reading her Sunday-school book to her mother, she was both pleased and rebuked to hear her reply, “Oh yes, I should like it! I can’t read evenings, and I often think how interesting your books look.”

“And if I can’t finish it to-night, may I read tomorrow night?” Jean asked eagerly.

“If I am not too tired.”

“But it will rest you.”

“Perhaps so. It will be something new.”

Something new for her to be thoughtful about her own hard-working mother! And she had to imagine herself in somebody else’s home to think of it.

What a day Monday was! She was busy all the morning, “helping,” and she found it good fun. In the afternoon she wrote a long letter to Sophie, and she had so much to tell that she filled three sheets. In the evening she read aloud to her mother, and her father listened, after he read his paper, and said it was a “jolly good book.”

When she left the room to go to bed, she said, “Good night!” Usually she forgot it. She was careful to remember “thank you,” and “please.”

It was not her turn to iron. To-morrow would be a long, hot ironing day, and there were so many starched things this week. Lottie was in a hurry to finish the pink muslin she was making for herself. If she should offer to iron two hours, and let Lottie sew—but how she hated to iron!

Still, she could only stay with these people two weeks—and there was nothing else Lottie would like so much; she and Lottie had not been very good friends lately, and this would “make up.” She was the one to make up, for she had been cross and had refused to do her work in order to let Lottie go to the picnic. Minnie did it, and let Lottie go, and Jean had felt mean ever since.

But she was only fourteen, and it was vacation. But Mrs. Lane said—and now she wished she hadn’t!—that nobody ever had a vacation from doing kind things.

She could help iron next week. This was her week.

“I guess it’s God’s week!” This was one of Jean’s new thoughts. Going into your own home like a new somebody was very hard work; she almost wished she were not a summer boarder, that she had stayed at home! And this last thought was so funny that the people down-stairs heard her laughing.

“Jean is a happy child,” said her mother.

“Yes, she seems to have a new kink,” replied her father. “She is taking a sudden interest in everything. I used to think she hated the farm and everything about it. The farm is all I’ve got to give my girls, and it hurts me to have them care nothing about it.”

“It’s vacation, and she’s more rested,” said Minnie. “She loves books better than any of us, and studies harder.”

“I don’t know what the secret is, but I’m glad of it,” her father replied.

With a brave heart the next morning Jean asked Lottie if she might iron two hours and let her sew on her pink muslin.

“You blessed child!” cried Lottie. “I had thought I must sit up all night to get it done for tomorrow. Two hours will be a great lift.”

Ironing was hot and hard work, beside being extremely unpleasant work to Jean; but she pushed the two hours into three, and never was so happy in her life as when her oldest sister gave her an unaccustomed kiss, which was even better than her words: “I won’t forget this, Jeanie.”

Wednesday morning Jean remembered that, as a stranger, she must learn something about the village and the village people. Bensalem was a pretty village with one long street, two churches, one store, a post-office, and an old school-house. She had another thought to-day; this, too, grew out of something Mrs. Lane said at Sunday-school. “Bind something, if you can; make some good thing fast, like forming a little society.”

How she would like to do that! She counted over the girls she liked best. There were nine, and ten would form a society, bound fast together. This she regarded as a very promising new thought. But what should it be for? Jean pondered a great deal, but she could think of nothing but her “outing.”

Her outing! Why shouldn’t it be an Outing Society—not to get up real vacations for people, but to get them out of themselves, and into the way of helping things along, and beginning right at home. For that was the curious part of it—that you didn’t have to go away anywhere. It seemed to come to you.

Jean resolved to call on the girls and tell them about it, and ask them to come to her house and talk it over. She knew now what she would call it: The Outing Ten.

First she would call at the Parsonage and tell Miss Marion about it, and ask her what to do first and next.

But she could not tell Miss Marion about it all herself; perhaps Judith Mackenzie would go; Judith knew Miss Marion better than any of the girls. She was always staying at the Parsonage “for company” for Miss Marion.

XII. A SECRET ERRAND.

“Say not ‘small event’! Why ‘small’?
Costs it more pain than this, ye call
A ‘great event,’ should come to pass,
Than that? Untwine me from the mass
Of deeds which make up life, one deed
Power shall fall short in or exceed!”

—Robert Browning.

On the lounge in the sitting-room, Judith lay cuddled up with a rare ailment for her, a throbbing headache; Aunt Affy had brought a pillow from her own entry bedroom, and bathed her forehead with Florida water; then brushed her hair for a long time and told her a story about her far-away girlhood, “when Becky and Cephas and I had our good times. Not that we don’t have good times now; Becky has hers up yonder, and poor Cephas and I do the best we can for each other down here.”

Judith wondered why she should say “poor Cephas”; he had laughing eyes, and a merry laugh, and everything that happened to him seemed just the very best thing that could happen.

Aunt Rody had brewed a bowl of bitter stuff and stood threateningly near while Judith lifted her dizzy head and forced herself to taste it.

“More,” urged Aunt Rody.

She tasted again.

“More,” insisted Aunt Rody.

She tasted several times with a look of pitiful appeal that Aunt Rody resisted.

“More,” commanded Aunt Rody.

“I can’t,” sobbed Judith, but she obeyed, and Aunt Rody set the yellow bowl on a chair by the sofa, that she might taste it whenever she felt like it.

Homesick Judith hid her face in the small pillow as soon as she was left alone, and cried; she cried for her mother not a year dead, for her father whom she scarcely remembered, for the pretty room she had with her mother in her own city home, for her picture of the Madonna with the child, that Aunt Rody declared popish and would not suffer, even in Judith’s own room; then she cried because Miss Kenney had not come yesterday, as she half promised, and then because Aunt Rody had made Cephas say that she should not run about in the fields with him, but stay in the house these wonderful days and sew carpet rags; and then, if she cried about anything she cried in her sleep; a soft step was in the room, the lightest touch covered her with Aunt Affy’s fleecy white shawl.

“Sit down,” whispered Aunt Affy’s voice, “she is fast asleep; she is a good sleeper, we shall not disturb her; I shouldn’t wonder if she had fits of home-sickness; she never tells; we are all old folks; Rody thinks she doesn’t need any more schooling because she can do sums and writes such a handsome hand, so she doesn’t go to school—and doesn’t know many young folks. Rody never *did* understand young folks, you know that.”

“I should think *you* knew that,” replied the other whispering, indignant voice. “So Cephas is back again; he was gone five years, wasn’t he?”

“Five this last time, three the other time.”

Judith stirred, pushed the white wool away from her face, and listened.

“He was good to go,” replied the still indignant voice.

Judith made a soft rustle; Aunt Affy did not heed it.

“Yes, he *was* good,” assented Aunt Affy’s sweet, old voice, “he is always ready to do the thing that’s happiest for me. He was so homesick and wrote such heart-rending letters that I couldn’t stand it. Rody sniffed, as she has always sniffed at us, but she said he might come back if we were both so set on it, so shamelessly set on it.”

Judith’s little protesting groan was not noticed; then she shut her eyes and listened, because she could not help it.

“It’s a burning shame, and the sister you have been to her, too. You took your money and bought your sisters out that you might keep the old place for Rody.”

“I wanted it for myself, too,” was Aunt Affy’s honest reply.

“But you could have taken your money and married Cephas—”

“But, you see, she never could bear the thought of my marrying at all; she doesn’t dislike Cephas so much, but she wants me all to herself. She doesn’t like men, I’ll allow that; she never had any kind of happy experience herself, unless it happened before I was born, and she doesn’t *know*. After Becky died, Cephas and I had to comfort each other; Rody never was a great hand at comforting, and the other girls were all dead or married. She had been a mother to me all my life; I was a two week’s old baby left in her care; and Becky was only two years old; we were her two babies.”

“You had whippings and scoldings enough thrown in, I’ll be bound,” was the visitor’s tart rejoinder.

“The scoldings are thrown in now,” said Aunt Affy, with the glimmer of a smile; “I am only a girl to her; I shall never grow up to her; not old enough to be married, sixty years old as I am. Cephas told her yesterday that he would fix up the old house with his own money, he has considerable laid by, and she dared him to pull off a shingle or drive a nail. He said she should always be the head of the house, and she said there was no need for him to tell her *that*. You see that we could not be happy in making her old age unhappy. She is so old that defiance might kill her; she is eighty-four.”

“I’d *let* it kill her then,” said Miss Affy’s life-long friend.

“No, you wouldn’t. Your sister is your sister, and she is all the mother I ever knew. Cephas and I jog on together like two old married folks. She says we will be glad when she is under the sod and we can have our own way.”

“She might let you have it now, and then you wouldn’t be glad,” urged Jean Draper’s mother.

“She cannot let us have it; her own will is too strong for her; when she gives up to us she will die.”

“Then I’d do it anyway,” counselled the other voice.

“We did talk of that, but we are afraid to—she is so old,” whispered Aunt Affy, feeling faint with the very thought of it.

“Well, it’s an old folks’ romance, and I didn’t know old folks had any,” said the woman who was married at sixteen.

But the girl on the lounge with her face in the pillow had listened; she had listened and learned something Aunt Affy would not have told her for the world.

How could she ever look into Aunt Affy's face again? And, oh, how could she ever love Aunt Rody?

She groaned, and Aunt Affy came to her and asked if she felt worse. The neighbor went out on tiptoe; Aunt Rody came from the kitchen to stand threateningly near while Aunt Affy coaxed mouthful by mouthful the draining of the bitter bowl.

While Aunt Rody was taking her nap that afternoon Jean Draper knocked on the open kitchen door. Judith and Aunt Affy were washing dishes together at the kitchen sink; Judith gave a cry of pleased surprise at the sound of the knock and the vision of the girl in the doorway.

"O, Jean, I *wished* for you," she said, with the longing for young companionship in her heart.

"And I wanted you. I am going to see Miss Marion on a secret errand, and I can't do it without you. Can you spare her, Miss Affy?"

"If her head will let her go," began Miss Affy, doubtfully.

"Oh, that's well," cried Judith, joyfully, "but what will Aunt Rody say?" she questioned in dismay.

"I will take care of that," promised Aunt Affy, anticipating with dread the half hour's scolding the permission would bring upon herself.

"You are making her a gad-about just like yourself," the monologue would begin.

"Are you *sure*, Aunt Affy, dear?" asked Judith, anxiously.

"Yes, sure. Run away and put on your new gingham."

XIII. THE TWO BLESSED THINGS.

"In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and
He shall direct thy paths."

—*Prov.* III. 6.

"How excellent a thought to me
Thy loving-kindness then shall be!
Thus in the shadow of Thy wings
I'll hide me from all troublous things."

"My life is like Africa; there are no paths anywhere," said Marion. She was not petulant; the tone was not petulant; Marion knew she thought she was bearing her life bravely. The study was cool and darkened that August afternoon; she lay idly upon the lounge, a fresh magazine in her lap, and a pile of books on the carpet within reach of her idle hands.

A year ago she thought she loved books—and music, and life.

Roger liked to have her near him while he wrote and studied, but he did not like her idle moods. This latest one had lasted two days.

He pushed his large volume away, and taking up an ivory paper cutter began to run its sharp edges across his fingers. Marion was easily hurt; he could not advise work as he did yesterday.

"If your life were like Africa," he began in an unsuggestive tone, "you would have a beaten track wherever you turned; no unmapped country in the world is better supplied with paths than this same Africa that your hedged-in life is like. Every village is connected with some other village by a path; you can follow ziz-zag paths from Zanzibar to the Atlantic; they are beaten as hard as adamant; they are made by centuries of native traffic."

"I have learned something about Africa," she answered, demurely, "if not about my life."

"Which are you the more interested in?"

"Oh, Africa, just now. I am not interested in my life at all."

"Marion, dear, is Bensalem a failure?"

"Yes, as far as I am concerned. Not for you, dear old boy; it is splendid for you, and for Bensalem. Even Judith listens in church."

"I know she does. I write my sermons for her."

“For a girl? How do you expect to reach other people, then?” she inquired, surprised.

“The inspiration came to me, that Sunday she told me she was sorry for not listening, to begin all over again—to look at life from a fresh standpoint, from the standpoint of youth, ardent, hungry, sensation-loving youth—”

“Sensation—”

“Not in its usual acceptation; truth cannot but give you a sensation; I knew it would not hurt the old people and the middle-aged to begin again; to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as a little child, and I have attempted to teach the children in the Kingdom of Heaven; to talk simply about the grand old truths; to keep that girl before me as I thought out my sermons—a thoughtful girl who has had some experience in life, and when a thought or the expression of it was over her head, I struck it out.”

“Now I know your secret. ‘Simplicity and strength’ are your characteristics, David Prince, our literary blacksmith, who wrote Bensalem up for the Dunellen *News*, was pleased to say. Shall you keep this up?”

“Until I find a better way,” he said, contentedly.

“Everybody listens.”

“Even Miss Rody,” he said, smiling at the memory of Miss Rody’s face.

“And all the other old folks. Old folks and children. What about the young men and maidens?”

“Aren’t ‘simplicity and strength’ good enough for them?” he inquired, seriously.

“It’s good enough for me.”

“Not quite,” he answered.

“Why?”

“You listen, of course.”

“But I do not grow fast enough? Roger, I’ve stopped growing. I knew something was the matter with me, and that’s it.”

“A pretty serious *it*.”

“I know that better than you can tell me. I wish Judith Grey Mackenzie—how Aunt Rody brings that out—would give *me* an inspiration.”

“Bring her here for a week and I’ll promise that she will.”

“Aunt Affy could not spare her. Her yellow head is the sunshine of that old house. But I’ll have her some day. I wish I *owned* her.”

“I wish you did. I would buy her myself if I had money enough.”

“I wonder who *does* own her,” said Marion; “I forgot that she does not belong to anybody.”

“She does belong to somebody. Her mother gave her to Aunt Affy.”

Perhaps she belonged somewhat to her “Cousin Don.”

Roger never talked about Don. He never read aloud to her the foreign letters she saw so often on the study table.

A sigh came of itself before she could stifle it; the idle fingers opened the magazine; Roger’s pen began to race across the paper. Voices on the piazza brought Marion to her feet; Judith’s voice was in the hall.

“O, Miss Marion, we came to tell you—” began Judith.

“And to ask you how—” continued Jean.

“To make an Outing Ten,” finished Judith.

At the tea-table Marion told Roger the story of how Jean had an outing.

“I wish you might have heard the unconscious way she told it. My life *is* like Africa: all beaten tracks. I am to be the President of the Outing Ten. All Bensalem is to be my own special private outing, but nobody is to know it.”

“Then, Marion dear, you will have the two most blessed things on the earth.”

“What are they?”

“Don’t you know?”

“You think work is one,” she said doubtfully.

“So you think. And companionship is the other.”

“Roger, dear, I’m afraid I haven’t given you companionship; I’ve been stupid, self-absorbed, idle—”

“Anything else?”

“But you have been desolate, sometimes.”

“My work has been my companionship.”

“Then there is only one blessed thing to you,” she said, merrily. “May you get it.”

“I am getting it every day.”

“Then you do not inwardly fret against the limitations of this bit of a village—” she began, frightened at herself for the suggestion: “I thought, perhaps, you were *bearing* Bensalem.”

“So I am, I hope,” he answered, gravely, “in my heart, and in my prayers.”

“I beg your pardon,” she returned, flushing under the “splendid purpose in his eyes.” “I might have known you were too broad to feel narrowed, as I do.”

“You remember what Lowell says: ‘There are few brains that would not be better for living for a while on their own fat.’”

“And that is better than the fat of the land—which you will never get in Bensalem.”

“I think I started from my new standpoint without worldly ambition. Think of Paul writing the Epistle to the Romans from a literary point of view.”

“Well, then,” with a laugh that was half a grumble, “I despair of you, if you ‘take pleasure’ as he did in all sorts of infirmities and limitations—I was beginning to be ambitious for you. You spent all the afternoon last week with Agnes Trembly’s mother, reading to her, and telling her stories—you do not take time to *study* as you used to study. You were such a student. Now all you care for is people—and the Bible,” she ran on, discontentedly; “What does Don think of you?” she asked, with a sudden flush.

“He is in despair,” he replied, thinking of Don’s latest letter of angry expostulation.

“He is ambitious,” said Marion, reproachfully.

“So am I,” he answered, smiling at the reproach.

“But in such a way. I like ambition. I would like to do something in the world myself.”

“The man, or woman, or child, who does the will of God is every day doing something in the world,” he said, seriously.

For a moment she was silenced, then urged by her own discontent she burst out:—

“But five hundred or a thousand people might as well listen to you, and be influenced by your ‘strength and simplicity,’ as this handful of Bensalem.”

“The perfect Teacher was more than once content with but one listener.”

“Yes; but his sermon was written and handed down to all the ages,” she answered, in a flash.

“If one life here in Bensalem is moved, and another life moved by that, who can tell how far down the ages the influence may go? Beside, that is not my care,” he said, in his rested voice.

“But *wouldn’t* you, now, candidly, rather influence ten hundred lives than one hundred?”

“Candidly, I would.”

“And, yet, you have refused a call to Maverick, and stay stupidly here.”

“Stupidly is your own interpretation. I will be content to move one man if I might choose the man. I am determined to learn what can be done in a village by one man who stays for the ‘fat of the land,’ the youth. From Drummond’s standpoint, only the boy himself and the young man understand the boy. My outlook just now is from the standpoint of that big-eyed, sensitive-lipped Joe, and your Judith. Men and women are but boys and girls grown tall. I find out the boy; you are helping me to the girl.”

“I am glad I can help,” said Marion, satisfied.

XIV. AN AFTERNOON WITH AN ADVENTURE IN IT.

"Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil."

—*Luke* xi. 4.

"Lord, Thou knowest all things: Thou knowest that I love Thee."

—*John* xxi. 17.

It was rag-carpet afternoon; it was also another kind of an afternoon, an afternoon with an adventure in it, and Judith longed for adventures; but, of course, all she knew, at first, was the rag-carpet; the adventure was to happen in the kitchen, and the rag-carpet ball was happening in Aunt Affy's room.

Judith was a working member of the Outing Ten, but if her outing meant this rag-carpet ball it was very discouraging, and if it were not for the pleasure of telling the President about the rag-carpet, she thought she would resign and become member of a ten that had more fun in it.

But then, Miss Marion was doing this kind of thing herself, things she did not like to do about the house, for she had sent away her servant and was doing all the work excepting washing and ironing, and, perhaps, in the village, too, she was doing uncongenial errands; but, of course, she would never tell the Outing Ten about that; she was going out to tea and making calls, as she had said she never *would* do when she came to Bensalem, and she was taking her music back and practicing hours every day, and reading solid books, instead of novels; she had let books and music go for a while, Judith had heard her say to Aunt Affy, and that Jean Draper's outing had been the blessing of her life. It was Nettie's blessing, too; she told Marion she had an "outing" every day; she was patching a quilt and studying history.

The history study was a part of Marion's outing, but the Ten did not know that.

Aunt Affy, wearing a calico loose gown of lilac and white, was seated in a rocker at the window combing her long gray hair: her hair was soft and thick, she twisted it into a coil, and behind her each ear she brushed a long curl.

Judith liked to twist these curls around her fingers when she talked to Aunt Affy.

"Only a little more to do," encouraged Aunt Affy, giving her coil a firm twist.

Sitting on the matting at Aunt Affy's feet the little girl began her weary work again.

"Aunt Affy! How did you get your name?" she inquired with the eagerness of something new to talk about.

"How did you get yours?" asked Aunt Affy, seriously.

"But mine is a real name."

"Isn't mine?"

"I never heard it before."

"Some people have never heard of Judith."

"That is true. Nettie never had."

"Mine is in the Bible. So is Rody's."

"*Is* it? Well, I've never read the Bible through."

"I will show it to you."

"Aunt Affy, you and Aunt Rody never look in the glass when you comb your hair. You sit anywhere. It's very funny."

"When you have combed your hair sixty and eighty years you will not need to look in the glass," was the serious reply.

"It isn't sixty," said literal Judith. "You did not do it when you were a baby."

Taking her New Testament in large type from the small table near her, Aunt Affy found the place and laid it on the arm of her chair; Judith lifted herself and read where Aunt Affy's finger pointed: "And to our beloved Apphia—but that isn't Affy," said astonished Judith.

"It grew down to it when I was a girl, and has never grown up. Shall I find Rody?"

Again Aunt Affy found the place, and Judith read. "'And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken named Rhoda.' That's very funny," she said, settling down among her rags.

"There were eight of us girls, and we all had Bible names: Rody, Dark, that was Dorcas, Mary, Marthy,

Deborah, that's your mother's mother, Hanner, it is really Hannah, Becky, and Affy the youngest, is eight. Rody and I only are left. They were all married but Rody and Becky and me. Cephas was engaged to poor Becky, and she died; he went away after that, went South, went West, and at last came here; I wrote to him to come and finish his days with me. Rody wasn't exactly pleased."

"Why?" asked Judith, excited over the old folks' romance.

"She doesn't like new happenings, and she never *had* liked Cephas."

"She scolds him," said Judith, with a feeling of sympathy.

"She scolds me. She scolds the minister. It is only her way of talking."

At that moment Aunt Rody's blue gingham sunbonnet appeared at the window; Judith's nervous fingers worked hurriedly.

"Not done yet. Jean Draper is worth two of you. The graham bread is out of the oven, a perfect bake, and I am going to call on Mrs. Evans, and take Nettie a custard."

"Well," said Aunt Affy.

Aunt Rody's hair was white, but if it were soft to the touch, Judith's fingers would never know; her black eyes were deep set, she had not one tooth, and her wrinkled lips had a way of keeping themselves sternly shut, unless they were sternly opened.

"Joe is hunting eggs; I hope he won't get into mischief while I'm gone."

"He hasn't yet," said Judith, Joe's champion.

Joe, with his closely cut black hair, his grateful eyes, new gray suit with navy blue flannel shirt, rough shoes, willing and efficient ways, and his great love for Doodles, was some one not at all out of place on the "Sparrow farm;" even dainty Judith did not altogether disapprove his presence at the table.

The small disciple's forehead was all in a pucker, and the blue eyes were so filled with tears that there was not room enough in her eyes for them; one tear kept pushing another down over her cheeks; they even rolled over her lips and tasted salt.

"Have you noticed the name on my new darning yarn?" inquired Aunt Affy, replacing the New Testament on the table.

"Superior quality," read Judith, taking the card from the basket Aunt Affy brought to her lap from the table.

"No; on the top."

"Dorcas," read Judith.

"Dorcas. Who is that for?"

"The name of the man who made it," replied Judith, stopping her dawdling and threading her needle.

"I think not."

"His little girl's name, perhaps," ventured Judith.

"It may be, for aught I know; but I do not *think* that is the name of the wool."

"Then I don't know," said Judith, interestedly.

"I know something and I will tell you. A long, long, *long* time ago, there was a little girl; I think she learned to sew when she was a little girl, for she knew how to sew beautifully, and her work was strong and did not rip easily. Perhaps she began by doing disagreeable things and then went on to other things until she learned how to make coats and garments for children and grown-up people. Her name was Dorcas."

"Did the man who made the wool into yarn know about her?" asked Judith.

"I think so. Almost everybody does."

"I never heard of her before. Is that all?"

"No; that is only the beginning. She was a disciple. And disciples always love each other and work for each other."

"Do they?" asked Judith, her face glowing. Why, that was splendid and easy.

"And she worked for widows and perhaps for their little children, and they loved her dearly. But she died, and oh, how they grieved! They sent for another disciple, Peter; they thought he could help them. His faith was so great that he kneeled down and prayed; then he spoke to her, and she opened her eyes,

and looked at him, and then she sat up. And then he called the people she had made coats and garments for, and in great joy they had her back alive again. God was willing for her to come back to earth and go on with her beautiful work. He cares for the work of his disciples, even when it is only using thread and needle."

Judith's curly head drooped over her hated work; she was so ashamed of behaving "ugly"; she hoped she had not behaved quite as ugly as she felt.

The ball was the required size at last, and she joyfully took it up in the garret to the barrel that was only half filled.

Then, aimlessly, she wandered into the kitchen, and there, odorously, temptingly, under a clean, coarse towel, were the two loaves of warm graham bread; she thought she cared for nothing in the way of bread, cake, or pudding as much as she cared for fresh graham bread and butter.

And Aunt Rody never *would* put it on the table fresh. For a slice of this she must wait until tomorrow night.

Lifting the coarse towel she peeped, then she touched; another touch brought a crumb, such a delicious crumb; another, and another, and another delicious crumb, and the crust of one end of a loaf was all picked off.

"Oh, deary *me*!" cried Judith, in dismay.

Then she covered it carefully, standing spellbound.

What would Aunt Rody say to her?

What would Aunt Rody *do* to her?

Afraid to go away and leave the bread that would tell its own story, afraid to stay with it, for Aunt Rody's sunbonnet and heavy step might appear at any moment, she went to the sink to pump water over her hands and to decide what to do next.

Joe was on his way to the barn and stables to gather eggs; Aunt Rody had made a law that she should not go into any of the outbuildings without permission,—without *her* permission; in summer time there were "so many machines and things around, and children had a way of stepping into the jaws of death." She missed hunting the eggs.

The gate swung to, there was a step on the flagged path; with her hands dripping, she flew up the kitchen stairs; on the landing she waited, breathless, to hear what Aunt Rody would say.

The step was in the kitchen, there was a pause,—Aunt Rody must be uncovering the bread; a smothered exclamation, then a quick, angry voice: "*That* Joe! He's always doing something underhanded. He's too fond of eating; I will not say one word, but he shall not have any of *this* graham bread, or the next, if I can help it. When he asks for it I'll tell him before all the table-full that he *knows why*."

The awful sentence was delivered in an awful voice; tearful and trembling, the culprit up the stairway heard every word; it was her dreadful secret, her guilty secret; she no more dared to rush down the stairs and confess the theft than she dared—she could not think of any comparison.

She fled through the large, unfurnished chamber, known as the store-room, to her own room, and there, bolting the door, threw herself upon the bed and wept as she had never wept before; because she had never been so wicked and frightened before. Joe would be punished for her sin; she would not dare confess if Aunt Rody starved him to death.

"Judith, Judith, come out on the piazza," called Aunt Affy.

She peeped in the glass: her eyes were red, and her hair was tumbled; the latter was nothing new, she could sit in the hammock with her eyes away from Aunt Affy.

As she stepped from the sitting-room door to the piazza, Joe rushed around the corner of the house, an egg in each hand, frightened and out of breath.

"There's an earthquake—in the southern part of Africa—and I've been in it; and I'm afraid the house will go in; oh, what shall we do? Mr. Brush is up in the field—"

"Stand still, Joe, and get some breath to talk with, and then tell us what has happened to you," said Aunt Affy, quietly. Joe dropped on the piazza floor, still carefully holding the eggs.

"Will the house rock and come down, do you think, Aunt Affy, as the houses did in the book Judith read?"

"How did you get all that earth on your clothes and tear your shirt-sleeve?" Judith inquired, forgetting her red eyes in the latest adventure.

"In the earthquake; I went in almost up to my neck, but I held on with one hand and didn't break the eggs."

"Where *was* the earthquake?" she asked.

"In the sheep pen. I was looking for eggs, and the first I knew I felt the ground sliding, and I was going down—there was water, for I heard it splash. I thought you said *fire* was inside the earth; I went down into water. And I caught hold of something with one hand because I had two eggs in the other, and I pulled, and pulled, and pulled myself up and out."

"Why, Joe, you poor boy," exclaimed Aunt Affy, in alarm, "that old cistern has caved in at last, and you've been in it; you might have been drowned. What a mercy that you are safe. Don't you go near that sheep pen again until Mr. Brush says you may."

"I'll *never* go near it again—I've had enough of it. I *couldn't* scream—I tried to, but nobody heard. Are you sure it won't cave in again, and get here, and swallow up the house?"

"*That* will not," laughed Judith, "Oh, you queer boy."

"Then may I have some bread and butter?" he asked, rising. "I think it will turn me crazy if it caves in again."

"Aunt Rody is in the kitchen; tell her your story and ask her for the bread," replied Aunt Affy.

Judith trembled so that she could scarcely stand; she dared not follow Joe; she dared not stay where she was: Aunt Rody herself made a way of escape for her by coming to the kitchen door with a slice of graham bread in her hand.

"Here, Joe: I heard your story. Here's the bread. I hope you'll behave yourself after this. Now, Judith, you see the reason I keep you from hunting eggs. You might be dead in that cistern this moment."

"You couldn't pull yourself up as I did," remarked Joe, giving Aunt Rody the two eggs as she handed him the graham bread.

Judith drew a long breath of relief. Now she need never tell; Joe would not be punished.

That evening at family prayer Cephas read about the institution of the Lord's Supper and the betrayal of Christ: Joe shuffled his feet until a look from Aunt Rody quieted him; Judith looked as if she were listening, but she did not catch the meaning of a single sentence until something arrested her rapid, remorseful thinking: "And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looking upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying: Woman I know him not."

Peter was afraid. He was afraid to tell that woman. The small disciple looked at the old lady sitting in her high straight-backed chair, with her long hands so still in her lap, her lips tight shut, her eyes roving from Joe to Judith, and then to Joe, then the dreadful round again, and she thought the woman that frightened Peter must have been like Aunt Rody.

She knew how afraid Peter was.

She did not hear one word of the long prayer; she knelt near Aunt Rody; she tried not to sob, or to be afraid, but she *was* afraid; not now of being found out, but afraid that she was wicked. As long as she lived she would never dare to tell.

And she never did tell, not as long as Aunt Rody lived.

For many a day her heart was heavy with the sin of allowing the innocent to be suspected; but she was not a very brave small disciple.

One night at prayers she surprised them all by saying suddenly and vehemently: "I don't care if Peter *was* so wicked; I like him better than anybody in the whole Bible."

XV. "FIRST AT ANTIOCH."

"How beautiful it is to be alive!
To wake each morn as if the Maker's grace
Did us afresh from nothingness derive,
That we might sing: How happy is our case,
How beautiful it is to be alive."

—H. S. Sutton.

It was Saturday afternoon; Judith had been busy in the kitchen all the morning with Aunt Rody, and she (not Aunt Rody) had kept her temper; that was one happening that made the day memorable and

delightful, and then there were three others: one was her miracle, another the maidens that were going out to draw water, and the disciple from Antioch, and, most memorable of all, the plan for boarding-school.

The miracle happened in this way: Aunt Rody sent her to take a basket of things to Nettie Evans, a "Sunday surprise," Judith called it; tiny biscuits, jelly cake, and a little round box of figs.

Nettie had had a wearisome day (very much more dreadful than a Saturday morning in the kitchen with Aunt Rody, Judith told herself), and Mrs. Evans thought it better for her not to go up to Nettie's room, for the pain in her back was better, she had fallen asleep and she was afraid to have her disturbed.

"May I get a drink of water?" Judith asked. She always felt thirsty when she came near the plank that formed the ascent from the ground where the kitchen had been to the bit of floor that was left for the sink to stand on. The old kitchen had been torn down this summer, and nothing remained of it excepting the sink which contained the pump (the water came from the well where Nettie's lilies grew), the window over the sink, the roof overhead, and the walls on each side of the sink. She liked the fun of running up and down this plank, and she liked to stand and look out of this window toward the east. It was a window toward the east. Sometimes she thought about the Jews praying toward the east. She wished once that something would happen to this window because it *was* a window toward the east. A window facing the east in a house was not at all remarkable; but a window that was not in a house brought itself into very interesting prominence.

And this afternoon her something happened. There was a wonder in the heavens.

It was afternoon; she knew it was, she was sure of it; dinner was over hours ago; Aunt Rody had helped her wipe the dinner dishes, and Aunt Affy had gone to town with Uncle Cephas to take the week's butter to her customers; and she was on her way to the parsonage to sing hymns with Miss Marion, the hymns for church to-morrow, and she *never* went till afternoon. But there it was. The sun was in the east in the afternoon; round, peering through mist with a pale, yellow splendor; she saw something that no one in the world had ever seen. It was the sun rising in the afternoon.

It must be a miracle; a miracle in the window towards Jerusalem.

But the sun surely had not stood still ever since morning; it was high up when she stood in the back yard and rang the dinner bell for Uncle Cephas and Joe.

Was it a miracle just for her?

That *was* the east; it had been the east ever since she was born; it had been the east ever since the the world was made; and it was the *sun*.

It was nothing to see the full moon in the east; the last time she went driving with Miss Marion and Mr. Roger they saw the full moon in the east and he talked about it. This was not the full moon.

"Mrs. Evans, Mrs. Evans, quick, quick," she called, excitedly, fearing that her miracle would vanish.

Hurried steps crossed the new kitchen and Mrs. Evans appeared.

"What *is* it, child? Don't wake Nettie."

"Look," said Judith, with the dignity of a youthful prophetess, pointing to the apparition; "see the sun in the east in the afternoon."

Mrs. Evans stepped up the plank, and looked. It *was* the sun in the east in the afternoon.

"Well, I declare!" ejaculated Mrs. Evans, "that does beat all I ever saw. Where did it come from? How could it get there?" Startled, she turned, and toward the west, there was the big, round sun shining in all his glory.

"Oh, I see," with a breath of relief; "I thought the world must be coming to an end. It is the reflection. Look, don't you see? the sun is opposite the window. But it *is* a wonderful sight. I wish it would stay until I could call the neighbors in."

Judith looked at the west and reasoned about it; she turned toward the east, then to the west, then to the window again.

"So it is," with an inflection of disappointment.

Mrs. Evans laughed softly and hurried back to the new kitchen.

Judith pumped her glass of water with the radiance of two suns in her face.

"Little girl, little girl," called a voice from a buggy in the road, "will you direct me to the parsonage?"

"Go on straight up the hill, turn to the right and see the church; the next house is the parsonage," she replied with ready exactness.

"Thank you," said a second voice, with a foreign accent; the face bent forward was very dark, with dark

eyes, and dark beard.

Half an hour afterward she found Miss Marion in her own room, and before they went down to the parlor to the piano, she and Miss Marion read together in First Samuel.

They were reading the Bible through together; Marion told her brother that it was a revelation to her to read the Bible with a girl, and an old woman; it was looking forward and looking backward.

Judith read her three verses and then gave a joyful exclamation:—

"'And as they went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water, and said unto them: Is the seer here?

"'And they answered them and said, He is, behold he is before you; make haste, now, for he came to-day to the city, for there is a sacrifice of the people to-day in the high place; as soon as ye be come into the city, ye shall straightway find him, before he go up to the high place to eat, for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice; and afterwards they eat that be bidden. Now, therefore, get you up; for about this time ye shall find him.' Oh, Miss Marion, that is like me. I was getting a drink of water and I sent two men to find the Bensalem seer."

"Even Saul couldn't find the way without the maidens," reflected Marion.

"And they were put in the story for all the world to read about; I wish people wouldn't forget about girls now-a-days."

"Who does?" asked Marion; "this is the girls' century."

"I wish people wouldn't forget about girls now-a-days."
"Who does?" asked Marion; "this is the girls' century."

"Nobody ever thinks about me. I am never *in* things like the other girls. Aunt Rody will never let me go anywhere; Aunt Affy coaxed her one day, and cried and said she was spoiling my girlhood, but Aunt Rody was worse than ever after that. I cry night after night because she will not let me go to boarding-school. Boarding-school has been the dream of my life; I make pictures about it to myself. Did *you* go to boarding-school?"

"Yes, for one year, and was glad enough to go home again. I wish you would come to school to *me*; do you suppose you could?" asked Marion with a sudden and joyous inspiration.

"O, Miss Marion," was all the girl could reply for very gladness.

"We will plan about it, Roger and I. If you can come and stay all day and study, and take music lessons, three or four days a week, it will be better than boarding-school for you, and more than you can think for me. You have been on my mind, but I didn't dare propose anything; I knew Aunt Affy would not be allowed to have her way."

Both Judith's arms were about Marion's neck, with her face hidden on Marion's shoulder.

"I've wanted a sister all my life," she said laughing and crying together.

Sunday morning on entering church her attention was arrested by a large map stretched across the platform, or half-way across it; the pulpit had been removed and in its stead were flowers, a row of pink bloom and shades of green.

A tall gentleman, with the very blackest hair and beard she had ever seen, arose and stood near the map.

How her heart gave a throb when he said, touching a spot on the map: “That is Antioch, the place where the disciples were first called Christians. I was born in Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas preached Christ. I was born in Antioch, and I was re-born in Antioch.”

Judith held her breath. He was a disciple, a Christian come from Antioch. She drew back, almost afraid; she felt as if Christ must be there standing very near this disciple.

He talked about the beautiful city and made it as near and real as this little village in which there was a church of disciples. It was like seeing one of the twelve disciples, Peter, or James, or John; or perhaps Paul, because he had been in Antioch.

But he said he had been “reborn” there; what could he mean? Re—again; born again. Was he born twice in Antioch? She had been born only once. Must every disciple be born over like this disciple who was born both times in Antioch?

For a long time she puzzled herself over this new, strange thing; then, when she could not bear it any longer, she asked Aunt Affy.

“When he was born, and for years as he grew up, he did not love and obey Christ, and then the Holy Spirit gave him a loving and obedient heart, and that loving and obedient heart is so new that it is like being born over again,” was Aunt Affy’s simple, and sure unraveling of her perplexity.

XVI. ONE OF AUNT AFFY’S EXPERIENCES.

“O, Master, let me walk with Thee
In lowly paths of service free;
Tell me Thy secret; help me bear
The strain of toil; the fret of care.”

—Washington Gladden.

The dream of Judith’s girlhood was coming true in a most unexpected way; she did not go to boarding-school, but boarding-school came to her in Bensalem; four days every week she studied at the parsonage with Miss Marion, her cousin Don’s “brown girl”; the dinner was the boarding-school part; often she was persuaded to stay to supper, and sometimes there would be an excuse for her to remain over night.

Aunt Rody thought the excuses were much oftener than need be; she said “it seemed” that something was always going on at the parsonage; the parsonage was a worldly place with games, and company and music.

Cephas replied that the parsonage folks were not going out into the world, but bringing the world in and consecrating it; she must not forget that “God so loved the world.”

Aunt Rody retorted that He commanded his people not to love it, anyway. In his slow way Cephas replied: “He never told His people not to love it *His* way.”

The worldliness was not hurting Judith; nothing was hurting the little girl her mother left, when she shut her eyes upon all that would ever happen to her.

How it happened that she went to boarding-school she never knew; she knew Aunt Affy cried and could not sleep all one night, that for once in his sweet-tempered life Uncle Cephas was angry, and as he told the minister, “talked like a Dutch uncle to Rody”; she knew a letter came from cousin Don to Aunt Rody herself, and that Aunt Rody did not speak to anybody in the house, excepting innocent Joe, for three whole weeks.

In spite of Aunt Rody, Agnes Trembly made new dresses from the materials Miss Marion took Judith to New York to select, and a box of school books was sent by express, and another box with every latest thing in the way of school-room furnishing. A bureau in Miss Marion’s room was placed at the disposal of her goods, and one corner of a wardrobe was made ready for her dresses.

Still, with all her happy privileges, there was no place she called home; she said: “Aunt Affy’s” and “the parsonage.”

Once, speaking of Summer Avenue, she said “home” unconsciously. She rarely spoke of her mother. All her loneliness and desolation and heartaches she poured out in her letters to cousin Don. He

understood. She never thought that she must be “brave” for him.

Nothing since her mother went away comforted her like her boarding-school.

During one heart-opening twilight she confided to Marion about casting lots in the Bible to find out if she would ever go to boarding-school.

“What *did* you find?” asked Marion.

If she were shocked she kept the shock out of her voice. She told Roger afterward she was almost too shocked to speak.

“The queerest thing that meant nothing: ‘And a cubit on the one side and a cubit on the other side.’”

“I am glad you found that,” said Marion, “I think God wanted to help you by giving you that.”

“But it *didn’t* help; how could it?”

“It helps me.”

“It doesn’t sound like a Bible verse; it is just nothing,” persisted Judith.

“God’s words can never be ‘just nothing.’ Those words were something to somebody, and they are a great deal to me. Do you remember something Christ says about a cubit?”

“No; did he ever say anything?”

“He said this: *Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?* You were taking thought to add something to your life. Your thought-taking has not done it,” said Marion, thinking that her own thought-taking had added no cubit to her own life.

“No, indeed; I never should have thought of the parsonage boarding-school. Who did think of it besides you, Miss Marion?”

“Several people who love you. If you had never thought of it, it would have been thought of for you. In that same talk Christ told the people: Your heavenly father knoweth that ye have need of all these things: *for* your heavenly Father knoweth; that’s why we do not have to think about the cubits. I think I’ll give Roger ‘*For* your heavenly Father’ for a text.”

“I am so glad,” said Judith, with radiant eyes, “I love that ‘cubit’ now.”

“So do I. I will certainly ask Roger to preach about our cubit.”

“But don’t let him put me in,” protested Judith. “I should look conscious so everybody would know I was the girl. Jean Draper will be sure to know.”

“He will not let it be a girl. He will make it somebody who was superstitious, and anxious, and did not trust God, nor know how to learn his will. Trust Roger for that. I always know when he puts people in, for we talk it over together; he puts me in so often that I am accustomed to being made a text of; and his own mistakes and failures are in all the time.”

“I thought mine were,” acknowledged Roger’s attentive and appreciative listener.

“And Uncle Cephas is sure his are in,” laughed Marion. “I think it is only the outside of us that isn’t alike.”

Very often Judith was allowed to sit in the study with her books and writing.

Mr. Kenney told her that she never disturbed him, that he would be disturbed if she were not there with her books and table in the bay-window.

“Ask me a question whenever you like,” he said one day.

But her questions were kept for Miss Marion. The year went on to Judith in household work, in study, in church work and “growing up” with the village girls; Nettie Evans and Jean Draper were her chief friends. The year went on to Marion. June came; the new minister and his sister had been a year in Bensalem.

Marion told him that his sermons were growing up, because his boys and girls were growing up.

In this year Marion Kenney had discovered Aunt Affy.

She said to her one afternoon in the entry bedroom: “I was hungry to find you; I knew I wanted somebody. I knew you were in the world, because if you were not in the world, I should not be hungry for you.”

“‘If it were not so, I would have told you,’” said Aunt Affy, in the confident tone in which she always repeated the Lord’s own words.

Judith heard the words: the wonderful words, and in her fashion, made a commentary upon them: when things were not so, and couldn't be so, God told you, so that you needn't be too disappointed; he wouldn't let you hope too long for things *and build on them*—that is, if you were not wilful about them. You might think just a little while about a thing, and not be silly about it, and if it were not so you would soon find out. She had found out about boarding-school—only she had been pretty bad about that all by herself, and did not deserve to have Miss Marion for a teacher.

Was Miss Marion paid? She had never thought of it until this moment.

It was "rag carpet afternoon." Judith coaxed Aunt Rody to allow her to take her half-finished ball and pile of rags up garret again, after Miss Marion came, but Aunt Rody sternly refused: "When I was a little girl I did my stent, company or no company. You can see Miss Kenney after you are through."

"But I am so slow," sighed the rag-carpet sewer.

"Be fast, then," was the grim advice.

Judith and her carpet rags were on the floor of the entry between the two bed-rooms; Aunt Rody was sitting in her bed-room in a rocker combing her long gray hair; the door of Aunt Affy's room opposite was open; Aunt Affy was seated in her rocker mending the sleeve of a coat for Cephas; Marion Kenney in her privileged fashion had come into the back yard and knocked at the open entry door.

Lifting her head, Judith saw her in the rush-bottomed chair; she had thrown her hat aside, her face was toward Aunt Affy.

Marion Kenney was Judith's ideal; she was such a dainty maiden, with brown hair and brown eyes, the most bewitching ways, and so true.

It was happiness enough for Judith to sit or stand near her to watch and to listen; and, this afternoon, she had to sit in the entry far away from her and sew carpet rags.

"Aunt Rody," called Marion across the hall, in an audacious voice, "may Judith bring her ball and rags in here?"

"Affy doesn't want that room cluttered up," was the slow, ungracious response.

"Oh, yes, I do," said Aunt Affy, eagerly. "I like it cluttered up."

"Go then, Judith," was the severe permission; "you are all children together, I verily believe."

With a merry "Thank you" Marion sprang to help gather the rags, and deposited them and Judith on the rag carpet between herself and Aunt Affy.

If it had not been for the rags and the ball that grew so tediously, there would have been nothing in the world for Judith to wish for.

"Aunt Affy, I brought a question to-day, as I always do," began Marion, and Judith's fingers stayed that she might hear the question and the answer.

She did not know how to ask Marion's questions, but she did know how to understand something of Aunt Affy's answers. In her spiritual and intellectual appreciation she was far ahead of anyone's knowledge of her. She had a talent for receptivity and, girl as she was, for discipline.

"If you had read the Bible through forty times, as Aunt Affy has, you would know all the answers," said Judith.

"Forty times," repeated Marion, in amazement.

"I did not tell her; she found it out," replied Aunt Affy, with humility; "I read my mother's Bible, and Judith found dates and numbers in the back of it, so I had to tell her it was the number of times I had read it through."

"You were as young as I when you began," said Marion.

"I was twenty; I felt so alone somehow, that year, I yearned for it. I read it through in less than a year, then I began again, and next year again, now it is second nature; I should be lost without it."

"What *is* second nature?" asked the girl on the floor, among the carpet rags.

"It is something that is so much a part of yourself,—that comes after you have your first nature—that it is as much your nature as if you were born first so," answered Aunt Affy with pauses for clearness. "You feel as if you were born the second time, and it would be as hard to get rid of as though you were born the first time with it."

"Carpet rags will never be my second nature," sighed Judith, picking up a long, red strip. "I wish reading the Bible would."

"Aunt Affy, it is only this," began Marion, again, flushing a little with the effort of bringing her secret into spoken words. "I want somebody to do good to; I have my class in Sunday school, and that is a great

deal, but it doesn't satisfy—and there must be somebody; if it were not so, I wouldn't be so hungry to do it. I say it with all humility; I know there is something in me to give, and it is growing. But I don't know how to find somebody."

Judith's fingers dropped the long, red strip; it would be a story to hear Aunt Affy tell Miss Marion how to find somebody.

"Then, you are just ready to hear my story."

"I knew you had it; I saw it in your face."

"It is one of the true stories, the stories as true as Bible stories, that you and I are living every day."

How Judith's face glowed. Was *she* living a true story? As real as the Bible stories?

"God helps and hears now, as quickly, as willingly, as sufficiently, as he did in the old Bible times; we live in the new Bible times. I heard a woman once wishing for a *new* Bible, the old Bible seemed written so long ago, and about people who lived so long ago. We are making a new Bible; our life is a new Acts of the Disciples."

And she was in it? How could Judith think of carpet rags? Unless carpet rags were in it, too.

"I like that," said Marion, "for Acts has been called the Gospel of the Risen Lord, and we know He *is* risen, and with us in the Holy Spirit."

Aunt Affy was silent a moment; like Judith her fingers stayed and would not work.

"Yes," she said, too satisfied to say another word.

"Aunt Affy's Bible is full of marks and dates," said Judith, "as if she were writing her new Bible in her old one."

"Now I'll tell you how I found somebody. I wanted somebody to give to, as you do. I felt full of good things to give. The village was more full of young people then; now the boys go to the city, or away off somewhere, then they stayed and married village girls. There were people enough, but I did not know how to find the one willing to take something from me. So I prayed about it: my giving, and the somebody. The first thing I learned when I began to live in the Bible was to pray about everything as Bible folks did—I wanted to do all the right things they did, and shape my life as near to God as some of them did."

Aunt Affy never talked as naturally as when talking to girls; she felt that step by step she had been over their ground. As Rody said, Affy had never grown up. A woman apart from the world, she lived a wide life; every day her clear vision swept from childhood to old womanhood.

"Before the answer came I read in the Old Testament (for all these things happened for our sakes, the New Testament tells us, throwing light on the old stories), three verses in the first chapter of Judges. How I studied it. And how much for myself I found in it—and for you. Joshua was dead; the children of Israel had no human counsellor, so 'they asked the Lord.' They knew he would speak to them as plainly as Joshua had. They had work to do, as you and I have; God's own planned work. They asked who should go up first to the work; the Lord said: Judah. That was plain enough. As plain as he says to you: 'Marion, do this.'"

"*How* does he say it to me?"

"In two ways. First by giving you something to give. Then giving you the longing to find somebody, to give to."

"Yes," said Marion, in a full tone.

"With the permission he gave a promise."

"I *like* a promise to work on; I feel so sure," said Marion, brightly.

"This promise was: Behold I have delivered the land into his hand. It is given to him, still he must go and get it; he must work and get it. God does not often put ready-made things into our hands; if he did we would not be co-workers."

Judith understood. Aunt Affy would not have thought of telling these things to Judith.

"That is his way of working for us, working *in* us. His work does not interfere with our work, only makes our work sure and strong. We speak the words; he keeps them from falling to the ground. Judah was the strongest tribe; he had been made ready for pioneer work; the first thing he did was to speak to Simeon, his brother, and say: Come with me. He found somebody to work with him. But he had to go first. He chose Simeon. We may choose somebody to work with us."

"But, Aunt Affy, I meant somebody to work *for*," replied Marion, who had a mission to somebody.

"There is nobody in the world to work *for*; it is always somebody to work with. We are all co-workers

with God. The somebody you wish to find is a co-worker, too. Why not? Has God chosen only *you* for His work?”

Marion looked ashamed; frightened at herself, and ashamed.

“How could I be so proud?”

“Oh, we all can,” said Aunt Affy, smiling. “And this brings me to my own story.”

“The new Bible,” said Judith, eagerly.

“One day I asked our Father to bring some one to me; my life has never been a going out, for Rody could never spare me, it has been a bringing in, instead; then I came in here and read about Judah and Simeon, and waited. The waiting is always a part of it.”

“Why?” asked Judith impatiently.

“Because God says so; that is the best reason I know. And my somebody came. Somebody to help in the work planned for both of us. And the happy thing about it (one of the happy things) was that the somebody started to come to me before I began to ask. Sometimes, people say things will happen if we don’t pray; perhaps they will, it is not for me to say they will not, but the happening will not be in *answer to prayer*, and that has a joyfulness of its own, that nobody knows except the One who answers and the one who prays. That is a joy too great to be told. Sometimes, I know that I have been as happy over an answered prayer as I *can* be. And I can be very happy,” Aunt Affy said, with happy tears shining in her eyes.

“This somebody was not anybody new, or strange, or very far off; when I thought about it there was no surprise in it; it was somebody who had been coming to meet me a long while—in preparation. Then, we were ready to be co-workers in a very simple way, making no stir, but I trust our work together will not prove hay or stubble in the last day. It was somebody I chose myself; we do a great deal of our own choosing. But it was God’s work and God’s workers, like Judah and Simeon. There was prayer first, and Judah using his knowledge and judgment. No wonder God could keep his promise; they helped him keep his promise, as you and I do. Do you remember what Andrew did after Jesus called him and asked him to spend that day with him? ‘*He first findeth his own brother.*’”

“My only brother *is* found,” said Marion. “Now some one else may be ‘first.’”

“And I haven’t any,” said listening Judith. “But I have my cousin Don; I wonder about him.”

“We each have our own; whoever we find is our own. This is our own world,” Aunt Affy replied in her happy voice.

Marion’s question was answered. Aunt Affy always understood what was surging underneath her restless, foamy current of talk.

Since she had known Aunt Affy she had grown quieter; she had come to Bensalem “in a fume,” she told Aunt Affy, and the air, or “something,” was making things look different.

Aunt Affy smiled her wise, sweet smile; she knew the time came to girls when things had to “look different.”

XVII. THE STORY OF A KEY.

> “What time I am afraid, I will
> Trust in Thee.”

Aunt Rody had a way of bringing her work and sitting somewhere near when Marion came; the girl’s vivacity, and gossip of village folks, gossip in its heavenliest sense, attracted the hard-visaged, hard-handed, sharp-tongued old woman.

An afternoon with Marion Kenney was to the old woman, who never read stories, what a volume of short stories is to other people; stories, humorous, pathetic, and always with a touch of the best in life. And, somehow, the best found an answering chord in something in Aunt Rody.

But for that something nobody could have lived in the house with Aunt Rody.

The door across the hall was open; all was quiet within the small bedroom.

For the world Aunt Rody would not acknowledge any weakness by bringing her chair into Affy’s room, or even into the entry. She was not fond of company; and all Bensalem knew it. Cephas asked her years ago if she wanted to be buried in a corner of the graveyard all by herself and the brambles.

“Heaven is a sociable place, Rody, and you might as well get used to it.”

Aunt Affy's story was done, there was no sound in the other bedroom; Judith picked among her colored strips.

"I had a letter from my cousin Don last night, Miss Marion," said Judith, "and he said he was glad I loved the parsonage."

"Did he?" asked Marion, twisting one of Judith's curls about her finger.

"O, Judith, I know you want me to tell you a story," she said hastily, as Aunt Affy slipped on her glasses again and took the coat sleeve into her hand. To Marion that coat sleeve was a part of Aunt Affy's "new Bible."

"Oh, yes," replied Judith, with pure delight.

"Judith would have enjoyed the age of tradition," said Aunt Affy; "just think," in her voice of young enthusiasm, "instead of reading it, what it would be to hear from Andrew's own lips the story of that day."

"We are living there now," said Marion; "I am. The title of my life just now is 'The Parsonage story of Village Life.' But the story I want to tell Judith to-day is an episode in my own life. Seven years ago. I haven't even told Roger yet, and I tell him everything. I think I never told any one before. I used to be at the head of things in those days; father was often away, and the children were all younger, except Roger, and mother wasn't strong. We lived in an old house in a broad city street, away back, with a box-bordered yard in front, and lilacs, and old-fashioned things behind; we were all born there, even Roger, the eldest, and our only moving times was in the spring and fall cleaning. Once a friend of mine moved, and I was enough in the moving times to be there at an impromptu dinner; we stood around a pine table in the kitchen, or sat on anything we could find, a firkin, or peach basket turned upside down, and they let me eat a piece of pie in my fingers. All I wanted was to do something just like it myself. And when mother said I might stay all my birthday week and help Aunt Bessie move, I thought my ship had come in, laden with moving times.

"Aunt Bessie lived in the city in a beautiful home, but something had happened that summer; Uncle Frank was in Europe and could not come home, and Aunt Bessie and the children had to go into the country for a year.

"The 'country' was only seven miles away; first the train, then the horse cars, and, then, a two-mile drive.

"The wagons from the country came for the things Monday morning; there were two big loads (everything else had been sold), and in the country home we expected to find new and plain furniture that had already been sent from the stores.

"Monday the children and I had a hilarious time at dinner; moving times had begun, and I *did* eat a piece of pie in my fingers. I was too full of the fun of things to notice that Aunt Bessie ate no dinner, and Elsie and I were teasing Rob in noisy play after dinner, and did not see that she was very white and scarcely spoke at all.

"'Marion,' she said at last, 'I cannot conquer it; I've tried for half the day and all night; I cannot hold up my head another minute; one of my terrible headaches has come upon me. Jane will have to stay here with me and baby and Rob—do you think *you* could—but no, you couldn't—it's too lonely for you—and I may not get there to-night.'

"'Go to Sunny Plains alone—and have an adventure! Oh, Aunt Bessie! It's too good to be true.'

"Unmindful of her headache I clapped my hands, and danced Rob up and down. It was all my own moving time.

"'But, Marion, what would your mother think?' she protested, weakly; 'of course there are near neighbors—and you might take something to eat—and, if I do not get there, you must go across the way and stay all night. The old man who had the two white horses—you remember him, said he was our nearest neighbor, and he hoped we would be neighborly. He said he had a daughter about your age—you might ask her—if I *do* let you go—to stay with you all night.'

"'But, after all,' looking at our trim, colored maid of all work, 'perhaps Jane may better go and you stay with me. And—'

"'Oh, no, ma'am, oh, no, indeed, ma'am,' tremulously interrupted Jane (she was only two years older than I). 'I couldn't think of it; I should die of fright. I never lived in a wilderness, and I expect to give warning the first week, for I never can bear the country.'

"'Now, Aunt Bessie, you see I have to go,' I persuaded. 'Jane can't help being afraid—and I didn't know how to be afraid—really, I don't know what to be afraid of. Let Elsie go with me, and we'll do everything ourselves—have the house all in order for you to-morrow morning, and have the most glorious time we ever had in our lives. My Cousin Jennie isn't fifteen, and she stayed a week over alone in the country while Uncle and Auntie were away. Oh, *do* let us go, Aunt Bessie.'

"'Somebody must, I suppose,' half consented Aunt Bessie, who was growing whiter every moment;

‘Elsie, are you brave enough to go with Marion?’

“‘Yes, mamma,’ said nine-year-old Elsie, in her grave little way, ‘*but I don’t know what the brave is for*.’

“‘I’m glad you don’t,’ smiled her mother. ‘Well, Jane—I hope I am not doing wrong—fix two boxes of lunch—and, you know you take the train to Paterson and then the horse-cars to Hanover—I will give you five dollars, Marion, you will have to take a carriage at Hanover—but you know all about it—you went with me to look at the house—and you know where to have the furniture put as I told you that day—and you can get things at the store—half a mile off—Jane, you will have to keep Rob and baby—Marion, I don’t know *what* your mother will say—it’s well there was a load of things left so that I may have a bed to-night—’

“During this prologue my feet were dancing, and my fingers rubbing each other impatiently, I was so afraid she would end with a sufficient reason for not allowing us to go. I could not believe that we were really off until we sat in the train, each with a huge, stuffed lunch-box, and I with five dollars in my pocketbook and my head confused with ten thousand parting directions, among which was, many times repeated: ‘Be sure to *ask* that girl to stay all night with you.’

“At the terminus at Hanover we got out and stood and looked around. Elsie was a little thing, but she was wise, and I liked to ask her advice.

“‘Aunt Bessie found a horse and a carriage at the blacksmith’s shop that day, didn’t she?’

“This was hardly asking advice, but Elsie brightened, and answered deliberately: ‘We walked on a canal-boat, then, to the other side, for the bridge was being built.’

“‘Then we are in the right place, for there’s the new bridge,’ I exclaimed, relieved, for I missed the canal boat we had that day made a bridge of.

“‘And we went down that way to the blacksmith’s shop,’ she said pointing in a familiar direction. Yes, I remembered that. The immensity of my undertaking was beginning to press upon me; I was glad I had brought Elsie.

“With a business-like air we crossed the bridge, and walked along a grass-bordered path to the blacksmith’s shop; there seemed to be two shops in the long building; before one open door a horse was being shod, before the other a group of men stood with hands in their pockets watching a fire that had died down into a red-hot circle—the circle looked like red-hot iron. As we waited for the horse to be harnessed and brought, Elsie and I stood across the street watching the red-hot iron ring—as large as a wagon wheel.

“Elsie looked as though she were forgetting everything in that red wonder, and I began to feel a trifle strange and lonely, for my little cousin was so self-absorbed that she was not much company.

“‘Hallo, there!’ called the blacksmith as a boy drove a two-seated wagon out from behind somewhere.

“With my best business air I asked the price before we stepped up into the wagon and replied, ‘Very well,’ to his modest one dollar.

“The drive was beautiful; Elsie looked and looked but scarcely spoke. But she did exclaim when we crossed the railroad, at the tiniest railroad station, we, or anybody else, ever saw.

“It was a brown shed, without a window even—the door stood wide open, there was no one within, no stove, no seats, no ticket office.

“‘Well, we are in the wilderness,’ I said aloud.

“And then, the ‘store.’ I wish I could tell you about that store. It was about as large as—a hen-coop, everything, everything in it. I got out and went in, for Aunt Bessie had asked me to inquire for letters which she had directed to be sent to Sunny Plains. The post-office was a rude desk and a few cubby-holes up on the wall above it; I saw a letter laid on a meal sack—this place behind the store seemed to be both post-office and granary.

“‘I’ll be down by and by—you are the new people, I suppose; I saw your things go by,’ remarked a pleasant young man behind the counter; ‘I’ll come for orders. I hope you will trade with us.’

“‘Thank you, I suppose so. And I wish you would bring some kerosene,’ I said, remembering that I must burn a lamp all night.

“Along the half mile on the way to the new house were scattered several farmhouses, then came the church, and churchyard, and, on a rise beyond the churchyard, a pretty house.

“‘*That’s* it,’ Elsie said, ‘I know the house.’

“The key was in the possession of the white-haired old man with the two horses, and his house was opposite the church.

“Elsie was too shy to go to the door and knock and ask for Mrs. Pettingill’s key, but I was very glad to go; I began to feel that I would like to see the girl who would stay all night with us. She answered my

knock, a tall girl, with an encouraging face. She brought the key, saying the wagons were all unloaded; two had come Saturday with things; her father had said my mother and all the family were coming before night.

"'Aunt Bessie was too ill,' I replied, glad to have the neighborly subject opened so easily, 'and she said I might ask you to come over and stay all night with Elsie and me.'

"'Oh, I couldn't,' she answered, hastily; 'I'm going away—I'm all dressed now. I'm sorry, too,' she added, sympathetically, at something in my face, 'but I can't disappoint my grandmother; she sent for me because she is sick.'

'Then, of course, you will have to go. (Then I began to know what 'brave' meant.) Thank you for the key.'

"Up the steep, weed-tangled drive we went to the side door; the boy-driver unlocked the door for us, giving a view of the moving times within. I paid him his dollar, and he drove away, leaving us in the wilderness.

"Elsie stood and looked around as usual.

"It *was* a wilderness, a wilderness everywhere; the two-story house, painted brown, with red trimmings, was set in the middle of a large field; it had been untenanted for two years; the hedgerows had grown luxuriant, the grass was knee-deep; the house faced the west (the driver told me that), and the west this August afternoon was an immense field of cabbages bordered by tall trees; above it was the sky, beyond that might be anything, or everything; at the east stretched a mown field, dotted with trees, an apple-tree that looked a hundred years old near the fence, then a thick woods, over the top of which ran a line of green, low hills; among the greenness a red slanting roof was visible; at the south stretched other fields, among the trees a white house, with outhouses, a well-sweep; at the north, beyond two fields, in which cows were pasturing, in a grove, a thick, green grove, was the churchyard, with rows and rows of white stones, now and then a white or a granite monument; the brown church-tower arose above the tree-tops. And this was my wilderness for a night, with the sky, the protecting, loving sky over all, and bending down to enfold us all into its sunshine.

"'It's pretty,' said Elsie.

"'Yes, it is pretty. Now we must go in and go to work.'

"The opened door led into the small dining-room; small and so crowded; as my big brother said, there was a place for everything, and everything was in it.

"The front parlor, back parlor, hall, all crowded; up stairs there was nothing but emptiness and roominess.

"The kitchen, such a pretty kitchen, was crowded with everything, too—and a pine table, a firkin, and an up-turned, or down-turned peach basket.

"I was in a whirl, an ecstasy, an enthusiasm; but as somebody remarks, nothing is done without enthusiasm; now what should I do with mine, that, and nothing else?

"Suddenly, to Elsie's great perplexity, I gave a shout and rushed out the dining-room door, and down through the tangles into the road.

"I had espied two men, working men, in shirt sleeves, with coats thrown over their arms. Farmers, or farmer's sons, probably, great, true-hearted sons of the soil, knightly fellows who were ready to—

"'Are you—do you know anybody—' I began, breathless, and with flying hair.

"They stopped and gazed at me.

"'We have just moved in. I would like things moved, and bedsteads put up, and boxes opened.'

"'We can do it,' said one promptly.

"He had lost one eye; the other eye looked honest.

"'Yes, we're out of the work,' said his companion.

"He had a stiff neck; he did not look quite so honest.

"'Can you come now?' I faltered.

"'Yes, right off. Come, Jim,' was the cheerful response. 'All we want is to be told what to do.' I could always tell people what to do; at home I was called the 'manager.'

"For two hours I kept those men busy; Elsie, with grave eyes and sealed lips, followed us about. I tried to forget the stiff neck, and the eye that did not look honest, and had forgotten both, when there was a heavy rap on the open dining-room door.

"There stood the young man from the store.

“I had forgotten that I did not like those two busy men, who never spoke unless spoken to, still I was glad enough to cry when I saw this familiar and friendly face.

“I had known him so long ago I could tell him anything.

“‘H’m. Somebody to help you,’ he said, stepping in, pad and pencil in hand, for an order.

“The men were in the back parlor; one was unpacking a box of books, the other was sweeping.

“Yes,” I replied confidently, “I needed help and I called them in. I don’t believe—” my voice sinking to a whisper, “that they are tramps, do you?”

“Oh, no. They are hatters. They have been about here two or three years; the factory is closed. The worst thing about them is drink. They will drink up all you give them. Still, it was hardly a right thing for you to do.”

“Elsie’s arm was linked in mine, her big eyes fixed on the young man’s face.

“‘A thing is always right—after it is done,’ I said desperately.

“‘Whew! you are a wise one,’ he said quizzically. ‘I’ve brought kerosene—have you lamps for to-night? Oh, yes, I see you have. Sugar, bread coffee, tea, what will you have?’

“I gave the order; he wrote it, then lingered.

“‘They are about done for to-night, I suppose.’

“‘Yes, I shall send them away.’

“He drove away, and I was left with my hatters.

“‘You have worked two hours,’ I said; ‘what do I owe you?’

“The man with one eye looked at the man with a stiff neck.

“‘Fifty cents, eh, Jim?’

“‘That’s about it,’ said Jim.

“I did not bring my pocket-book down stairs, there were two bills in it; I handed each a twenty-five-cent piece with the most reassuring and disarming air (one air was for myself, the other for them), and thanked them, hoping they would soon have work at their trade.

“They said ‘thank you’ and ‘good-night,’ and Elsie and I were left alone.

“‘Aren’t you hungry?’ asked Elsie, ‘It is late and dark.’

“‘So it is: we will have supper in the kitchen—and I will fill a lamp to burn all night.’

“That supper was not quite as much fun as I thought it would be; Elsie munched a sandwich and wished she were home; out the window the fire-flies were glistening in the tall grass; the gravestones loomed up very white and tall and stiff.

“‘We’ll go to bed early,’ I said cheerily, ‘and be up early in the morning to put everything in order. Aunt Bessie will be sure to be here early.’

“Elsie followed me up stairs still munching a sandwich. She, too, had learned what it was to be ‘brave.’

“The hatters had put up a bedstead and laid a mattress on it; the bed clothing lay in a pile on the bare floor.

“I made the bed while Elsie finished her sandwich.

“‘May I brush out your hair and braid it?’ asked Elsie.

“‘Yes, in a minute. Let’s go down stairs and look at all the doors and windows again.’

“The fastening on every door and window was tried anew. We were locked in. The world was locked out. I did not look out again at the fire-flies.

“I sat down before the bureau while Elsie stood behind me and brushed and braided my long hair; doing my hair would comfort her if anything could.

“But what would comfort me?

“My *Daily Light* I had put in my satchel; I liked to have it open on my bureau; it was bound in soft leather, two volumes in one: I found the date, August XV., in the Evening Hour.

“‘Read aloud,’ said Elsie.

"My glance caught the large type at the head of the page. My heart beat fast, the tears started, but I cleared my throat and read unconcernedly: 'I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.'

"'Read it again,' said Elsie, brushing softly. I read it again. Elsie undressed and crept into bed.

"'You didn't say your prayers,' I remonstrated.

"'I like to say them in bed,' she replied.

"So did I that night.

"I placed the lamp, burning brightly, on the floor in the hall opposite my door, leaving the door wide open, then I lay down, and said my prayers in bed.

"Elsie was soon asleep; my prayer ended with the earnest petition, several times repeated: 'Please let me go to sleep quick and stay asleep all night.'

"Then I watched the light, and thought about home, and fell asleep.

"A voice awakened me: Elsie was sitting up in bed:—

"'I'll do your hair, Marion,' she said thickly, talking in her sleep.

"I pressed her down, and covered her; she did not waken. But I was awake, wide awake, alone in a great wilderness. There was no sound, no sound anywhere, but a stillness like the stillness of death.

"Then sh—sh—sh—a hush, a soft pressing against something—a padded shoulder against a door, a soft fist at a window; then the stillness like the stillness of death. I was awake; I did not sleep.

"The soft, soft sound came again and again; the softest sound I had ever heard, and then the stillest silence.

"Should I get up, bring the lamp in, and lock the door?

"But suppose there were no key in the door—it was swung back, I could not see the inside key-hole; if I should get up and find no key, and could not lock the door, I should confess to myself that I was afraid—how could I lie there, with the door shut and not locked, and be afraid? *I was afraid to be afraid.* I would rather lie there, and look with staring eyes at the lamp and the wide stairs, and listen, and listen, with my very breath, and know that I was not afraid."

"Oh, dear!" cried Judith, with a choking in her throat.

"Morning came. Oh, that blessed streak of dawn. I arose and slowly pushed the door so that I could see the lock.

"*There was no key.*"

"Oh!" cried Judith, with a sudden, sharp breath, cold to her very finger-tips.

"That day was the happiest day of my life. I never knew before how happy I *could* be. I had learned that I could be kept from being *too* afraid."

"Only just afraid enough," laughed Judith, glad that the laugh was not frozen in her throat.

"How I scampered around that day and helped, and scampered around and didn't help. That was years ago, and I haven't told the story yet. That *no key* was one of my turning-points."

"I wish I might have a turning-point," said Judith, "only I never could bear to be afraid."

"Being afraid doesn't hurt," consoled Aunt Affy; "you are glad you were afraid after you get out of the wilderness."

"What did your point turn you around *to*?" questioned Judith, who had learned from her mother that something always happened next.

"To knowing I would always be safe," said Marion, "no matter how deep I get into the tangles in my wilderness."

"Yes," responded Aunt Affy, "we only *think* we are hurt."

"Was it all wilderness?" asked Judith.

"It appeared so to me. We took a drive one day into another wilderness—Meadow Centre; that was almost more a wilderness."

"I know Meadow Centre," said Aunt Affy; "Cephas has a cousin there, a kind of cousin by courtesy, and he is always promising that he will take me over there. His name is Richard King; he has just come to take charge of the church. Cephas says he is a splendid worker, as big as a giant and as simple-hearted

as a child."

"Is he old like Uncle Cephas?" Judith inquired.

"No, child, he's young like our minister. He preached here before your brother had the call, Miss Marion; Cephas wanted him, but he wouldn't leave that going-to-pieces church and congregation over there. Cephas told him he was staying by the ship to see it go to pieces, and he said he wanted to see it go to pieces, then."

"Meadow Centre is a part of my wilderness; I would like to see the place again. I have a very warm feeling for my wilderness."

"And now you are in the Promised Land," said Judith; "do people have to go through the Wilderness first?"

A warning voice came from across the hall: "I'd like to know if your ball is getting bigger, Judith."

Judith's guilty fingers snatched her needle, and she began stitching a black strip to a brown strip as Aunt Rody had expressly forbidden her to do.

"They don't have to *stay* in the Wilderness," replied Aunt Affy, "their own naughtiness kept them there."

"H'm," sniffed the voice across the hall. "I think some people who behave pretty well are kept in the Wilderness."

"I like wild places," said Judith, forgetting her ball again.

"And naughtiness, too," snapped Aunt Rody.

"Oh, we all like that," laughed Marion; "Aunt Rody, I am coming in there to tell *you* a story."

"Don't want you," grumbled Aunt Rody, in a relenting voice.

But Marion went.

"I'm sure you have a story to tell me," Judith heard Marion say, in the tone Roger Kenney called "wheedling."

"My story is all hard work, privation, and ingratitude," was the ready response.

As Aunt Affy sewed a tear fell on her coarse work, which Judith tried not to see.

Judith sewed diligently, wondering the while how she could make a turning-point for herself.

"Yes," groaned the voice across the hall, "my past is not pleasant to dwell on, the present is full of contradictions and being opposed, and the future—well, I *hope* I am a Christian."

"I don't believe you are," whispered Judith softly over her rags.

A heavy step on the sod under the bedroom window brought sudden color to Aunt Affy's old cheeks; with her sister's groanings in her ears she was meditating if it were her duty to ask Cephas to go away again. Was the Lord asking her to choose between the two?

Pushing back his straw hat and leaning his shirt-sleeved arms on the window-sill, the old man stood, with his lover's eyes on the delicate, sweet face of the woman he had loved thirty years.

"Well, Affy, how's things?" he asked, joyously.

"Just as usual," she half sighed.

"No worse, then?"

"Not a bit," she answered, smiling.

"Then I'll get a bite and go back to work again. It does me good to come and have a look at you and know you are here."

"Oh, I shall always be here."

"And so shall I," he answered, confidently.

After that, how could Aunt Affy but decide once again, and for ever, that he *should* always be here.

XVIII. JUDITH'S TURNING-POINT.

“No act falls fruitless; none can tell
How vast its power may be,
Nor what results infolded dwell
Within it silently.”

Judith stood in her night-dress and bare feet on the rug of rag-carpet before her bed; she was afraid; she was afraid because of Miss Marion’s story; would she go to sleep, and wake up, and wish she had a key in her door?

After another hesitating moment she decided to go down stairs to Aunt Affy’s bed-room and linger around, hoping Aunt Affy would ask her to sleep just one night in that cunning room in that old-fashioned, tall-posted bed, with ever so many small pillows, and that red and green quilt of patch-work baskets with handles.

Slipping on the blue wool shoes her mother knitted, she went softly down stairs to the entry bedroom. Aunt Rody’s door, for a wonder, was shut; that was one danger past, for if Aunt Rody heard one foot-fall, without inquiring into it she would certainly send her back to bed. If she were dying of a broken heart Aunt Rody would never know or care. But she did not think it was because she would never care to tell Aunt Rody about her broken heart.

Aunt Affy’s door, like the gates of Heaven, was wide open; by the light of a small lamp she was reading her “chapters” in the Bible.

One of Judith’s names for Aunt Affy’s Bible was “My Chapters.”

“Come in, dear,” welcomed the angel within the gates of Heaven. On the threshold stood the white-robed figure, with her long hair braided loosely and ending in one curl.

“Just a minute,” pleaded the rather tearful voice; “shall I disturb your chapters?”

“No, indeed, you are a part of them, as your mother was before you,” said Aunt Affy, shoving her gold-rimmed spectacles into their case.

These gold-rimmed spectacles were her last birthday present from Cephas.

Judith thought it was funny, but very lovely for such old people to have birthday presents. Aunt Affy was so choice of these spectacles that she kept them to read the Bible with.

“I wanted to come a little while,” said Judith, perching herself on the side of the high bed, her blue-slippered feet not touching the carpet.

“I wish you had a sister,” began Aunt Affy in the tone that ran on a long while. “You must have some one to grow up with. You have never had any one to grow up with.”

“I have Nettie, and Jean, and Miss Marion, and Mr. Roger, and everybody else, and you and my cousin Don.”

“And we are all growing up together,” laughed Aunt Affy with her soft laugh. “When I was a little girl I had my sister Becky. The other sisters were all grown up. Eight sisters we were. But some were married. Father would have us all home on Christmas Days. Such a merry houseful. Cephas was like the brother we never had. He came a boy to work for father, just as Joe works for him. Becky and Cephas and I were always growing up together. Becky was the friskiest thing, always getting into scrapes and out of them. Rody used to be hard on us, we thought then; but I’ve no doubt we were wilful and disobedient, and gave her heaps of trouble. She always worked hard; she always would.”

“Why?” asked Judith, with thoughtful questioning.

“Because it is her nature to put her shoulder to the wheel. She pushes other peoples’ shoulders away. She does not know how to be helped—not even by the Lord himself. She married off her sisters, she said, and then all she wanted was to settle down to work and to peace and quietness. She likes to see people at church; but it frets her wonderfully to have people come here. If it hadn’t been for that I should have brought your dear mother back here years ago to stay, but Rody *wouldn’t* hear of it. She can’t bear to have her ways interfered with. She wouldn’t sleep one wink to-night if she thought that pile of papers on the round table wasn’t just as she put it. And it would give her a fever for me to sleep in her bed.”

“But it wouldn’t *you*,” interrupted Judith, eagerly.

“Oh, not a bit. Still I never try it. I like my own bed, and own side of the bed. But I was telling you about Becky; she used to sleep with me, and no one has since.”

Judith’s heart sank. The room up stairs grew desolate and afraid and homesick.

“Cephas always liked Becky; they used to do their lessons together, and when he went to town to learn his trade he asked her to be his wife as soon as he could build a house to put her in. Father gave Becky twenty acres on her twentieth birthday, and Cephas was to build the house.”

“He wasn’t bald and white-whiskered then.”

"Well, I think not. He was the handsomest young man in the country, and the *best*. And a master workman, too.

"Then father died; he had been queer some time. Rody broke off a match for him; the old minister's sister, a widow, a good and lovely woman, and he had mourned years for mother, and Becky and I were glad to have him comforted; but Rody would not give up her place to any stepmother, trust her for *that*; and she broke it off somehow, and the widow married a minister, and father grew queer and then died.

"Rody had something to repent of, if she only thought of it; only she never *does* think. She worked on Becky's feelings about Cephas, but Becky held on, and wouldn't give him up; so she and I together, when Rody wasn't looking on, made her wedding things, such piles. I enjoyed it as if it were to be my own house-keeping; I loved them both so, and Rody worked hard and was dreadfully cross to us all; and the cellar for the new house was dug, and Becky was as happy as a queen. How she sang about the house. Cephas had a shop of his own in town by this time, and journeymen and apprentices; he *was* a rusher; he expected to drive in every day. He wanted a house in town, but Becky loved the old place and she was always delicate, and he couldn't bear to cross her. And, then, it's a sad story for young people, but you must know there's sadness in the world as well as joy—she died suddenly with fever. I watched her night and day. And Rody. She was a ministering angel. She died in Rody's arms. Rody had been like a mother to her. Her things, 'our things' she used to say, were all packed away. Cephas failed in business—I think he didn't care much whether he failed or not, and came back to the farm. Flowers and weeds began to grow in the cellar of Becky's house; it's only a big green hole now. Cephas wanted me to use her things; he said Becky would like it, and I knew she would. He comforted me and I comforted him. Rody didn't like *that*, and sent him away. We comfort each other now, and always will. Rody can't hinder everything. Why, child, don't have such big eyes over my story. Becky has been happy all these blessed years, and Cephas and I talk over old times and look forward to new times; and, we *would* like to build a house over Becky's cellar if Rody didn't fume so.

"This is her ring that I wear—this plain gold, the only ring I ever had; she put it on my finger and asked me to be good to Cephas. He wouldn't take it back. But isn't it your bed-time, Deary?"

"I wish I might brush your hair," said Judith, slipping off the high bed.

But a door creaked, was flung wide open; a night-capped head appeared in the opposite doorway.

"*You* up, Judith Grey Mackenzie. Go right up to bed this minute. It's just like you, and it's more like Affy. No wonder I couldn't sleep with voices in the house at this unearthly hour. There! It's striking nine o'clock. Affy, *you* go to bed."

Aunt Affy laughed softly as the creaking door was closed again.

"I am not grown up either, you see. Perhaps I shall grow up with you. She wouldn't let me mix the bread to-night, and she never lets me take the butter out of the churn. And when we go to town shopping she always carries the money."

Judith laughed a doleful little laugh, and went bravely up stairs to her turning-point.

It was moonlight, but she must light the candle for company; she would keep it burning all night, or as long as it would burn, if she dared.

She would scratch the match where she liked; Aunt Rody had no right to order her about so; she did not belong to Aunt Rody. She wished Aunt Affy would let her go to live always at the Parsonage.

Perhaps Cousin Don would if she wrote and told him all about Aunt Rody.

One night last week Aunt Rody had put her head in at the door and found her scratching a match on the bureau along the crack on its upper edge; she often did it; but Aunt Rody gave a scream and seized her by the arm and said angrily; "Judith Grey Mackenzie, don't you do that again; I'll whip you as sure as you live if I ever see you do it again. You might set the house on fire. Suppose a spark should fall into the upper drawer."

But a spark never had. The upper drawer was shut tight; Aunt Rody had no right to catch her by the arm like that. And *whip* her! She wouldn't dare. She would go to the parsonage and stay until Cousin Don came after her.

She was old enough to scratch a match where she liked.

With a sudden indignant stroke she drew the match under the top edge of the bureau: a snap and a flash.

"There," she said aloud, triumphantly.

She lighted the candle and dropped the burnt match in the tin pail that served as slop jar.

It was very quiet down stairs; Joe had gone to bed, Uncle Cephas had not come home from the session meeting at the parsonage; she wished he would come.

Then, the tiniest curl of smoke caught her eye—out of the top drawer; no, that was tight shut; the curl grew and grew; *it came from the crack under the top edge of the bureau*.

Paralyzed with terror she stood and looked. It *was* smoke. And it grew and grew. Should she run down and tell Aunt Affy? But Aunt Rody would hear and come, too. Might she call Joe? But he might tell Aunt Rody the next day; he looked cross at her at supper time because she said she would not read aloud to him all the evening. If Uncle Cephas would only come. But he always stayed late at session meeting—there it was, slowly, so slowly curling up.

It was real smoke, and there had to be fire to make smoke. The bureau would burn first and then—after a long time she remembered that water would put out fire; what a goose she was to stand there and see the smoke grow.

She poured water into the wash-bowl, soaked the wash-cloth, and ran it carefully all along the crack.

There, it was out. Nothing to be frightened about. But she would never do it again. Aunt Rody did not know about that.

Sitting down on the foot of the bed opposite the bureau, she leaned over the red rail that formed the foot-board and watched and waited. Of course the fire was out. Yes—no—yes, there it was again—the curl of smoke; the water had done no good; the fire was too deep in for water to get through the crack; the spark had fallen away down *in*.

In despair she burst into tears; but the tears kept her eyes from watching the smoke; she brushed her eyes clear and looked; it was there, and it grew and grew, not dense, not black, but real smoke, and it kept coming and coming.

“O Father in Heaven,” she cried aloud, “*please stop it; please stop it*. I don’t know what to do.”

Still the smoke was there. Did God see it? Didn’t he care? Would he not answer because she had been so disobedient and because she had hated Aunt Rody?

“I will be good after this,” she sobbed. “I don’t want to be hateful. I will give up my will to Aunt Rody *when she is right*.” It *was* fainter; no, there it was again. Would the fire never go out?

Aunt Rody knew best. Perhaps Aunt Rody knew best about other things. Perhaps she *was* a Christian, a real disciple, only a very queer one.

Now it was so faint, so faint she could not see it at all. It was not because the tears were in her eyes; it was gone. It *was* gone. She felt all along the crack with her finger. It was not hot. And the smoke *was* gone. The fire was out; it was all burned out inside that crack.

And Aunt Rody need never know. And she would never, never, never disobey Aunt Rody again. Her mother had always told her she loved her own will too much; she would never love it so much again; she would say—what would she say? She knelt on the strip of rag-carpet where she had seen the girl kneel in her “picture” and repeated softly, through fast falling tears: “Our Father, who art in Heaven; Hallowed be thy name; Thy Kingdom come: *Thy will be done*; that was it; *Thy will be done*, Thy will be done,” she repeated joyfully over and over. “Make me love Thy will best. Make my will a good will, a sweet will, *an obedient will*.”

She did not know then that it was her turning point. The next day she *loved* to obey Aunt Rody. Aunt Rody did not ask her to do one disagreeable thing; and it was the queerest thing, Aunt Rody said, when she asked if she might sweep the sitting-room, “That’s a good girl.”

She did not tell any one about her fright over the match excepting John Kenney, Miss Marion’s brother, and Jean Draper. He had come to the parsonage for vacation. He was a big, handsome boy, as manly as the minister himself, and as gentle as a girl; one afternoon, when she and Jean Draper went off on a long stroll with him, and they began to tell stories of adventure of what they had read, or of what happened to them, she told her story about how the smoke got in a crack.

She only said she liked Aunt Rody better after that. She could not tell about her prayer. But John would have understood, she was sure.

He always looked as though he understood everything you meant, but did not know how to say.

XIX. A MORNING WITH A SURPRISE.

“Routine of duties,
Commonplace cares.”

—F. L. Hosmer.

The years went on in quiet Bensalem and brought Judith to her eighteenth birthday; the summers and winters came and went, and the girl grew. The parsonage was “home,” and the farmhouse was “Aunt Affy’s,” as it had been ever since she could remember. One July morning, in this nineteenth year of

Judith's story, something besides the new morning was given to Marion. The parsonage under the housekeeping of the two, the woman and the girl, was a dainty, restful, and inspiring home to its three home-keepers, the minister, his sister, and Judith Mackenzie.

The relationship among the three was as simple and natural as though Judith had been born one of the sisters in that old house, with the three windows in the roof that she had made a picture of for her mother.

This July morning, an hour before dinner-time, Marion sat near the kitchen table shelling peas; she had sent Judith back to the story she was writing, and refused Roger's help when he put his head in at the window to say that shelling peas always meant two people and a bit of confidence.

"Miss Marion," called a voice from the kitchen-porch; "I am not fit to come in, I'm just out of the hay field. I've got a letter for you that's been laid over, and a burning shame it is; and it is the second time it has happened. To excuse himself he said your box was full and this slipped out or was set aside. I gave the Bensalem postmaster a round scolding, and told him the parsonage mail was always important, and if it happened again I'd go straight to Washington and report him to Uncle Sam," chuckled the old man to whom a letter was about the smallest thing in life.

"Uncle Cephas," welcomed Marion, cordially, "thank you for the scolding and the letter."

"I mustn't come in; I brought the minister a load of hay. Don't call him, I'll find him. Your letter looks rather foreign."

"Yes," she said, trembling almost visibly after a glance at the post mark.

"Double postage too," he said curiously.

"Yes," she said again.

"Judith had a foreign letter last night, too."

"Oh, yes, I see all her foreign letters," she replied with an effort.

"I must go; don't work too hard. So you like to be your own mistress and your own maid; no help at all this summer?"

"No; and once Judith and I did the washing; it was the best fun we ever had."

"Our folks say you think you own Judith; but I guess you have as good a right to her as anybody. You and her Cousin Don; you do the most for her."

He nodded, wiped his forehead with his soiled handkerchief, pushed down his tattered straw hat and went down the steps with a careful tread. Uncle Cephas was an old man—his age had come upon him suddenly. Marion watched him as he walked away; it was easier to look at the load of hay, the hayfield beyond the parsonage garden, easier to look at anything, and think of anything excepting that foreign letter. Why should Don write to her? He had not written for five long years, not once since that letter about Judith from Genoa. Was it because she had—refused him?

During all these years it never once entered her thoughts that she had refused him.

He did ask her to become his wife—if *that* were asking. And she had refused, if that were refusing.

"Can you have dinner in half an hour?" Roger asked, coming to the open window near the sink. "I only this minute remembered that I promised King to drive over this afternoon to talk his parish difficulties over with him. His housekeeper has gone, did I tell you? He's keeping house by himself—has been trying it a month, or I'd take you and Judith for the drive; he would not relish your seeing his house-keeping. Don't hurry too much; give me a cold dinner with a cup of coffee."

"I'll ring the bell in half an hour; Judith will help me," she replied, hearing the sound of her own voice with every word she spoke.

The words she was speaking did not touch her own life—nothing was in her life but that letter in her hand; she had as much of it as she could bear just now, she thought she would hide it away and never open it. It was another thing to die and be buried.

Judith came and began to set the dinner table and to tell her the last pretty thing Nettie Evans said—Marion moved absently about the kitchen; the letter was pushed down in her dress pocket.

When at last she could bear the suspense no longer, she asked Judith to boil the eggs, and to bring the rice pudding from the cellar, and went up stairs to her own chamber and shut the door. If she did not have to bear this—if only it had not come to disturb her peace—she was satisfied without it. It was a long letter; it was full of something, her heart was beating so fast and choking her that she read sentence after sentence without gathering any thought or incident; it was words, words, words.

"I expect to sail for home next month; I am tired of being a stranger and a foreigner. You have never written to me beyond those two words; but I know what you have been to my Cousin Judith. I think I have grown old since you saw me; life has grown old if I have not. I know from the letters of Roger and

Judith that you are just the same. Unless you are just the same I would not care to see you again. Your old friend, Don."

She opened a drawer and laid the letter away; she would understand the rest of it when she was not in such a tumult. Did Roger know he was coming home? Judith had not told her. Had he told no one but herself? Did he expect her to tell the others? She had to take her eyes and burning cheeks down stairs, but she did not have to speak of her letter yet. And, after all, there was nothing in it to speak of. It was a letter not worth the writing.

The girl in the blue gingham, with the yellow waves of hair dropping to her waist in one long braid, was giving the last touches to the dinner table set for three; the roses in the centre of the table were from Aunt Affy's garden.

"They are talking still—Uncle Cephas and Roger. They will never get through; they begin in the middle every time. I have been so interested that I forgot to boil the eggs. There are chops down cellar; shall I broil them? I always think of Don when I broil chops. I broiled chops for him that last time I saw him. Do you know I believe he is coming home soon? He thinks he will surprise me; but I have guessed it all summer."

"Yes; get the chops," replied Marion.

"And you listen there at the window," laughed Judith; "Uncle Cephas is touching on marriage now. He told Roger he did a wrong thing when he married Jean Draper to a man who is not a Christian; she is only nineteen and does not know better, he said. Roger has been trying to argue himself right; but I don't know how Roger could help that, do you?"

"No; Roger couldn't help it; David Prince comes to church regularly and Roger admires him; Jean's father and mother were willing; I think Uncle Cephas takes too much upon himself. Roger believes David Prince is a Christian and doesn't know it. Roger knows it; and Jean does. But Roger never minds Uncle Cephas."

Uncle Cephas was speaking with low intensity; standing at the window Marion listened: at first indignant, then she became interested. Roger would miss his appointment; perhaps he was so amused with the old man that he had forgotten his drive to Meadow Centre.

"You see, dominie, in marriage there's a heap to look at besides young folks choosing each other, even more than parents being willing; parents may be mistaken—there's the command that comes straight and strong. I am as interested in the marriage question as I am in all the other things that concerns the life of the church and the community; I've had years enough to study it theoretically," he went on, with his deep laugh.

"Which command are you bringing down upon my head now?" inquired the minister, in a tone of good fellowship.

"Is it the dominie that asks which? You who should have all the commands, and promises, and threatenings at your tongue's end—"

"My tongue would have no end then," replied Roger.

"And the geography and history of the scriptures, too. I didn't use to believe in studying the geography of the Bible until that man came from Antioch, and now I know Damascus and the land of the Chaldees, and Tyre and Sidon all by heart. Of course you know better than I do that command Joshua gave the people, and I verily believe it was more for the women than the men, as I told Affy in talking over Jean Draper's case; women are naturally religious creatures, bless 'em."

Judith and the chops were over the fire; Marion stood at the open window; Judith listened, and burnt her chops.

"Why, you remember," Uncle Cephas ran on in the familiar voice with which he talked about his cattle and his crops, "that he told the people the nations should be snares and traps, and scourges in your sides and thorns in your eyes until they perished from off the good land, and the reason was, or would be, that they made marriages with them."

"Yes, certainly," interjected Roger impatiently.

"But that isn't all; don't say 'certainly' in such a matter of fact way; it was something else; it was making marriages 'with the remnant,' those that *remain among you*, not the round-about nations, but the among-you nations, and there's where the danger is, I tell the young folks; young folks never know their dangers; it is the believers that don't believe the folks that come to church and don't confess Christ, that is the hindrance, and the ones that bring punishment of scourges and snares and traps and thorns; it is like the half of a truth that is the worst of a lie. David Prince comes regularly and listens to the truth, and if I do say it to your face, you put it powerful; and he goes away and by his actions confesses that he doesn't believe a word you say. I labored with Jean Draper, but she only cried, like the dear girl she is, and said she couldn't give him up; not if the whole session said so."

"She came to me," answered Roger, in his quietest tones, "and I told her to hold on to him and I would marry them if the session tore me to pieces."

“I believe you would,” laughed Uncle Cephas. “Well, I’ve washed my hands. I didn’t expect to hinder anything. I suppose I can trust my minister if he hasn’t come to his gray hairs. I thought that hay was the first fruits and I’d bring it. You see Bensalem is as dear to me as the land of Israel to old Joshua and Samuel. The Lord’s eyes are always upon it, and it flows with milk and other good things. No offence, I hope,” he added in his sweet, old, slow voice.

Roger hurried into the house, and hustled Judith and her chops to the dinner table.

“I believe I’ll take you this afternoon, Judith; it’s time you began your vacation; all the other boarding-schools closed long ago. You will see the desolation of the Meadow Centre parsonage and offer your services on the spot. King can’t get a housekeeper to suit him since Mrs. Foster left. You will suit him exactly; perhaps he likes burnt chops.”

After the little bustle subsided, Marion asked: “Roger, why didn’t you tell him about Ruth of Moab—Judith and I are just reading *Ruth*, who married one of the chosen people, and, if Samuel wrote the story, he made the sweetest love-story that ever was written—and she was one in the direct line of the ancestry of Christ.”

“Because that would have been in confirmation of his point,” said Roger, breaking an egg carefully.

“I don’t see how,” replied Marion.

Judith listened; Roger never talked for the sake of argument; he pondered before he spoke again.

“She deliberately chose the God of Israel to be her God, giving herself to His worship and His people; Naomi had taught her; Naomi was a missionary—love of her mother-in-law was not all that decided her to leave her gods and her native land.”

“I thought it was because she loved Naomi,” said Judith, “and that was so lovely.”

“But Naomi’s son married her first,” argued Marion; “he had no right to do that.”

“Perhaps he was punished for it; perhaps both sons were punished for it; who knows?”

“But you do not think Jean has done wrong,” said Judith, sympathetically; “it will break her heart if she ever reasons herself into believing she has disobeyed.”

“Well, no,” replied Roger, dryly; “especially as David expects to confess his faith at the next communion. He would not do it before for fear that he would do it to please Jean. He did not dare tell her. He has told no one but myself.”

“Then, Roger, why didn’t you tell Uncle Cephas?” asked Judith, in astonishment.

“I thought he might as well learn that, even in Bensalem, there are some people he may misjudge. He knows Bensalem by head, once in a while, better than he knows it by heart.”

“Did you say you would take Judith to Meadow Centre,” Marion asked, bringing herself back from over the sea.

“Did I, Judith?”

“No, you said you believed you would take me,” said Judith, mischievously.

“I believe it still.”

“Would you like to go?” inquired Marion.

“I would not like to interfere with any of Roger’s beliefs.”

“Then be ready in ten minutes, or you will. I fed Daisy and she has had to eat in a hurry like her master.”

“But, Marion, I shall leave you with the dishes, and supper—”

“She couldn’t be left in better company,” Roger insisted; “don’t stop to change your dress; put on your big hat and we’ll be off.”

“Marion, do you want to be left alone?”

“More than anything else in the world,” said Marion, sincerely.

XX. JUDITH’S AFTERNOON.

“Green pastures are before me,
Which yet I have not seen.”

“I suppose King will ask me to exchange with him Sunday,” remarked Roger, putting the reins into Judith’s ready hands, after turning out of the parsonage lane. “Which sermon shall I take?”

“The cubit one,” was her unhesitating reply; “it has been in my mind to ask you to preach that again for me.”

“But you will not hear it.”

“Unless you take me with you,” she suggested with a merry laugh.

Roger believed that Judith Grey Mackenzie was the merriest maiden in Bensalem.

“I would if I were going to dine at the parsonage, but there’s no housekeeper there, more’s the pity, I shall take dinner and supper with one of the deacons, and drive home in the moonlight. You would like that.”

“All but the deacon.”

“And you wouldn’t endure the deacon for the sake of the cubit sermon.”

“Indeed, I wouldn’t. What would they think of me?”

“That you are a very nice little girl.”

“I’m too big a girl, that’s the worst of it.”

“That’s the best of it—for me.”

“I don’t know whether I’m glad of it or not,” she said, as frankly as if speaking to Marion. “The only trouble I have in the world is that I’m growing up away from being your little girl.”

“The only trouble I have,” said Judith, “is that I’m growing up away from being your little girl.”

“Don’t you dare,” he said with playful threatening.

“I don’t dare.”

“As if you could, Lady-Bug.”

“Oh, how that brings back dear old Don. It is the last name he ever called me—outside of a letter. Don’t you believe that he’s coming home soon?”

“I know it.”

“Do you know how soon?”

“That is his secret.”

“Oh,” drawing a long breath, “I’m too glad. But I don’t want to go to the city and keep house for him, and go to college and have every advantage, as he says I must do. I’ve *had* every advantage; you and Marion have been my ‘liberal education.’ Nothing will ever take me away from Marion.”

“Or your brother Roger.”

“Oh, you two are one. I always mean you both.”

“But hasn’t your Cousin Don the best right to you? Isn’t he your guardian or something?”

“He is my everything—beside you and Marion and Aunt Affy.”

“Then he must do as he thinks best.”

“Am I not to be consulted? I belong to myself first of all.”

“You will be much consulted, no doubt.”

“Then I hope I shall not have to do anything I don’t want to. I’m afraid Don will be like a stranger. I was only a little girl when he went away. I do not feel at home with *him*, only with the thought of him.”

“With your thought of him?”

“And my thought may be very far wrong. O, Roger, do you believe it is?” bringing her earnest face within range of his too sympathetic eyes.

“Tell me what is your thought of him,” he said, gently, taking the reins from her hands. “You see you cannot talk and drive, too. Daisy was walking into a fence.”

She gave up the reins without any consciousness of the action; she was looking at her Cousin Don’s face as she had told a “picture” of it to her mother.

“He is so fine, so unselfish, so true, so considerate, a refuge from everything that troubles me, a part of my mother to me—I have saved all his letters, they are my chief treasures. If I should be disappointed in him the sun would drop out of the sky.”

“Poor little girl,” thought the man beside her, tenderly. “Suppose you are disappointed in me,” he asked, lightly; “have you ever thought about that?”

“No. I cannot even *think* that,” she said, impulsively.

“Because you have not placed me on any such pedestal?”

“Perhaps so,” she laughed.

“*Is* that the reason?”

“No, for when I was a little girl I placed my Cousin Don and his friend Roger on the same pedestal. You haven’t tumbled off yet, and I’ve been with you ever since.”

“Judith, I do not like that,” he answered, seriously; “you shouldn’t look at people like that.”

“I don’t. At people. But I do at you, and Don, and Marion, and Aunt Affy and Ruskin and George Macdonald and Miss Mulock and Tennyson and—”

“Then I will not be frightened if we are all there. If one of us fail, you will have all the others to keep the sun in your sky.”

“Now, give me back the reins, because I have told you.”

He laid the reins in her hand, asking what she had been doing with herself all the morning.

“Writing a story.”

“O, Judith, not another one,” he exclaimed in pretended dismay.

“I had to. It was burning in my bones. Don’t you know I got five dollars for the last one?”

“Can nothing but a five-dollar bill quench the burning in your bones?”

“Oh, yes; the burning is quenched by writing it. I am quenched now for quite a while.”

“What was your inspiration this time?”

“Something you said Sunday evening.”

“Tell me.”

“I will read it to you in your earliest leisure.”

“Do you intend to keep this thing up and be a dreadful literary creature?”

“Only as long as the burning lasts.”

“But while you muse the fire burns; you must give up musing.”

“Are you serious?” she asked, troubled.

“No, dear. Give everything that is *in* you. That is what it is in you for.”

“I know that,” she answered, confidently. “In almost all your sermons I find a thought to make a story of.”

“You illustrate me. I am the author; you are the artist.”

“Then how can I go away and keep house for Don?”

“You mercenary creature, you want to make money out of me.”

“When I was a little girl and thought of writing stories I wanted to earn money; now I only think of the joy of writing things down.”

“That is creating—like the joy of the Lord. May it last forever—like his joy.”

Judith was silent from sheer happiness. Her work was so little, but so dear: Roger and Marion always understood; she was no more shy with them about her stories than about her thoughts; she gave herself to them utterly, as she had given herself to her mother.

The parsonage at Meadow Centre was in Meadow Centre; it was not in a village, or a *ville*; it was not in any place, but its own place, where it stood; the church was the nearest building, the post-office was two miles distant; there were farm-houses scattered about for miles; the most distant parishioner lived three miles from the church.

The parsonage, built of wood and stone, a story and a half, with the trumpet vine climbing luxuriously to its low roof, had passed its birthday of three-score years and ten. It was old, and it looked as if it felt old.

The gate was swung wide open, the path leading to the closed front door was weed-grown, the flower beds on each side of the path were a mass of wild, bright bloom.

“How pretty! How like a picture!” exclaimed Judith, in admiration; “there’s a grape-vine running up an apple tree, and there’s the old oaken bucket. What a pity for no one to live here.”

“Somebody stays here,” said Roger.

“Is it the parsonage? How can they neglect it so?”

“Whoa, Daisy. The farmers are all busy. King should learn to use a scythe, and a lawn-mower; he’s a born hermit. If he wanted to he could find a housekeeper; he forgets he hasn’t any.”

“But there’s no one at home.”

“Oh, yes, he’s at home. He’s expecting me. The study is in the rear; he lives in that.”

“But where is his sunshine?”

“He finds that. He’s the best man to find sunshine I know. He is the sunshine himself.”

The “sunshine” came around the corner of the house, a long linen duster crowned with a soft gray felt hat; beneath the hat a tawny beard, and the bluest eyes shining through a tangle of eyebrows.

“I had given you up.”

“Never give me up,” said Roger in a sunshiny voice. “I’m always on hand, when I am not on foot. Miss Mackenzie, Mr. King. But, excuse me, you have seen each other in Bensalem.”

“I have had the pleasure of meeting Miss Mackenzie; I hope she has not forgotten me.”

“Judith never forgets. Will you let her go around and browse while we have our drive? Judith, you don’t mind staying alone?”

“It is not a very nice place for a lady to stay in,” the bachelor housekeeper hastened to say; “I fear I forget when sweeping-day comes, and I always forget to wash the dishes.”

“Judith will do that for you. Don’t forget, Judith,” he warned.

“The woman who comes once a week is ill, and has not been here for two weeks; I am really ashamed to have Miss Judith come into the house.”

“She isn’t ashamed, she likes it. Give her your hand, Dick, and help her out; I must hold Daisy.”

Judith stepped down and stood beside the linen duster and gray hat, fervently wishing she had stayed at home.

“Roger, how long will you be gone?” she inquired, faint-heartedly.

“Till supper-time—we have business on hand—if you don’t have supper ready for us I’ll lose you on the way home.”

“There’s bread in the house, and butter and milk and eggs—but the dishes—,” excused the embarrassed housekeeper.

“Trust a girl to wash dishes. Will you wear that duster?”

“I have a coat under it. Wait until I show Miss Judith in; my study is the only fit place.”

“Show her the kitchen, there’s where you need a visitor.”

“The front door is locked,” apologized Mr. King. “I am sorry to take you to the back hall door.”

Judith’s courtesy and kindliness failed her; Roger deserved a scolding for bringing her to such a forlorn place; what could she do with herself two or three hours?

The doorway into which she was shown led into a narrow carpeted hall; the study door stood open; books in book-cases, on the floor, on a table, books and dust, a coat on a chair; the light from two windows streamed in.

“If you care for books you will find something to do—the latest magazines are somewhere. My housekeeper had to leave suddenly, and to get another has been impossible. I wish I might make you comfortable. I’d like to put Kenney under the pump for bringing you. Would you rather I would take you to a neighbor?” he asked, brightening.

“Oh, no; I like it—I shall like it,—here, in a few minutes,” she said with fervent kindliness.

“Don’t get us any supper; Mr. Kenney was only joking,” he added as he disappeared.

It was rather a cruel kind of a joke, she thought, as Daisy sped down the road; she would run away and walk home, seven miles, if she dared. But Roger would be hurt; he had brought her for the drive, and had no idea of the dismalness of the desolate old place.

She threw off hat and gloves, and braced herself for action of some kind. Roger would expect supper. It was not difficult to find the kitchen; there was no fire, a fire could hardly be expected; there appeared to be nothing in the room but piles and piles of dirty dishes. There were kindlings in a basket near the stove, and wood in the box behind the stove; there was a sink and a pump; with fire and water she could wash dishes.

If Marion had only come, too, what fun it would have been. It would be rather desolate fun all alone.

She discovered soap in a dish on the sink, and towels, clean towels, hanging on a heavy cord behind the stove. The room, like the study, was flooded with the afternoon sunshine. And there were pictures out of the window; she had never yet found a window that did not frame a picture. She could not be lonely with pictures and sunshine.

In five minutes the wood fire was crackling; the sunshine and the fire were two companions she loved, and then, Marion often laughed at her enthusiasm for washing dishes. For once in her life, she would tell Marion, she had dishes enough to wash.

If she might only heat the oven and make biscuits. That would be a surprise. With a feeling that she was intruding she opened a closet door; a loaf of bread, a plate of butter, a paper of soda crackers, a small basket of eggs, a tin quart of milk, a bag of salt was the quick inventory she made—then she found a bag of flour on the floor, a basket of potatoes, a ham from which slices had been cut, and a jug of molasses. Hot biscuits, ham and eggs, coffee, there must be coffee; what a splendid supper she might have. There were no remains of a dinner; perhaps he had forgotten to get any dinner, or he might have been invited out; he should have one supper—if there were only time.

Roger told her once that she had the feet and fingers of a fairy; she said to herself that she needed them that afternoon.

At that very moment when feet and fingers were busy in his kitchen, how her young enthusiasm would have been kindled could she have heard the story he was telling Roger.

“It has been a tug for me, something to go through with. You do not know unless you have had something of the sort happen to you. It may end in my going away. She is everything to be desired, and more than I deserve. A splendid looking girl, a college graduate, just the wife for a minister, keen as a flash, quick at repartee, as spicy as a magazine article, born to command, a perfect lady, with a winning manner, and I can’t love her if it kills me. I’ve been down on my knees begging the Lord to make me love her: and she is no more to me than a picture, or a statue, or a character in a book. It unmans me to feel

how her heart has gone out to me. She is as brave about it as she can be.”

“How, in the name of wonder, do you know it then?” asked Roger, in astonishment.

“I know it because I cannot help knowing it. If you do not know how I know it I cannot tell you. Her mother knows it, and how she watches me. They say Frederick Robertson married in a like way; he was afraid he had been dishonorable. But this is none of my doing.”

“I can believe that, old fellow.”

“What am I to do?”

“Steer clear of her.”

“All my steering will not keep me clear of her. We are constantly brought together.”

“Introduce me. You will be nowhere.”

Richard King would not laugh; the very telling his trouble appeared treason in his eyes.

“I know what is the matter,” ejaculated Roger, suddenly. “You have seen some other woman, or you would succumb.”

“I have seen several other women,” he said, thinking only of one,—the girl with a blind mother in Bensalem.

“Don’t let it drive you away from your work.”

“I think she may go away. I think her mother will send her away. I think I would rather face the cannon’s mouth than be left alone half an hour with that old lady.”

“Does she blame you?”

“Not if she has the common sense I think she has. I am the last man for a girl to fall in love with,” he added, ruefully.

“Don’t count too much on that,” advised Roger, gravely.

At six o’clock Daisy was driven around to the stable to be fed; Judith was taking her molasses cake from the oven and heeded neither voices nor footsteps.

“I told you so,” cried Roger, delighted, coming to the kitchen doorway. “See here, King, and look here, and *smell* here.”

“Well, I think so,” exclaimed the bachelor housekeeper in dismay and delight.

“Table set, too,” declared Roger, stepping into the tiny dining-room. “No table-cloth; how is that, Judith?”

“I couldn’t look around for things,” said Judith, flushing; “I was afraid every minute of intruding. I haven’t looked into places any more than I could help.”

“Miss Judith, I am ashamed—”

“You are grateful, you lucky dog,” interrupted Roger. “We are as hungry as tramps, Judith; our host stopped at the store and bought sugar cakes and cheese to treat us on, not knowing the feast he was bringing his guest home to.”

Biscuits, molasses cake, ham and eggs and coffee.

Judith’s eyes were demure and satisfied; she had never had such a good time in her life.

“I can get you a table-cloth if it will not be too much trouble to reset the table,” proposed the host as unembarrassed as his visitors could desire.

“Please don’t,” said Judith, “unless for your own convenience.”

“I acknowledge I haven’t seen a table-cloth on my own table since I have been my own housekeeper: but we must have napkins. I cannot do without napkins unless I am camping out.”

Judith was placed at the head of the table, she accepted the position as naturally as she did at the Bensalem parsonage when she was left to be the lady of the house; she poured the delicious coffee, ate her biscuits with a perfect relish, and listened to story, repartee, experiences, plans for work with an appreciation that added zest to the conversation.

“Well, Judith, what do you think of your afternoon?” inquired Roger, when Daisy was trotting the second mile toward home.

“I never had anything like it. I didn’t mind washing the supper dishes with you looking on; but I *did* mind

having him in the kitchen."

"He couldn't stay out; it was nuts for him. He's a first-rate camper, but housekeeping is one too many for him. He is one too many for himself. He wishes to be near the church, so he will not try to find board anywhere."

"Hasn't he a sister, or cousin, or somebody?"

"He hasn't anybody. He wants to bring a family to the parsonage—he might have had one for the summer if he had known he would lose his housekeeper in time. He will make a break and do something. What do you think of him?"

"If I hadn't seen that dreadful study, and that kitchen—"

"Did you go up stairs?"

"Why, *no*. Did you think I would do that? I felt myself an intruder every minute. You didn't think I *would* do that, Roger."

"Well, no; now I come to think of it."

"If I had met him away—but he is so much a part of that kitchen and study, that I'm afraid I shall not be fair to him. At first he was nothing but big, to me; big and ashamed; then nothing but red beard and eyebrows, and then eyes; his voice is as big as he is. I liked his sermon that other time you exchanged; he is a man in earnest."

"A man burning with enthusiasm! He came to Meadow Centre—his parish covers three miles in two directions,—only because he was needed there. He refused twice the salary, a pitiful little salary it is, that he might try to bring that church back,—to keep it from being swallowed up; his father was born there—he has a love for the church and people; we passed a deserted church on the way here, a mile ahead of us; Meadow Centre will be another deserted church before many years—there are deserted farms in this neighborhood."

"But the people will find a church somewhere."

"There's a new church where we went this afternoon; it is taking his people, his grandfather's people."

"I should think it would. The church is out of repair—there's nothing pretty about it. I don't believe he *can* keep the people together."

"Then he will help them scatter. He will do something for them. He wanted this experience, and he could afford to take it."

"Did you promise to exchange Sunday?"

"Yes. I will drive home after evening service. He will stay over night with us. I wish we might keep him a week. He took me to see a place for a new church. He is a born organizer—"

"Outside of the kitchen," laughed Judith.

"I wish he had a wife," said Roger.

"Not for such a reason—to keep house for him," replied Judith, in a flash of indignation.

"His grandfather and father were born in Scotland—on his mother's side he has Scotch grit. He'll pull himself through, but it's rather tough on him. He makes me feel like a pampered baby. He worked his way through college; he has fed on thistles and he shows it. I wish I had," said Roger devoutly.

"Is it too late?" asked Judith teasingly.

"I feel so small beside him," Roger went on discontentedly; "he is the biggest and best fellow I know."

"Roger, Roger, you tell me not to seek hard things for myself."

Roger lapsed into silence. Judith wondered if she might not put her afternoon into her next story. Sometime what a pretty book she would make out of her short stories. She would call it: "A Child's Outlook." But that would be too grown up for children. Her stories were *for* children, as well as about children. Marion had planned a summer of writing for her; she had the "plots" for five stories in her head; she had told them all to Marion as she used to tell her mother pictures; they were, all of them, founded on her own childish experiences; her childhood had been full of things—Marion said her own childhood had not been so full. Every day when she was a child had been a story. Telling her mother pictures had helped make her stories. She used to tell her mother stories about herself.

"You are too young to look back to your childhood," Roger had once told her; "that comes with age."

"Mother made it so real—she impressed me with its happenings. She made things happen, I understand now, because she was going away so soon. She used to say, 'I want you to look back and remember this.' And I read aloud to her the journal she asked me to keep the last three years—I draw upon that now."

A summer of stories. She laughed aloud in her joy. She wished she might take her book of stories to Heaven to show to her mother.

XXI. MARION’S AFTERNOON.

“Only the present is thy part and fee,
And happy thou,
If, though thou didst not beat thy future brow
Thou couldst well see
What present things required of thee.”

—George Herbert.

More than anything else in the world Marion wished to be alone that afternoon. If it were possible she wished to understand herself. She closed the study blinds, and, in the dim light drew Roger’s study chair to the table; and, sitting down, bent forward, leaning her head on the table.

What did she wish to understand? She wished to know if the years had burnt out that impulse of friendship, or love, she had, then, toward Roger’s friend, and her own friend; she was as light-hearted to-day, but for the shame of it, as if she had never known him so pleasantly and familiarly; her excitement over the letter was—what was it?

If he should enter now she would be startled; she would be startled because of that shame, because of those words that had spoken the truth to him; she had read his letters to Judith week after week all these years; they were delightful letters, he put himself into them; Judith had written him that she always showed them to her; she did not often read the letters Judith wrote to him.

If she knew that he were coming back to—but, why should he? He had not cared beyond friendliness then; there was no reason that he should care beyond friendliness to-day. She *was* just the same; not any prettier, not any more attractive; she was only a busy worker in her brother’s small parish. Girls always had lovers, she supposed; before she had a thought of it David Prince asked her to marry him, and she refused instantly with no thought but surprise; there had been no one else; she was twenty-one when she thought she cared for Don Mackenzie, she was twenty-six now; an impulsive girl then, a self-possessed woman now; that had been a golden experience; if there were any gold in her it had been tried in that fire.

He was her girlish ideal; he was not her woman’s ideal. Perhaps she was disappointed in him.

“Marion, Marion,” called a voice in the hall; a voice Marion loved; Aunt Affy’s voice.

“O, Aunt Affy,” springing toward the figure in the gray dress and pretty gray bonnet, “how *did* you know I wanted you more than I ever did in my life?”

“I was sent, may be,” was the simple reply.

“I am sure you were,” said Marion, drawing her into the study and seating her on the lounge. “Now give me your bonnet.”

“But, I can’t stay a minute,” Aunt Affy protested; “Cephas had to come to the blacksmith’s, and he brought me. Rody hasn’t been so well all day, and I hate to leave her. I came to see the minister.”

“The minister’s sister will have to do this time.”

“I’m afraid she won’t. Rody has something on her mind; I thought perhaps he would come to see her and find out. She looks queer at me and will not speak. Mrs. Evans is staying with her. She hasn’t worked too hard this summer; she couldn’t; I’ve done a good deal, and we’ve had one of the Draper girls come in two days every week. I know it isn’t *that*; it’s her mind. But I’ll stay content till Cephas comes for me. Now, what is, deary?”

“It isn’t anything; only I wanted to hear you talk.”

“Bless the child,” ejaculated Aunt Affy; “I never talked in my life.”

“No, you never do; you only breathe out your spirit and your experiences; they find words for themselves; I truly believe you have nothing to do with the words; they *come*.”

Aunt Affy laughed; she thought so herself.

“Did you ever want to do anything different from your life? Were you always as satisfied as you are now?” asked Marion, taking Aunt Affy’s hard-working hand into her own pretty fingers.

Then Aunt Affy laughed again. What a tumult her far-away girlhood had been. Did girls now-a-days think

so much and have such confusing thoughts and times?

"I had a longing to do a certain kind of work—very practical; and the only relief was praying to be satisfied with the having and doing it. That was a very holy state of mind, you think. I used to think so, too. Would it have been a holy state of mind if I had run next door to see my bosom friend and talked to her continually about it? My praying was simply to unburden myself. I had no bosom friend to talk to; if I had I might have told her about it instead of praying about it. And being devout I talked to God about it, instead of falling into reverie as one less devout would have done. I am not confident all my praying was prayer," she answered, shaking her head with its two long white curls.

"Yes," said Marion, who had felt this dimly about her own praying.

"But it held this inestimable blessing—it moved me to study about prayer, as no other experience would have done. And then, as the years went on, the comfort of what I found to believe was so satisfying that I forgot, for the while, the certain thing I was longing for. And then as it was not granted, I began to think the longing had been kept alive and craving that I might be kept alive and craving about prayer. God's way of answering is as well worth studying as our way of asking."

"I should think it might be worth more," said Marion.

"I am glad to hear you say that. Some too introspective people regard more their way of asking—and in that way wander about in the dark while his way of answering is light about them."

"But then," Marion said, argumentatively, "don't you see that unless your prayer were granted what you were learning would not be true; that is, if the promises are to be taken literally and exactly."

"I do not always know about 'literally and exactly.' That depends upon just where we are. A child's faith may need 'literally and exactly.' You and I may be growing into—not a less confident, but a more intelligent faith."

"Let me read you something. Dr. Parkhurst says—" Marion opened the volume and read:—"'The longings of the human spirit have their own particular beatitude, and, better than any other interpreters, make clear the meaning of the Holy Word.'"

"Read it again," said Aunt Affy. "I've been all through that."

Marion read it again, very clearly, then laid aside the book.

"But how do you know if you do give up?" she asked, feeling her own will strong within her.

"There is a great deal in your question. To give up heartily and thoroughly is a rare thing to do. It is more than giving up praying about it. It is even more than giving up wishing for it. It is giving up the place in your heart, the plan in your life that held it; it is so giving up that you can put something else in its stead. It is filling that place so full that the old desire can never get back into it again. And it is doing it of your own free will. It is like what the people might have done by taking God back again as King, and refusing to have Saul. They had the opportunity to do it."

"Aunt Affy, *how* have you learned to be so sure about things? You remind me of another thing Dr. Parkhurst says: 'A Christian has more than the natural resources of thought and action.'"

"So we have. I knew nothing but that God cared for me. And I was eager, impetuous, impatient, wilful, eager for him to walk my way, in the way I should tell him about. It was years and years before his Word became to me the delight, the plain command, warning, rebuke, comfort, it is to-day. But I studied night and day with my longing heart; and he blessed every natural longing; he took not one away; he took each into his keeping and blessed it."

"Does it take years?" faltered Marion. "I want to learn something to-day."

"You may learn something to-day; you cannot learn all to-day. Yesterday I opened my Bible to a passage dated thirty years ago; I remember the night I marked it; I was staggered, dismayed at something that had happened to me, something that I thought God would never let happen. I read through tears; I was comforted although the words meant little to me; I was comforted as a child is comforted, snug in its mother's arms, when the mother does not speak one word. Yesterday, being in a strait again, I read these same marked words; again they were dull and dry; I asked God to tell me what he meant."

"Thirty years ago did you ask him to tell you?"

"No, I did not think of that. I thought I would be comforted some other way. I had not grown up to the understanding of to-day. You know there's a *natural* growing up to understanding God's words. It took the happenings of these thirty years to make me understand; God worked through them. He makes us grow through the sunshine and rain of his happenings. God has to wait for our slow growing. (And I wish to impress upon you just here, that unless you read and remember and understand the Bible stories you cannot expect to find the lessons for your own life. Superficial reading will not bring out the points; one of his ways of teaching is through the natural method of your own study and memory.)

"'Therefore they inquired of the Lord further.' That further helped me through a hard time. The story is this: God had chosen a king for his people, told Samuel all about it, and sent him to pour the anointing oil upon his head and to kiss him; and now when Samuel called the people together at Mizpeh, and

caused all the tribes to come near to choose a king for them, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken, then the family in Benjamin, then Saul, the son of Kish, thus confirming the Lord's choice and Samuel's mission in the anointing, and then the most astounding thing happened. Saul, the chosen of the Lord, the young man whom the Judge of Israel had anointed and kissed, could not be found. What would you think if you believed that God had bidden you do something, and had confirmed it in such a special, satisfying, convincing manner, and then suddenly you could go no further—it was all taken out of your hands. The prophet sought for Saul and could not find him. Would you not be tempted to say—would you not really say to yourself, and to the Lord, I have been mistaken; I went ahead to do God's bidding in all the confidence of my faith, and before all the people I am ashamed; it is proven that God did not bid me, that my faith was presumptive, for the time has come to go on, and I cannot go on—the work is not to be done. It looks as if I had deceived myself; God has allowed me to believe something that is not true. Could anything be more heart-breaking? How could God treat you like that when you believed him so, and were so in earnest? Would you have the heart to inquire further? They asked if the man should yet come hither. Samuel had done all he could. The Lord answered, telling them plainly where the man had hidden himself. Oh, these hidden people, the Lord knows about. He is in all their hiding places. Suppose Samuel had stopped, ashamed before the people, angry, humiliated before the Lord. There had to be this last trial of faith. At the last eager, sure moment God may have a new test of faith for us. Is there a hiding place in one of your last, sure moments? Do not fail before it. God's will is hidden away in it."

"Aunt Affy, you do not know what you have done for me," said Marion, solemnly, "I have just been deciding something for myself. I was forgetting that God might have a will about it; that there was any *further* in it."

"And here comes Cephas," Aunt Affy replied, rising; "I know the rattling of those chains—I came in the farm wagon because it was easier than for him to hitch the horses to the carriage. I'm thankful enough if I've been of any help to you," she added, touching Marion's forehead with her sweet, old, happy lips.

"Shall I send Roger as soon as he comes home?"

"Yes, and Judith. Judith didn't come yesterday, and Rody kept asking for her."

"It may be late. They have gone to Meadow Centre."

"No matter if it is midnight. Rody didn't sleep last night. She talked in her sleep, and has been muttering all day; I wouldn't have left her only I wanted to see the minister alone before he saw her."

The chains of the farm wagon rattled into the lane. Marion, on the piazza, watched the old lovers drive away.

XXII. AUNT AFFY'S EVENING.

"When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?"

—*Job* xxxiv. 29.

"I don't want any supper," complained Aunt Rody, rising from the supper table and staggering toward the sitting-room door. "I'm too full to eat; too full of deceit; you are all deceiving me."

"Now, Rody," protested Cephas, buttering his big slice of bread, with a vigorous touch.

"All, every one of you," she said with a wail, turning with a slow effort to face the supper-table; "you have deceived me all your life, and Affy has, and Joe, and Judith, and Doodles would if he knew how. Perhaps he does in a dog's way, which isn't half so tremendous as the human way."

Joe burst into a laugh, which Aunt Affy's look instantly silenced.

"Poor Rody," she sighed.

In the twilight, after the dishes were done, the two old sisters sat together on the piazza; Rody had insisted upon wiping the dishes, and as she sat upright in her straight-backed chair, she rubbed her fingers dry with the brown gingham apron she had forgotten to take off.

She rubbed her fingers with an unceasing motion, muttering to herself. Affy looked off into the twilight, her hands still in her lap. Joe went whistling up the road to the village; Cephas, in meditative attitude, in his shirt-sleeves, with his straw hat pushed to the back of his head, leaned over the gate.

"All of you, all of you," mumbled the breaking voice, "from my youth up."

"Cephas thinks it would be a good thing to sell the milk to the Dutchman that has bought the Elting farm," began Affy, watching the effect of her words. "Four cents a quart. And we would be saved the churning and washing all the milk things. If Joe goes away to learn a trade we shall have nobody to churn. What do you think, Rody?"

The drooping head lifted itself, the fingers with the gingham fold were held with a loosening hand; sharply and shrilly Aunt Rody replied: “That’s always the way; you and Cephas are always putting your heads together to cheat me out of something. Not a quart of that milk shall go. Joe shall stay and churn. Mother never sold her milk to a Dutchman for four cents a quart. What would we do for butter, I’d like to know.”

“Buy it.”

“Buy it,” she repeated, mockingly; “nobody on the Sparrow place ever paid money for butter.”

“But Cephas thinks—,” began Aunt Affy, patiently.

“Tell Cephas to stop thinking,” replied the weakly imperative voice.

Twilight darkened into night; but Rody refused to go in and go to bed; she was comfortable, she liked that chair, she liked the stars, she could breathe better out here in the night air; she did not want to go into her bedroom, somebody had struck her a blow in there.

So they stayed, the air blew damp, Aunt Affy brought a shawl and pinned it about the stooping shoulders; Cephas came and sat down on the step of the piazza with his hat on his knee, giving uneasy glances now and then at the muffled, still figure in the chair.

“It’s getting dark,” suggested Affy, rising and standing before the bent figure with its head turned stiffly to one side.

“And damp—these nights are chilly for old bones,” replied Cephas.

“There’s a light in the house,” persuaded Affy, “and it’s dark out here.”

“And the bed is so comfortable,” added Cephas; “guess I’ll go in.”

He arose and went in.

“I’m going, too,” encouraged Affy. “Come, Rody, you may sleep in my bed.”

“I won’t sleep in my bed; are you sure there’s nobody to strike me in your room?” she questioned like a frightened child.

“Nobody but me. Come, Rody,” she urged, gently.

Placing a hand on each arm of the chair, the old woman lifted herself to her feet; then she felt out in the darkness for something to lean on; Affy took her arm and led her in. The lamp was burning on the round table where the *New York Observer* was piled; Doodles slept on his cushion on the lounge.

“I’ll sit here awhile,” said Cephas, pulling his spectacle case from his vest pocket. “I haven’t read the paper to-night.”

“I’ll sit here, too,” said Rody, rousing herself to a decision. “Somehow I don’t want to go to bed. I don’t believe it’s nine o’clock yet. I wish the clock would strike. I wish something would make a noise.”

“It’s a quarter of nine,” replied Affy, lowering her sister slowly down into her chair. “It will soon strike.”

“Take this thing off,” commanded Rody, tugging at the shawl with her weak right hand. “You bundle me up as if I was a baby.”

“There’s a carriage coming,” said Cephas, bending his head and half shutting his eyes to listen; “he’s come, Affy.”

“Who’s come?” demanded Aunt Rody, in shrill tone. “Who comes at this time of night?”

“The minister; he was coming to bring Judith for an hour or two,” Cephas answered, reassuringly. “She didn’t come yesterday. Don’t you want to see her?”

“Just for a look; I don’t want her to stay, I don’t want anybody to stay.”

Roger Kenney and Judith entered quietly; Judith shrank from the old woman as she stood for an instant beside her chair. Roger drew a chair nearer and took Aunt Rody’s hand into his own. The nerveless hand lay in his as if glad of the warmth and strength; as he talked, Roger clasped and unclasped his hand over hers that she might feel the motion and life of his fingers.

“I’m glad to see you, Aunt Rody,” he said in a voice which was a tonic.

“I’m glad to see you,” she replied, with the flicker of a smile about her lips.

“‘Let not your heart be troubled.’”

“It *is* troubled; it is full of trouble. It’s Affy and Cephas; they are deceiving me. They want to get married and deceive me more and more.”

“Shall I tell you how we’ll stop that?” asked Roger, bending confidentially toward her.

“Yes, do. Tell me quick.”

“Let me marry them, and then you will never think they are deceiving you again. What is the reason they are deceiving you now?”

“Because they think I stand between them; they think I’ve always stood between them,” she said, piteously; “but I never did. I was seeking their good.”

“But don’t you think you have sought their good long enough?” he asked persuasively.

“Yes; I’ve worn myself out for their good. I’m worn out now; they’ll have to do for themselves, after this.”

“Who will take care of Affy after you are gone?”

“I don’t know; I’m sure I don’t know. She doesn’t know how to take care of herself.”

“But she was your little baby; you are sorry not to have her taken care of.”

“Oh, yes, I’m sorry; I’m *very* sorry.”

Affy dropped on the lounge beside Doodles, and was crying like a child; Judith went to her and put both her strong young arms about her and her warm cheek to hers. Cephas cleared his throat, then busied himself burnishing his spectacles with a piece of old chamois.

“Somebody must take care of her, Cephas knows how best,” said the minister with firmness, rubbing the cold, limp fingers.

“Yes, Cephas knows how best,” she quavered “Come here, Cephas, and promise the minister you will always take care of Affy.”

“Go, Aunt Affy,” said Judith, in her strong, young voice, “go and be married while Aunt Rody knows it. She’ll change her mind to-morrow—”

“Oh, I can’t, I can’t,” sobbed Aunt Affy, “with Rody so near dying, how can I? It’s too hurried and dreadful.”

“It’s too beautiful,” said Judith; “that is all she can do for you; do let her do it, dear Aunt Affy.”

“Come, Affy,” said Cephas solemnly, “the Lord’s time has come.”

“Perhaps it has,” sobbed Affy, trembling from head to foot, as Judith led her across the room.

Roger arose and stood before the old man and the old woman; her head drooped so that one long curl rested on his shoulder.

“I’d ought to have a coat on,” said Cephas with an ashamed face; “it isn’t proper for a man to be married in his shirt-sleeves.”

“And let me fix up a little,” coaxed Aunt Affy; “this is my old muslin, all faded out.”

“Oh, don’t spoil anything,” Judith besought; “see how she is watching you. Aunt Rody, don’t you want Uncle Cephas to take care of Aunt Affy?”

“Yes, yes, oh, yes. Has he promised the minister?” she asked with tremulous anxiety.

“Listen, and you will hear him promise. Joe, come here,” Roger called to the step in the kitchen.

Joe came to the threshold, threw off his hat, and stood amazed.

“Aunt Rody, put their hands together,” said Judith, taking Aunt Rody’s hands as the old bride and bridegroom stretched their hands toward her.

“Did I do it?” she asked, as she felt the touch of both hands. “Is it done for always?”

“Yes,” said the minister, “you’ve done it. Now, listen to every word.”

“Has he promised to take care of Affy?” Rody asked, peering up into Roger’s face.

“Yes, Rody, with all my heart and soul and strength,” answered the old man, with the light of communion Sunday in his face.

The curl drooped lower on Cephas’ shirt-sleeve; Judith stood near Aunt Affy.

The solemn, glad words were spoken, the prayer uttered, the benediction given; Aunt Affy and Uncle Cephas were married.

“Let me kiss you, Rody,” said Affy, through her tears.

“I kissed you when you were a baby,” said Rody. “You were a nice little baby. Mother said I must always think of you first.”

“Now, you will go to bed,” said Affy. “It’s after nine o’clock.”

“Not in my room. I’ll go in your room. Don’t you go away all night. Keep the light burning, and don’t you go.”

“No; I’ll stay, Rody; we will take care of you always, Cephas and I.”

Judith stayed that night; Aunt Rody slept well, and arose in the morning at her usual early hour. She made no allusion to the marriage that day, nor as long as she lived.

XXIII. VOICES.

“The love for me once crucified,
Is not a love to leave my side,
But waiteth ever to divide
Each smallest care of mine.”

The three were in the study that Sunday afternoon that the Meadow Centre minister exchanged with Roger Kenney; the minister, the hostess, and the girl at boarding-school. The boarding-school girl had a book in her lap with her finger between the leaves, listening.

“Mr. King talks as though he had never had any one to talk to before,” Judith thought as she watched the two and listened.

His conversation was filled with bits of information, with incident, with a thought now and then, absorbingly interesting to a school-girl.

Roger loved people better than he loved books; Judith had not outgrown her books, and grown into loving people. The Meadow Centre minister was a chapter in a most fascinating book; he was the hero of a story; he was not a being of flesh and blood like Roger. She was afraid every moment the book would shut and she would read no more of his story; “to be continued” would end this chapter, and then she might never see the end of the book.

“‘Conversation is not the road leading to the house,’” he quoted, “‘but a by-path where people walk with pleasure.’”

“I think it leads to the house,” replied Judith, quickly, “if people are real and sincere. What *does* lead to the house if conversation does not?”

“Deeds,” suggested Marion.

“But we can’t do deeds every minute,” persisted Judith; “how could we do deeds sitting here this afternoon.”

“We have done them,” said Mr. King; “we are resting in a by-path.”

“But we want to get to the house,” insisted Judith.

“Loitering by the way is pleasant; through the by-way we may learn the way to the house.”

“Marion, that reminds me of Cousin Don,” Judith said, suddenly; “we know him only through by-ways.”

“Tell me about Cousin Don,” said the minister, interestedly.

Cousin Don was a story Judith loved to tell.

“You expect to find him unchanged after all these years—the time in his life when a man changes?” he inquired, astonished. “Is that the way you understand human nature?”

“Perhaps I do not understand human nature at all. But I have his letters.”

“By-ways—they do not lead to the house,” he replied.

“But they can,” said Judith, vexed.

“Oh, yes, they *can*.”

“And I know they do; don’t you, Marion?”

“In this case, I hope so,” Marion answered; “I don’t see how people can help being like their letters.”

“Or their letters like them?” corrected Judith.

“Then how is it we are disappointed in people?” Mr. King questioned; “is it only our lack of insight?”

“People change,” said Marion, with slow emphasis; “if we were with them all the time we would see the little changes that lead the way to the great changes. People are even disappointed in themselves; I am.”

“So am I,” he answered sincerely; “I fall below my own ideal often enough; if anybody cared enough for me to be disappointed in me they would have reason enough.”

“I don’t believe they would,” thought Judith.

“Mr. King,” Marion began doubtfully, “do not answer me if my question is intrusive; but I would like to know how you read the Bible for yourself.”

“That *is* a coincidence,” exclaimed Mr. King; “as I was driving along this morning a question came to me that I never thought of asking myself before: suppose someone asks you to-day how you study the Bible *for yourself*, what will you say?”

“How wonderful,” both girls said in the same breath.

“So I told myself what I would say. One of my ways when I am in special need of a word from my heavenly Father is to ask him to give it to me, and then I am sure to find it in my reading. Often I open and find it; often and often I find it in the chapter that comes next in my daily reading. Asking the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to see his special word to you in that special need is the safest way and the quickest for me. I am assured then that I shall learn that day’s lesson in that day’s place. The truth I need most has never failed to come.”

“That is a very simple way,” Marion said. “As simple as a child asking his mother for something she has promised. The only hindrance is self-will.”

“Oh, dear, that hinders everything,” sighed Judith, who was battling with the suggestion from within herself that perhaps her boarding-school days were over and she *ought* to go back and help nurse Aunt Rody. The aunts had been so kind to her mother when she was a homeless little girl, and to herself when she was a homeless little girl. She had kept it out of her prayers ever since she had thought of it. If only she had not thought of it. Aunt Affy would never ask her to give up her studies and her happy home to bury herself with three old people.

“Are you far enough along in life to know that?” asked Mr. King, giving the girl of eighteen a glance of keen interest.

“I think I was born knowing it,” said Judith. “Do you know about anybody who wanted to do right and had a will of his own—”

“Oh, yes; they are plenty of us. Three of us in this room,” he laughed.

“But I meant some one in the Bible, for then we can know certainly what happened to him.”

“Yes, I find a king who leagued himself with another king to go to war; but he was not satisfied that he was in the way of obedience, and he said to the other king, ‘Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord to-day,’ and the other king gathered four hundred men, his own prophets, and inquired of them what he should do. With one voice they said, ‘Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hands of the king.’ Four hundred answers to his prayer; the Lord’s command four hundred strong. But the king who believed in the true God had not had his answer; it was the will of the true God he sought. He said, ‘Is there not here, besides, a prophet of the Lord that we might inquire of him?’ The answer was, ‘There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord.’ If there is one way of knowing the Lord’s will, there is no excuse for us; we may know it. Four hundred voices of self-will are no reason, and no excuse, for not knowing it. This king who believed in God heard the one voice of God—and disobeyed it. He joined himself in battle with the king who trusted in the four hundred voices of his self-will. And the battle went against him; God had told him so. He believed God afterward; so will you and I if we disobey. He went to battle as though God had not spoken.”

“Was he *killed*?” asked Judith, fearful some trouble might fall upon her if she listened to the voice of self-will.

“No, he cried out, and the Lord helped him, and moved his enemies to depart from him. As he returned to his house in peace, a seer met him, and said, ‘For this thing wrath is upon thee from the Lord.’”

“‘For this thing,’” repeated Judith. “For inquiring of the Lord, learning his will, and then believing the voice of the four hundred who gave him his own way. Oh, dear, I wish those four hundred would *never* speak.”

“There is but one way to silence them; listen to God’s voice above them all.”

“But it is so *hard*,” cried Judith, impetuously.

“Do not choose the easy way of obedience. Choose God’s way, and let me tell you one of his secrets; *his way is always easier than we think*.”

To hide the tears which would not be kept back Judith hastily left the study; he did not know, nobody could know, what obedience would cost her; life at the parsonage was so different; Roger and Marion were *young* with her, and Aunt Rody and Aunt Affy, and Uncle Cephas were so *old*; they had lived their lives, and their days went on with a long-drawn-out sameness; nothing ever happened to them, they were not looking forward to anything, there would be no study, no new books, no music, no getting near the loveliest things in the world; it was barrenness and dreariness, it was like death; the parsonage was hope, and youth, and love and life, with the best things yet to come. “It will stifle me to go back; I shall die of homesickness, I shall choke to death.”

Cousin Don had a right to her, he was her guardian cousin. Would he not have a right to come and take her away? But her mother—what would her mother choose for her to do?

They had been so kind to her mother.

“I will go and stay—a week,” she resolved, tears rushing afresh; “but I miss Marion when I stay one single night.”

At the supper-table she announced with reddened eyelids and a voice that would not be steady that she thought she would go to Aunt Affy’s before evening service and stay over night; Uncle Cephas had told her that morning that Aunt Affy was very tired.

“Must you go?” asked Marion. “But I know they need you. Mrs. Evans said they couldn’t get any one, and Aunt Rody was in bed to-day.”

“Perhaps I’ll find it easier than I think,” said Judith.

“As soon as they find a nurse you will come back,” encouraged Marion.

During the walk through the village and to the Sparrow place Judith’s courage all oozed away; she grew so faint-hearted that she thought she was faint; she stopped for a glass of water at the well where the lilies had come, and went upstairs a moment to talk to Nettie, still helpless in her invalid chair.

“The minister came to see me this afternoon,” Nettie greeted her; “he read and prayed and told me things. Has he told you anything?”

“Yes, and I almost wish he had not. I *have* to do right things—whether I want to or not.”

“Are you doing one now? One new one. You look so.”

“I am on the way to it.”

“Where are you going?”

“Literally and figuratively I am on the way to it. I am giving up study and everything else to go and take care of Aunt Rody.”

“How splendid of you. I knew you would do something *real* some day,” Nettie said with enthusiasm. “You haven’t been my ideal for nothing. Mother has kept telling me I might be disappointed in you; but I *knew* I never should.”

After that how could she feel faint-hearted?

“O, Judith,” said Aunt Affy, meeting her on the piazza, “how did you know I couldn’t do without you any longer? Joe has gone for the doctor; Rody has had another spell.”

In her own little room that night the girl knelt on the strip of rag carpet, and, with her head buried in the pink and white quilt, prayed that the voices of her self-will might be lost in the voice of the Holy Spirit. The coming back was even harder than she feared; Mr. King had not told her God’s truth when he said: “*His way is always easier than we think*.”

The thought that she was bravely doing a hard thing did not brace her to the bearing of it; she was not bearing it at all; she was living through it.

Roger had not once told her she was brave, Marion was not more than usually sympathetic; the neighbors were taking her coming back as a matter of course—something to be expected; they would have blamed her if she had not come; Aunt Rody every day was less fretful toward her, more satisfied with her nursing; Aunt Affy busy in kitchen and dairy, with the new importance of her marriage, and being for the first time mistress in her own house, seemed forgetful that the girl had come from any brighter life, forgetful that she had ever left the old place and its homespun ways, and, most discouraging of all, forgetful that any other help in household or sick-room was desired or might be had by searching and for money. For the first time in her life Aunt Affy was selfish. In her own contentment she forgot, or did not think it possible that the girl of eighteen could be discontented.

Judith remembered that Harriet Hosmer had said she could be happy anywhere with good health and a bit of marble.

But suppose she had not had her bit of marble?

These days were the history of her summer of stories.

The doctor told them that Aunt Rody might be helpless in bed for months; she might gain strength and sit in her chair again. He had known such instances. That was in the first week; in the second week he gave them no hope.

The stricken old woman was alive; that was all she was to Judith: an old woman who was not dead yet.

Judith was pitiful; she loved her with a compassionate tenderness as she would have loved any helpless, stricken thing; but she was hardly "Aunt Rody" any longer.

She was as helpless as a baby, with none of a baby's innocence, or loveliness or lovingness; there was no hope for this gray-haired, wrinkled mass of human flesh, but in casting off this veil of the flesh, no hope but in death. It was as if death were alive before Judith's eyes, and within touch of her hand.

She had no memory of Aunt Rody as the others had, to give affection to; there was only *this*. There was scarcely any memory for her gratitude to cling to.

There was one comfort left; she was not afraid of her now.

If she had stayed with her, instead of being at home at the parsonage, she might have grown up to love and understand her; instead she had grown away from love and understanding.

She dared not think of release coming through Aunt Rody's *death*. That would be desiring her death. Desiring one's death in one's heart was—.

There was no hope but in Cousin Don.

XXIV. "I HAVE ALWAYS THOUGHT YOU CARED."

"'What is it thou knowest, sweet voice?' I cried,
'A hidden hope,' the voice replied."

—Tennyson.

"Judith, don't stay in this little close entry when all out-doors is calling to you," said Aunt Affy.

"But I thought she might stir and want something," replied Aunt Rody's nurse; "she looks up so patient and pitiful when she wants something."

"My work is all done; I'll sit here; you are losing your color, child. What will your Cousin Don say to me when he comes home to claim you?"

"He will not come home to do that," said Judith, rising reluctantly to give Aunt Affy her low chair. "I have a foreboding that something is happening to him. He never forgot me before."

"Forebodings come out of tired head and feet and back. I am allowing you to do too much. This is Saturday afternoon and your play time. The baking is done, and now that we are rid of churning—what *would* poor Rody say to me for selling the milk and making no butter? I feel that I am 'deceiving' her at every turn about the house. Run up stairs and put on the blue muslin you look so cool in, and go out in the hammock and forget the responsibility that takes away your appetite and gives you big eyes. Dear child, death must come. It is the voice of the Lord calling Rody. You know what George MacDonald says: Death is only going to sleep when one is downright sleepy. Rody *is* downright sleepy. Think how she sleeps half the time, poor old soul."

"Do you think she is glad to be 'downright sleepy'?"

"Aren't you, always, when your night comes?"

"But, Aunt Affy, she hasn't been—she wasn't—I did not think she cared."

"Her light has almost gone out, sometimes, I do believe. But it's there, burning. She has a spark of real faith that never went out. She wasn't as loving in her ways as she was in her heart. Now, don't stand another minute. I want you to go to church to-morrow, too. John Kenney is out on the piazza waiting for you; he's come to the parsonage to spend Sunday."

In an instant Judith was all light and color. John Kenney was the kind of a friend that no one else in the world was; as grave as the minister himself, at times, as book loving, and yet as full of fun and frolic as a boy; he was taller than Roger, and handsome; Roger was fine, but he was not handsome; she had no fear or reverence for John, he stood beside her, and walked beside her; they were boy and girl together; John was nearly three years older; he would be twenty-one in the winter. She stood still radiant.

"You look rested enough now," remarked Aunt Affy.

“I was not so tired, I was only blue; I was thinking about Don. John has been away all summer; he has not been in Bensalem since my birthday.”

“Did he come for that?” inquired Aunt Affy, keeping any suggestion out of her voice. She would not put ideas into the child’s head.

“He said so. And to say good-bye to the parsonage. We agreed not to write to each other while he was out west.”

“What for,” questioned Aunt Affy, suspiciously. “Had you ever written to each other before?”

“No,” laughed Judith, softly, “and we agreed not to begin.”

“What for?” asked Aunt Affy, again.

“For fun, I think, as much as anything. I think we had no real reason.”

“Two such reasonable creatures, too. Judith, you *had* a reason or he had. Why should the question come up?” Aunt Affy asked severely.

“Oh, questions are always coming up. He asked me if I would write and I refused.”

“And that’s how you agreed together. What was *your* reason?”

“I think,” began Judith slowly, “I was afraid Roger wouldn’t like it. Or Marion. Marion is particular about such things. I’m afraid she had something to trouble her once—she never will tease anybody about anybody, even.”

“Well, be off, and dress. I told John you would not be out for some time.”

“I’ll go in this dress. I haven’t seen him for months.”

Whether the haste augured well or ill for John, Aunt Affy could not decide; she went into Aunt Rody’s bedroom, touched her forehead and spoke to her.

“Are you sleepy, Rody?”

“Yes.”

“Would you like anything?”

“No.”

Aunt Affy, with her mending for her husband and for Joe, kept watch in the entry, lighted by the open back door, all the afternoon.

After half an hour on the piazza, Judith gave John Aunt Affy’s latest magazine to amuse himself with, and went up to her small chamber, to braid her tumbled hair and to array herself in the fresh, blue muslin.

In the cracked glass over the old bureau she met the reflection of a girl with joyful eyes and cheeks like pink roses. She knew that was not the girl that had watched Aunt Rody in the entry.

Her summer companion had come back; he was her vacation friend; perhaps she had missed him; perhaps her loneliness had not all been for her Cousin Don. He was still in her world; across the continent had not been in her world. He had not sent her one message through letters to Marion or Roger. She had not dared write to him. But he was home again, just as grave, and just as bright, with no reproach in his eyes, and he was planning to stay a week. He had come to talk to Roger and decide his choice of business in life; his father wished to take him into his own business, the jeweller’s, either in the factory or store, but he had no taste for making jewelry, or selling it, he said; he would rather study; he was “not good enough” to be a minister; he would like to study medicine.

Judith made herself as fresh and pretty as girls love to be, pondering the while John’s choice of work in life. She would choose for him to be like Roger, and do Roger’s work, but if he did not believe himself to be “called” like Roger, that would not be acceptable work; was not healing a part of Christ’s work; was not John gentle, sympathetic, and in love with every human creature? He had a copy of something of Drummond’s in his pocket; he said Drummond was making a man of him. The beginning of his manhood was in joining a Boy’s Brigade while he was away at boarding school up the Hudson. When she came back to the piazza he said he would read to her Drummond’s address to a Boy’s Brigade.

He had grown more grave since he went away; he told her the weight of what to do and what not to do was heavy upon him night and day.

“And he has such laughing brown eyes,” she said, almost aloud, to the girl in blue muslin, reflected in the cracked mirror.

“What are *you* going to do?” he inquired as he pushed a piazza chair near the hammock for her, and stretched himself in the hammock that he might look up at her and watch her as he talked.

“Must I do something?”

"You are old enough to decide. Girls are always deciding. Martha and Lou are forever taking up something new. They are not satisfied to be housekeepers. How Marion has settled down since she came to Bensalem! To be Roger's housekeeper and a deaconess in his church has come to be her only ambition. Is that yours, too?"

"Which?" she asked with serious lips and dancing eyes.

"Both."

"My Cousin Don thinks he has my future in his right hand. But I'm afraid his right hand is finding business he likes better."

"Tell me true, what do you wish most to do?"

"If you cannot decide for yourself, how can you expect me to decide for myself?"

"I do know. I have decided. I am simply waiting for Roger's judgment to confirm my choice. I want him to talk father over. Father wants one of his sons in the business, and Maurice declares he will not go in—he wants to be an architect. He has decided talent; as I have not, but am only commonplace and a drudgery sort of a fellow; I may take business instead of medicine to please father and help Maurice out. Mother beseeches me to please father; she almost put it 'obey' my father. What do *you* advise me?"

"O, John, is it like that? I thought there was nothing in the way but your own choice."

"There is not. Father will give a grudging consent. I think he gave me my California trip to give me time to think—perhaps to think of his wishes. He went into the business to please his father."

"He has not regretted it."

"Far from it. He congratulates himself. I know a fellow whose father gave him a 'thrashing' to make him go to college; his grandfather had given his father a 'thrashing' and made him go."

"Did he go?"

"The fellow I know? No; he ran away."

"Do you want to run away?"

"I ran away to Bensalem to ask Roger."

"I think Roger will urge you to please your father."

"Father was glad enough for Roger to study."

"That was because of the choice of study."

"I knew that. But my choice is no mean one."

"I think a natural bent should be respected," reasoned Judith.

"I don't know that I *have* a natural bent. A great English physician writes that he decided to study medicine when he was a boy because his father's physician came to the house with a coat trimmed with gold lace. He was after the gold lace."

"What are *you* after?"

"Money, reputation—position—"

"I don't believe it," she answered, earnestly.

"Oh, I would like them thrown in," he laughed.

"In the Boy's Brigade you didn't make them first."

"What do you make first?"

"Aunt Rody, just now."

"What second, then?"

"Talking to you, on the piazza."

"Judith," catching her hands and holding them fast, "decide for me. Shall I study medicine, or shall I please my father and mother?"

"I cannot decide for you," she said, lightly, withdrawing her hands.

"You don't care."

"I do care."

“Decide then.”

“I am not the one to decide.”

“You are; if I put the decision in your hands.”

“But I am only a girl.”

“That is why I ask you. Girls see clear. They do not love money, they are not ambitious.”

“I do not love money. I may be ambitious.”

“How are you ambitious?”

She flushed and would not reply.

“About your stories? Do you expect to write?”

“I expect to write. I cannot help it; it is *in* me and will come out. Nothing much, perhaps; only little things, but I love them.”

“I do not think medicine is ‘in me’ like that. I simply like a profession better than the routine and drudgery of business.”

“That is not a great motive.”

“No; and that boy’s gold lace wasn’t; but he made a success.”

“Yes,” was all Judith said.

“You are displeased with me.”

“I am disappointed. I thought you *cared*.”

“I do; in a certain way.”

“But not in the best way.”

“Judith, I am not ‘great’ or ‘best.’”

“I thought you were; I want you to be.”

“That is a motive,” he said, catching her hands again. “Judith, if you will tell me you love me and will marry me, I will go home and tell my father I will make gold rings and sell them to the end of my days; but you must let me put one on your finger.”

“If you made it I’m afraid it wouldn’t fit,” she laughed, again withdrawing her hands.

“Will you, if it fits?”

“I cannot tell until I try.”

“Don’t play with me. It is neither ‘great’ nor ‘best’ for a girl to do that.”

“You frighten me,” she said, with a sound in her breath like a sob.

“I beg your pardon.”

“I cannot promise. I do not want to promise. I never thought of it.”

“You think I am only a boy.”

“I am only a girl.”

“I did not just think of it. You think I am too sudden and impulsive. I thought of you all the time I was gone. I have loved you ever since I knew you. How can anybody help loving you? You meant Bensalem to me more than Roger and Marion did. I have been afraid somebody would guess. I was afraid somebody would keep you away from me. Judith, don’t you care for me, at all?”

“Yes, John; but not like *that*. I couldn’t promise that. I never thought you cared like that.”

“How did you think I cared?” he asked, passionately; “in a grandfatherly way like Roger?”

“I do not know,” she answered sadly; “you were so good to me, and I liked you. I didn’t think.”

“Will you think now?” he asked, gently. “Will you think and tell me?”

“When?”

“As soon as you know yourself. I will wait years and years.”

“Yes, I will tell you as soon as I know myself,” she promised.

“Then I will wait. You are worth waiting for.”

“John, ought I to tell Marion?”

“No. Do not tell anybody. It is my secret. You haven’t any secret. Nobody need ever know, I will never be pitied.”

Judith pitied him then.

“I am not bound in any way. I haven’t promised, John.”

“No; you haven’t,” he said, touched by the sorrow in her face. “I am sorry to trouble you so; but I had to say it. I came to Bensalem to say it.”

“Are you sorry you came?”

“No; I had to have it out. Perhaps it will make a man of me. Something will have to. A man needs some kind of a fight.”

Judith thought that it was not only his “fight.”

“I am going home; I can’t stay here. I’ll tell Roger I decided not to stay over Sunday. I don’t care what he thinks. We talked till twelve o’clock last night. I know what he thinks. I’ll walk to Dunellen to the train, I’d like to start and walk around the world.”

“John.” Judith’s eyes were filled with tears.

“Don’t feel like that,” he answered, roughly; “it’s bad enough for me to feel for myself without feeling for you. I have always thought you cared.”

“I *do* care.”

“That’s no way to care.”

He walked off, not turning for her low word of farewell.

She would have kept him had she dared.

XXV. COUSIN DON.

> “If we are ever in doubt what to do, it is a good rule to ask ourselves what we shall wish on the morrow we had done.”
>
> —Sir John Lubbuck.

The first day of September, late in the afternoon, Judith stood over the kitchen stove making beef-tea for Aunt Rody. The weekly letters from Don had failed—failed for three weeks; but twice before in five years had she missed a letter. At the step behind her she did not raise her eyes; the beef-tea was ready to strain; at this moment she had no interest in the world but that beef-tea.

“Judith, are you ready for news?” asked Roger.

“Good news?” she asked, forgetting her beef-tea and turning towards him, radiant.

“That depends upon how you take it.”

“I’ll take it in the way to *make* it good, then. I’m not ready for anything unpleasant,” she said, with a vain attempt to keep her lips from quivering.

“Then I’ll tell you. Guess who is married. But you will never guess,” he replied with confident eagerness.

“Some one in Bensalem?”

“No.”

“Bensalem is all my world.”

“You forget somebody on the other side of the world.”

“Not Cousin Don,” in the most startled surprise.

“Cousin Don. It’s a stroke of genius, or something. He never did anything like other people. Just as he

was on the point of starting for home, he decided to stay and marry an English girl he found out he was in love with; or found out she was in love with him; he seems rather surprised himself. They were married the day he expected to sail for home.”

“Then why didn’t he come and bring her?” asked Judith as soon as she could find her voice.

“The English girl would rather stay in England, or on the Continent; she has no fancy to live in America.”

“I’m afraid—he didn’t want to,” said Judith who could not believe that Cousin Don had failed her.

“He never did a thing he didn’t want to in his life.”

“But he has not been quite fair to keep it from us; I did not think he *could* do such a thing.”

“He did not keep it all from me,” Roger replied, seriously; “perhaps I should have prepared you for it. He has been interested in her for some time, visited her in England—whether he did not know his own mind, or she did not know hers does not appear; but now they both seem to be of the same mind. Judith, dear, it isn’t such a dreadful thing.”

“Not to you,” said Judith.

Now, he would never come and take her away. No one would ever take her away. She did not belong to him any longer.

“Judith,” began Aunt Affy, hurriedly in the kitchen doorway. “Oh, you *are* fixing the beef-tea.”

She strained the beef-tea, salted it, poured it into a cup, and went to Aunt Rody’s entry bed-room as if she were in a dream, not thinking, or feeling anything but that she was left alone in the world, her Cousin Don had cast her off, he had broken his word to her mother, he had not cared for her as if she were his little sister. He did not even care to write and tell her that he was married and not coming home.

“Poor child,” Aunt Affy was saying in the kitchen, “it will break her heart.”

“It shall not break her heart,” was the fierce answer. “I would rather have told her he was dead than married—for her own sake. I cannot understand his shameful neglect. No money has come for her for six months—but she will never know that. His letter to me gives only the news of his marriage—his first letter for a month—but he has never written to me regularly as he has to her. It would be a satisfaction to run over to England to have it out with him.”

“But he had a right to be married,” said Aunt Affy, doubtfully.

“I am not questioning that. He had no right to hurt this child so—she has believed in him as if he were an angel sent out of Heaven for her special protection.”

“He isn’t the only angel,” said Aunt Affy, composedly. “I have been counting on him. That’s why I have had no help—I didn’t bestir myself for I expected news of his coming every week. Mrs. Evans’s sister, a widow who goes out nursing, can come the middle of this month. I didn’t tell Judith. I thought she was happy in being a ministering angel herself. And then she was going away so soon, if her Cousin Don should come I wanted her here when he came.”

“You had better send for the nurse,” said Roger, dryly.

“I’ll go after supper and see Mrs. Evans. I suppose you and Miss Marion will want my little girl again.”

“We certainly shall,” replied Roger with emphasis, “more than ever, now.”

“But she mustn’t be an expense to you,” said Aunt Affy, with an anxious frown.

“Never you mind the expense. If I don’t burn Don Mackenzie up in a letter, it will be because there are no words hot enough. I wish I could send him her face as she came to the understanding of my news. It would rather mar his honeymoon. I’ve kept this news a week, and now I had to come and blurt it out.”

XXVI. AUNT AFFY’S FAITH AND JUDITH’S FOREIGN LETTER.

> “If I could only surely know
> That all these things that tire me so
> Were noticed by my Lord.”

At the supper table Aunt Affy asked Judith if she would sit in the entry near Aunt Rody’s door and watch while she “ran out a minute to see Mrs. Evans about something.”

With the instinct of the story-teller Judith remembered the little girl who used to sit there and sew

carpet-rags, and began to weave herself into a story; the “The Child’s Outlook” was not very hopeful, she thought, but she gave the story a happy ending, just as she herself expected to have a happy ending. She did not know why she had to sit there and watch; there had been no change for days; perhaps Aunt Affy wished her to sit and watch for Aunt Rody to die. The light from a shaded lamp on a table at the foot of the bed, did not touch the sleeping face—the sleeping face, or the dead face, and Judith’s eyes were turned away; she was watching without seeing.

She was too miserable to open a book; she was too miserable to think; she thought she was too miserable to pray.

The tears came softly, softly and slowly; face and fingers were wet; the only cry in her heart was “mother, mother.”

“Mother, I want you,” she sobbed, “will not God let you come back a *little* while?”

The doors were wide open all through the house; in the sitting-room there were low voices, at first her dulled ears caught no articulate word, then the voice of Mrs. Evans spoke clearly: she was saying something about “faith.”

Perhaps, the listener thought penitently, she herself was weeping because she had no faith.

Now Aunt Affy was speaking; she loved to hear Aunt Affy talk. Mrs. Evans must have come and hindered Aunt Affy in her call; perhaps they both wished to talk about the same thing; but they were both talking about faith. She wished Aunt Rody might hear; she was afraid Aunt Rody was lying there uncomforted. She had never thought of Aunt Rody as a “disciple.”

In Judith’s thought Aunt Affy dwelt apart.

If you called upon Mrs. Finch she would ask you to “step in” to the kitchen where her work was going on; Mrs. Evans with conscious pride would throw open to you the door of her prettily furnished parlor; Agnes Trembly would take you into her sewing-room; a call upon the minister meant the study; Marion’s guests were made at home everywhere within and without the parsonage; but Aunt Affy’s visitor was taken to her sanctuary, the place where she prayed to God and worshipped, to the inmost chamber of her consecrated heart. Aunt Affy kept nothing back; she gave herself.

With lifted head, and intent eyes, there in the dark she listened to Aunt Affy’s impressive speaking:

“Once, it was in June, I was in prayer-meeting, and I was constrained—a pressure was upon me—to pray for more faith. I must have more faith. Not aware that I was in special need through trial or temptation, I hesitated. Could I ask for what I did not feel the need of? But only for an instant, the constraint was strong, and so sweet (the very touch of the Holy Spirit), and in faith I asked for more faith. Then I trembled. Might this sweet pressure not be a prophecy of sorrow? Had I not just this experience, and a few days later brought the tidings of the sudden death of one very dear to me? I had the asked-for faith then, and it bore me through. Was this constraint the comfort coming beforehand? To take God’s will as he would have me take it, I must needs have this faith. It was not too hard before; could I not trust him again?

“Before the week was over, unexpected happiness was given me. Ah, I thought, this is what the faith is for! For we cannot take happiness and make him glorious in it, but for this faith. God knows we need faith to bear prosperity. So for days the happiness and faith went on together, and then, don’t be afraid, dear heart, and then came, but not with the shock of suddenness, the great strain, when heart and flesh must have failed but for the faith the Holy Spirit constrained me to ask. The prayer was in June—all August was the answer.”

“Affy Sparrow, you make me afraid,” was Mrs. Evans’s quick, almost indignant answer.

“If you will only think you will not be afraid.”

Judith listening, was not afraid. Never since her mother went away and left her alone with Aunt Affy had she felt the need of faith, of *holding on* to her heavenly Father, as she did to-night.

“At one time,” Aunt Affy went on with her fervent, glad faith, “I was moved to cry out: ‘O, Lord, do not leave me, I shall fall, I cannot keep myself, there is nothing to keep myself *in* me.’ I awoke that night again and again with the same cry in my heart, the same agony on my lips. ‘How *can* he leave me?’ I asked myself over and over. ‘It is not like him; especially when I have begged him to stay.’ Was I in the shadow of a temptation that was to come? The next day the temptation came; for one overpowering instant I was left to wonder if he *had* left me; then I knew that he was perfect truth as well as perfect love; I said: ‘Lord, I am very simple, be simple with me.’ Then the wave rolled over me, not touching me. I was tempted—tempted to unbelief; but *was* I tempted? Did the temptation come near enough for that? I could only say over and over, *Lord, I believe in thee*. My temptation came and he did not leave me.”

“Affy, you are supernatural. You have supernatural experiences,” replied Mrs. Evans in a tone of awe, and considerable displeasure.

“You and I do not know what other people in Bensalem are going through,” was the gentle remonstrance.

"I hope not through such terrible things as that."

"I hoped I was helping you," said Aunt Affy, grieved.

"That doesn't help. It doesn't help *me*. I'd be afraid to pray for faith if I knew it was to prepare me for trouble."

"Would you rather be unprepared for trouble?" was the quiet question.

"I'd rather the trouble wouldn't come."

"Then you would rather God wouldn't have his way with you."

"I don't like *that* way, I confess, but I have to have trouble like everybody else. You have had as little of it—the worst kind I mean, as anybody ever had—your troubles have been spiritual troubles, and you are having your own way now about everything."

"Yes, too much. I'm afraid every day of being a selfish, careless woman. A dozen times a day I wonder what Rody would say to me if she only knew what we are doing; selling the milk for instance. Sometimes I stop in the middle of something as if her hand were on my shoulder. Your sister can come next week, then?"

"As far as I know; she'll be ten times better help than Judith; she's strong and used to sickness. She can *lift* Rody, and that's what you want. I thought the parsonage folks had spoilt Judith for you by making her too much of a lady."

"Judith is not spoiled," was the quiet rejoinder.

"You will find my sister Sarah ready for any emergency. What do you think she's been doing to get into the paper? She sent me the paper with the thing marked in it. I wish I had brought the paper; I'll show it to you some time. You know she lives, when she's at home, near a tunnel; well that tunnel caved in one day just after a passenger train had passed through; she knew there would be another train soon, and she had her red petticoat ready and ran out as it came thundering on, and swung it in the air until she stopped the train—and just within a few feet of the tunnel, too. Wasn't that pluck?"

"Where's Judith?" called Joe's voice. "I have a letter for her; one of the foreign letters she used to be so raving glad to get."

In the half light Judith sprang toward the letter. There was no light in the sitting-room; on the kitchen table a lamp was burning; she was glad to read it unquestioned. Snatching at its meaning she ran through the three thin sheets; then she read it deliberately, understandingly.

He had written to tell her of his marriage, and two weeks afterward, on his wedding tour, found the unmailed letter in his pocket. That letter he had destroyed, and, after a week to plan and decide what to propose to her, had written again—was writing again now, in fact. The shortest way to her forgiveness he believed to be to ask her to come to England, not to be his housekeeper, but to be his wife's dear little friend and cousin, as well as his own. But, if she decided not to do that, and the plan did have its disadvantages (he had not yet asked his wife's advice or consent), would she be happy to stay on at the parsonage, or at Aunt Affy's just as usual? He would never forget her, she would always be his dearest little cousin in the world, and he knew she and Florence would be the best of friends if they could know each other. Florence had a prejudice against America, but that would wear off. He very much regretted he had never written about Florence, but she was something of a flirt and had never allowed him to be sure of her until she knew he had taken passage for America. He hoped she would write to Florence and then they would understand each other better. She must be sure to write to *him* by return mail. He hoped the delayed letter had not made her uncomfortable. He was always her devoted Cousin Don.

Mrs. Evans went home, passing through the kitchen; Aunt Affy had told her of the unexpected marriage of Judith's cousin; she was curious to catch a glimpse of the girl's face over his letter. It would be something to tell Nettie. With her usual thoughtfulness Aunt Affy asked no question concerning the letter. That night Judith could not bring herself to show the letter; the next morning she gave it to her to read, and then asked if she might be spared to go to the parsonage.

"Yes, dear child. And stay all day if you like. I'll do for Rody. She will not ask for you. She called me Becky in the night. It's the first time she has not recognized me. And when Mrs. Evans's sister, Mrs. Treadwell comes, you may go and have a long rest and study again."

"I don't deserve that," said Judith, breaking into sobs; "I haven't been good, and I don't deserve anything."

"No matter, you'll get it just the same," said Aunt Affy, patting her shoulder with a loving touch. "And, after *this*, you are to come to me for money—you are to be my own child; my little girl, and Cephas' little girl."

With her head on Aunt Affy's shoulder Judith laughed and cried; she even began to feel glad of something—not that Don was married, or that she was not to be his housekeeper, or that she was not to be Aunt Rody's nurse; it was almost wrong to be glad when she should be disappointed; then she knew she was glad because no one in all the world had the right to take her away from the parsonage.

The way of obedience *had* been easier than she thought. She stayed that day with Aunt Rody, doing little last things for her, and telling Aunt Affy ways of nursing that pleased Aunt Rody that she had discovered for herself.

"She will miss you," Aunt Affy said that evening, as Judith came into the sitting-room dressed for her walk. Doodles was snoring upon his cushion on the lounge; Uncle Cephas, at the round table, was lost in the day's paper; Joe, at another table, was reading a book he had found under rubbish in the storeroom: this last year he had developed a taste for books.

The girl lingered, with her satchel in her hand; the dear old home was a hard place to leave; without the cloud of Aunt Rody's presence it was peace and sunshine.

Aunt Affy, with her pretty, gray head, her light step, her words of comfort and courage, moved about like a benediction; Uncle Cephas, rough and kindly, with strength in reserve for every emergency, gave, to the house the headship it had always lacked; Joe, to-night, was fine and sturdy, and growing into somebody; would they miss her?

Was the girl going away any real part of the strength and beauty of the old Sparrow place?

She was going because she chose to go.

Joe had asked her if she were "going for good." Was to-night another turning-point?

If she stayed would her life to come be any different?

In anybody's eyes was there a difference between belonging to the parsonage and belonging to the Sparrow place?

No one was taking her away, she was going of her own free will.

With a sudden impulse she dropped her satchel in Aunt Rody's empty chair and ran up the kitchen stairs to stay a few moments alone in the chamber her mother used to have when she was a little girl.

XXVII. HIS VERY BEST.

"Lord, teach us to pray."

—*Luke* xi. 1.

"O Thou, by whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way!
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod;
Lord, teach me to pray."

Judith stood on the parsonage piazza; a voice within was unfamiliar, then in a change of tone she recognized something and was reminded of her afternoon at Meadow Centre; that laugh she had heard before, it was not Don—it was—the face at the window looked out into the shadows,—it was Richard King. He was a strong tower; he was safe, like her parsonage life; she would go in and feel at home. No new face or voice would ever come between and keep her away. Across the room, as she discovered by a peep through the curtains, Marion sat with some of her usual pretty work in her hand; Roger was not there.

"In the excavations in Babylon," Mr. King went on in easy continuation of the subject in hand, "a collection of bowls was found, inscribed with adjurations of all sorts of spirits by name, and with indications that could not be mistaken of medicines they once held. You know, that capital R with which the physician heads his prescription, believing it stands for Recipe, in the days of superstition was understood to be an appeal to Jupiter."

"That was consistent," Marion replied, still bending over her work.

"Imagine our physicians writing at the head of a prescription: *In the name of Jesus Christ*."

"As Peter did when he healed the lame man."

"Our old Meadow Brook physician prays with his patients very often; I tell him he leaves nothing for the parson to do."

"Roger says sometimes the doctor has a way of getting nearer our Bensalem people than he has."

"I am not sure of that. They tell the doctor a different kind of trouble. You would be amazed—if you were not the minister's sister—at the histories people tell me about themselves, and their neighbors."

"I am always delighted that people have a story to tell. When I first came to Bensalem I thought no man,

woman, or child, lived a life worth living. Now I know the sweetest stories. Aunt Affy is one, and Nettie Evans, and even her hard-featured mother brims over once in a while with an experience."

The coming back from Babylon to Bensalem brought Judith to the consciousness that she might be considered an eavesdropper; at that instant Roger entered in his shirt-sleeves, remarking: "Let's be informal, like Wordsworth. He used to take out his teeth evenings when he did not expect callers."

"But you *have* a caller," remonstrated Marion, when the laughter ceased.

"Yes, and here's another one," Roger replied, as Judith walked softly in. "Judith, must I put on my coat? I've been potting plants for Marion and I couldn't afford to soil my coat."

"Yes," said Judith, who was always on Marion's side in influencing the Bensalem minister to remember the claims of society.

"I wish you had stayed at home. What are you looking so full of news about?"

"I have come back—to stay. No one else in the world wants me."

"And we don't," declared Roger.

Something in the gleam of the eyes under Richard King's tangled eyebrows was a revelation to Marion. She knew his secret. She would keep it. Roger was stupid, he would never guess. But how could she keep it from Judith? Poor little Judith, was she growing up to have a love story? To-night Marion did not like love stories.

She wished the tall girl with the serious eyes and braided hair were a little girl with long curls.

"Did *you* get a letter from Don to-night?" Roger asked.

"Yes."

"How do you like it?"

"I—think I like it. It will not make any difference to me—only the difference that it hasn't made."

"A good distinction," remarked Richard King.

"May I go upstairs, Marion?"

"Surely—your room has been waiting for you as the Holy Land waited for the Israelites to return from their captivity; nobody spoiled either, or occupied either."

"Mine was not seventy years," said Judith, "although sometimes it seemed like it."

Marion did not follow her; it would not be an easy thing to talk to Judith about Don's marriage; she was relieved that the only view the girl would take of it would be in regard to the difference it made to herself.

When Judith returned, feeling as much at home as though she had been away but for a night, Marion was matching silks for her work, and the gentlemen were talking, sitting opposite each other in the bay window.

It had been so long since she had heard Roger talk; that "talk" was one of the delights of her parsonage life. She had heard him preach but once during her stay at Aunt Affy's.

"That point about praying came up," Mr. King was saying, "and I am not satisfied with the answer I gave. The man gave his experience—it was an experience of years—and then he asked me what was the matter with his prayer, and I decidedly did not know. I know he has fulfilled the conditions, praying in faith, and in the name of Christ, and the thing prayed for was innocent in itself. He said, 'What *is* the matter with me?' and I could not tell. He went away unsatisfied. I went down on my knees, you may be sure, thinking something was the matter with *me* because I had no illumination for him."

Roger's strong, brown hand was stretched along the arm of his chair; he looked down at his fingers in deep thought.

"He said he had been praying months to learn if the petition in itself were not acceptable to God, and had, he thought, studied a hundred prayers in the Bible, comparing his prayer with the acceptable and unacceptable prayers of the old saints."

"He is determined to get at the bottom of it," said Roger.

"I never saw a man more determined. I quoted Phillips Brooks to him: 'You have not got your answer, but you have got God.'"

"He was not satisfied with that getting?"

"No. He said he knew he should not be satisfied until he had God's answer to himself. I think he has almost lost sight of the thing he was anxious for when he began to pray. It has been worth a course in

theology to him."

Marion dropped her silks; Judith was listening with all the eagerness of her childhood. She felt sure Aunt Affy could explain the difficulty.

"The thing that strikes me," began Roger, "is that he may be like those men sent to the house of God to inquire about fasting."

"Well?" questioned Richard King.

"These men went to pray before the Lord and to ask a question. Their question was about fasting; but fasting has to do with praying—your friend has certainly been in a weeping and fasting spirit. They asked: Should I weep in the fifth month separating myself, as I have done these so many years?

"The Lord's answer came through the prophet Zechariah. He understood all about that so many years separating themselves and fasting. He told them the fasting was not so much to him as for them to hear the words which the Lord hath cried by the former prophets. They might better study his revealed will than seek to find a new answer to this question of fasting. The fasting in itself was all right if they wished to fast. 'When ye fasted did ye do it to me?' he asked. 'When ye did eat and when ye did drink, did ye not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?' In feasting and fasting they had been selfish. Then he gives them plain words of command, like the plain words the former prophets had spoken. Obedience was better than fasting; better even than coming to him to inquire about fasting. There is a parallel in the history of one of Joshua's prayers. He could not understand why the people should flee before their enemies. Then he rent his clothes and fell to the earth, the elders, also, all day, with dust on their heads; praying and fasting.

"But the Lord's answer was: 'Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?'

"Tell your old man praying and fasting are good, but sometimes God has enough of them. He prefers obedience. The conditions of the covenant had been violated by disobedience in both instances. Praying in faith, and in the name of Christ, are but two conditions; hearing and obeying is a third condition. Your man may be in the midst of a very interesting experience, but I would advise him to stop questioning the Lord, and try what a little obedience would do."

"But, he's a *good* man, Roger," urged Judith, "only a good man could bear a trial like that."

"Good men have favorite little ways of disobedience, sometimes; God's own remedy is more obedience."

"I wish we could know all about it—the rest of the story, and, if he ever has his prayer," said Marion, to whom "people" were becoming a real and live interest.

"Joshua had his prayer. The story of Ai is the story of how God answers prayer when he has made way for it; it shows his disciplinary government; it places obedience before all things; obedience makes God's answers to prayer a natural proceeding."

"I'm afraid I have depended too much on prayer," Judith answered, troubled.

"Oh, no," Mr. King reassured her, "only you have not depended enough on obedience. I will call upon my old man to-morrow and tell him these two stories of disciplinary government."

"You are not going home, to-night, old fellow," urged Roger, "the girls will give us some music. We four will make a fine quartette."

"Miss Judith, did you know I have a housekeeper?" he asked, turning brightly to Judith.

"I am very glad."

"So are we all of us," declared Roger.

"A man and his wife I have taken in. She's a good cook; the house is a different affair; I wish you would come and see. The man gets work among the farmers and takes care of my horse, which I used to do myself. They are both grateful for a home and I am very happy to be set in a family."

Judith fell asleep thinking of Aunt Rody's beef-tea, and wondering if Aunt Affy would remember to keep the water bag at her poor, cold feet.

It was luxury to be at home again; to be at home and in the way of obedience. That was God's will on earth as it was in Heaven.

The next day the gentlemen went fishing and Marion and Judith kept the long day to themselves. In the afternoon Marion and Nettie had their weekly history talk, and, Judith shut herself up in the study and wrote a story about a girl who learned a new lesson in the way of obedience. The story was from a child's standpoint; in writing for children she was keeping her heart as fresh as the heart of a little child.

"Judith," said Roger that evening as the "quartette" were together in the study, "I have a thought of work for you; you smell work from afar as the warhorse scents the battle; how would you like to write up the childhood of a dozen famous women? The study itself will be delightful, and the writing more so. Call the series: '*When I was a Girl*.'"

"I would *like* it," was the unhesitating reply, "if I can do it."

"You can do it. You can do anything you like."

"Then I will," she decided, thus encouraged.

"But the books?" said Richard King, ready to place his own bookshelves at her service.

"Oh, the books are easily found. There's our school library, and the Public Library in Dunellen, and everybody's house to ransack in Bensalem. Besides, my own library is no mean affair. Books and fishing are my laziness and luxury. No hurried work, Judith, remember. You shall not read the first one of the series to me until a month from to-day."

"Are you such a slow worker yourself?" Roger's friend inquired.

"I am a plodder. And I believe in other people plodding. I believe that genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains. I have sermons laid away to mellow that I've been six months on."

"But you do other writing and studying in the mean time," said Judith.

"Oh, yes, while the seed is sprouting."

"Kenney, you are planning something."

"Yes, I am planning to salt down a barrel of sermons before I take a new charge."

"Mellowing, salting, sprouting," laughed Judith.

"Roger, a new charge!" exclaimed Marion, startled.

"A new charge, my dear sister. I am too small for Bensalem, they need a bigger man here."

"But, Roger," remonstrated Judith, with big, distressed eyes; "will you not give dear, little Bensalem your best?"

"My very best," he answered, solemnly.

XXVIII. A NEW ANXIETY.

> "Our eyes see all around, in gloom or glow,
> Hues of their own fresh borrowed from the heart."
>
> —Keble.

It was chilly that evening in the old rooms of the house with three windows in the roof; Roger Kenney's father and mother sat near the grate in the front parlor; curtains and portieres were dropped, the piano lamp with its crimson silk shade threw a glow over the two faces sitting in cosy content opposite each other. The house was still; the girls, Martha and Lou, and the two boys, Maurice and John, had gone down town to an illustrated lecture on India; the maid had her evening out; even Nip, the house-dog, had gone out for an evening ramble; the two "old people," as in their early sixties they loved to call each other, were alone with each other and a new anxiety.

Mr. Kenney told his wife that nothing in the world made her quite so happy as a new worry, and he wished he could get one for her oftener.

"This will do for awhile," she remarked; "but this isn't as bad as that old trouble of Marion's; a man can work himself out; and Roger has work enough on hand for two worries."

"Now, what are you going to do about this?" inquired her husband, folding the evening's paper and laying it upon his knee. "You sent Marion to Bensalem for her charm; will you get Roger away for his?"

"That would do no good," she replied, discontentedly, "he would not be got away in the first place, and Judith is not a fixture in Bensalem."

"Judith is worth having," was the complacent reply.

"That's the worst of it. So was Don Mackenzie."

"It's the best of it, I think. You wouldn't have your boys and girls carried away by somebody not worth having."

"But, then, being disappointed in somebody might help them bear it, and turn them around to look at somebody else."

"A disappointment like that is poor consolation."

"I don't suppose the disappointment *is* the consolation. The somebody else is."

"You never had the consolation of the somebody else."

"I have only had the consolation of you," she retorted.

"Marion has never taken up with anybody," he said, reflectively.

"She has had no chance—"

"That you know," he interrupted.

"—That I know," she accepted meekly, "excepting David Prince."

"She wouldn't look at him."

"No, she wouldn't. He was younger in the first place—and so different from Don."

"I'd like to see that English beauty Don has married."

"How do you know she is a beauty?" asked Marion's mother, with a touch of jealousy.

"Oh, he wrote that to Roger in his first young admiration. An orphan, living with an uncle, years younger, a capricious beauty, with a little money; wasn't that the description?"

"Something like it. Marion has carried herself well about this marriage."

"Why shouldn't she? She had nothing to carry herself about."

"You don't know girls. A memory is a memory."

"How do *you* know?" he laughed.

"But this is not helping us out about Roger," she remarked, ignoring his words and laugh.

"Roger will help himself out; he isn't his father's son for nothing."

"As Marion was not her mother's girl for nothing," was the demure reply.

"How do you know—how can you be so certain sure that he wants Judith?"

"She is the very light of his eyes. She has been for years. A mother can see. The thought of her is always about him."

"Does Marion see it?" Roger's father inquired, convinced. He had a thorough respect for his wife's judgment.

"No; that's the queer part of it. I think Roger is guarded with her. He never had a secret from his mother."

"Young men never have," the young man's father threw in.

"But I know Roger; I wouldn't be afraid to ask him."

"Then, why don't you?"

"Because I know without asking," she silenced him.

"Now, to come back to the starting point—what do you intend to do about it?"

"Bring Judith here," she replied impressively.

"That's a fine move; an effectual separation."

"If I could send her anywhere else he would think it his duty to go and see her, he would have to know how she was doing—pay her bills, and so forth. There's no one else to be a father to her. Mrs. Brush leaves everything with him. She has no knowledge of any world outside of that village."

"Perhaps she is trying to catch him for Judith."

"Such a worldly thought would never enter her dear, pretty, simple, shrewd head. She has her catch, and she didn't catch him with guile. She would rather keep Judith than set her on the throne of England. *That's* out of the question."

"Well, I do see that point about bringing her here. He can see her naturally here; nothing to thwart him; she's such a girl, no older than Martha—you never have any scares about Martha."

"Martha has never been thrown so with anybody, I wouldn't allow it. I try to be always on the safe side?"

“You didn’t seem to be on Judith’s safe side.”

“I couldn’t. Nobody asked me. There she was studying at the parsonage, before I knew it.”

“She was only a child then.”

“And I thought it such a good outlet for Marion—it was one of the first things that roused her—that and her Outing Society. My only fear was that she was taking Judith up for the sake of her Cousin Don. His influence somehow seems to run through everything. But I know better now. Judith won her own way. But I didn’t know I was sacrificing Roger to Marion.”

“How could you have hindered?”

“I could have brought Marion home,” she answered, decidedly.

“And spoiled the good Bensalem was doing for *her*.”

“Oh, dear,” with a sigh, “how lives are tangled up.”

“And it’s rather dangerous for our fingers to get into the tangle,” he suggested, with mild reproof.

“But we must do something,” she exclaimed, in despair.

“Well, yes, I suppose so—when the time comes.”

“Well, the time has come now.”

“I don’t see anything the matter with Roger. He can walk ten miles on a stretch, he rides horseback, he cuts his own kindling wood and makes his own garden, he gives his people two strong sermons a week, beside the prayer meeting and weekly lectures; he goes hunting with one of his deacons and talks farming with another; he neglects nobody, and works like a drum-major. He isn’t hurt.”

“But he *will* be. Judith will refuse him.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because she has never thought of such a thing.”

“I grant that. Why should she? But she *will* think of it when he suggests it.”

“She will not think of it as he does. He is an old fellow to her; let me see; she was thirteen when she went to Bensalem, and he was—how queer for me to forget—he was twenty-six, just twice her age.”

“He isn’t twice her age now,” observed Mr. Kenney, comically.

“And a woman is always older than a man,” Mrs. Kenney, reflected. “She is nearer his age then, I think, childish as she is. With her hair up she does look older; it’s those blue eyes like a baby, and that complexion. I told Roger she might sit for a picture of Priscilla the Puritan maiden, in her new-fashioned, old-fashioned dress, and he said he had thought of it himself. But, now, Roger,” with a deprecating little appeal, “it will do no *harm* to bring her here.”

“Not the least bit in the world,” he consented, cheerfully.

XXIX. JUDITH’S “FUTURE.”

“God never loved me in so sweet a way before:
’Tis he alone who can such blessings send:
And when his love would new expression find,
He brought thee to me, and he said, ‘Behold—a friend.’”

Exactly a month from the day Roger planned the Girl Papers for her, Judith knocked at the study door with her manuscript in her hand. She had written three papers; if he took sufficient interest in the first she would read the others.

Beside the education for herself she had another thought in writing them; she would send them to some child’s paper and earn money. She knew that Marion had never depended upon the parsonage for money; every month her father sent her a check; she had no father to send her a check. No money had come to her from her Cousin Don since his hurried marriage. Probably he considered her old enough to earn money for herself. It would be hard to tell Aunt Affy when she needed a dress, or shoes, or money, when she was not doing anything for Aunt Affy’s comfort.

Last Sunday she had no money for Sunday-school or church; she had no money for anything.

Her last story had been refused, and how she had cried over the refusal. It was even hard to laugh when Roger told her that Queen Victoria had sent an article to a paper under a "pen-name" and it had been "returned with thanks." She wished she were a dressmaker like Agnes Trembly, or that she could go into a farmer's kitchen, like Jean Draper's sister Lottie, and earn money and not be ashamed.

"Come in," called Roger from among his books.

Her eyes were suspiciously red, she was relieved that his back was toward her; he wheeled around in his chair as she seated herself, and looked as though he had nothing in the world to do but listen to her.

"Have you leisure to hear my Girl Papers?" she asked, with some embarrassment. "They are horrid. I tried an essay, and failed. It was stilted and stupid. I can make girls talk, so I threw my garnered information into a conversation. But you may not care for this style."

"I can bear anything," he said, making a comical effort at self-control.

After the first was read, with an inward quaking, she was delighted with his word of encouragement:

"Read the others; I cannot know how bad they are until you read them all."

More hopefully she began the second paper, which she read in a clear, conversational tone:—

"Do you know," began grandmother, "who said that she could be happy anywhere with good health and a bit of marble?"

And then we were all astir with eager interest.

"Rosa Bonheur was 'happy anywhere' with canvas, colors, and brush; and this girl loved marble just as well, and brought breathing life out of the cold marble, as Rosa brought it out on her canvas. But Harriet was an American child, born into a luxurious home, with no brothers or sisters, and her mother soon died and left her alone with her father. Her mother died with consumption, and her father had buried his other child besides Harriet with the same disease, so no wonder he was afraid for his little girl, and determined to give her a playful childhood in air and sunshine. Harriet Hosmer was born in Watertown, Mass., October 9th, 1830."

"And now she's older than you are, grandmother," said Bess. "I like to know about when grandmothers were little girls."

"But she and Rosa Bonheur are not grandmothers. They have had canvas and marble instead of a home with children and grandchildren in it. As soon as little Harriet was old enough a pet dog was given to her, and she ornamented it with ribbons and bells. Instead of tin cup and iron spoon, which Rosa had, she revelled in all the pretty things that children love. The River Charles ran past her home; her father gave her a boat and told her to take her air and sunshine on the water and learn to develop her muscles by the oars. And then he had built for her a Venetian gondola with velvet cushions and silver prow.

"'She will be spoiled,' the neighbors foreboded, but her wise father was not afraid; he knew how much happiness his child could bear and not be rendered selfish. The next thing to help her become strong was a gun; she soon became what your brothers would call a good shot. By and by you will know how strong her hands and arms became and what she could do with them. All this time, just as you are, girls, these common days, she was being made ready for her own special work."

Juliet grew radiant. She was hoping for "special work."

"Her room was a museum. Gathered and prepared by her own eager and wise hands she had beetles, snakes, bats, birds, stuffed or preserved in spirits. From the egg of a sea gull and the body of a kingfisher she made an ink-stand; she climbed to the top of a tree for a crow's nest. Miles and miles she learned to walk without being wearied. In her work and habits and strength she was like a boy. She was fond of books, but just as fond of the clay-pit in her garden where, to her father's delight as well as her own, she molded dogs and horses.

"When Harriet Hosmer was taken to a famous school (at home they called her 'happy Hatty') the teacher said: 'I have a reputation for training wild colts; I will try this one.' She stayed three years. On her return home she began to take lessons in drawing, modeling, and in anatomical studies, often walking fourteen miles to Boston and back, with hours of work and study. Was not that a day's work? She went to the Medical College of St. Louis to take a thorough course in anatomy."

"You have to know things to get things out of marble," remarked Ethel.

"Grandmother, how hard girls can work!" exclaimed Nan, who did not love work.

"After she had finished her studies she traveled alone to New Orleans, and then north to the Falls of St. Anthony, smoking the pipe of peace with the chief of the Dakota Indians, explored lead mines in Dubuque, and scaled a high mountain to which her name was afterward given."

"That was fun," said Nan. "I'm glad she had some fun with her hard work."

"After work in her studio at home her father sent her to Rome. Girl as she was, in her studio at home she wielded for eight or ten hours a day a leaden mallet weighing four pounds and a half. And it was then

she told a friend that she would not be homesick, for she could be happy anywhere with good health and a bit of marble. For seven years she worked on her ‘bit of marble’ in Rome. She made beautiful and wonderful things with her good health and her marble, with hard work, and the insight into beauty that God, who makes all beautiful things, gave to this ready and obedient child.

“The first work she copied for her teacher was the Venus of Milo; when almost completed the iron, which held the clay firm, snapped, and all her work was spoiled.”

“Oh!” sighed Ethel.

“But she did not shriek nor cry herself to sleep (that anybody knew), but bravely went to work again. Her works were exhibited in Boston and much admired. Her teacher said he had never seen surpassed her genius of imitating the roundness and softness of flesh. Look at other marble statues and see if the flesh looks soft and round like Harriet’s. One of her works, a girl lying asleep, was exhibited in London and in several American cities. She said once she would work as though she had to earn her daily bread, and, strange to tell, very soon after that her father wrote that he had lost his property and could send her no more money. And then she hired a cheap room, sold her handsome saddle-horse, and went to work in reality to earn her daily bread. Her first work, in her time of sorrow, was a fun-loving, four-year-old child. With the several copies she made from it she earned for her daily bread thirty thousand dollars.”

“And oh! grandmother,” I said (for I am a poor girl myself), “when our heavenly Father has work for us to do, it doesn’t matter whether we are born poor or rich.”

“Either way it takes hard work,” said grandmother.

With a shy glance into his satisfied face she opened her third paper:—

“Children have more need of models than of critics,” said grandmother, “therefore I will give you another model to-night. You will think I am always choosing for you stories of girls that work; but where can I find models of any other kind? What do girls amount to who think only of their own pleasure, and never persevere to the successful end? Now I will tell you about a girl who came in womanhood to live in an observatory. This is her home. She is a dear old lady with white hair, dressed in gray or brown, in rather Quakerish fashion. She said to the girls she teaches: ‘All the clothing I have on cost but seventeen dollars.’ In this unusual home (she is not a grandmother, either), she keeps the things she loves best,—her books, her pictures, her astronomical clock, and a bust of Mary Somerville, of whom I will tell you some time.”

“And then we will remember that her bust is in somebody’s observatory home,” said Bess.

“It is not a wonder that Maria Mitchell has great respect for girls who do something, and for idle girls none at all. As Juliet was at Nantucket last summer she will be interested to know that Maria Mitchell was born in that quiet, delightful place. She was in a home of ten children. Her mother was a Quaker girl, a descendant of Benjamin Franklin. Her father was a school teacher. Little Maria went to school to her father. At school she studied, and with ten little people at home, what do you think she did? She herself calls her work, ‘endless washing of dishes.’ The dishwashing never hindered. I think it helped. I believe in dishwashing. I wonder what this little girl would have thought of the dishwasher that some people have in their kitchens, and is warranted to wash sixty-five dishes (in the smaller affair) at once, in the soap-sudsy, steamy, crank-turning space of three blessed minutes. And all dried, too. But in her observatory she had no need to think of dishwashing. Like Rosa Bonheur, and Harriet Hosmer, she had a good father and a wise father. When he was eight years old his father called him to the door to look at the planet Saturn, and from that time the boy calculated his age from the position of the planet, year by year.”

“Then it began with her grandfather,” said Juliet, who liked to find the beginnings of things.

“Her father had a little observatory of his own, on his own land, that he might study the stars. So it is no marvel that his daughter is ending her useful days in a big observatory. When Maria went to her observatory, her father was seventy years of age; he needed her as nurse and companion, but he said, ‘Go, and I will go with you.’”

“This is the loveliest story of all,” exclaimed Grace, who loves her own old father dearly.

“For four years her father lived to be proud of her, and enjoyed her work and her pupils at Vassar College. When Maria was a girl her father could see no reason why she should not become as well educated as his boys, so he gave her, as to them, a special drill in navigation.”

“Grandmother,” asked Ethel, “did you know all these little girls when they were little?”

“No, darling,” said grandmother, “I found out about them in books. And telling you about the girls is getting you ready to read about them all the little things the world has a right to know. For they belong to the whole world. Maria did not learn fancy work. I can guess what she would say of some girls who care more for fancy stitches than for studies. She has said, ‘A woman might be learning seven languages while she is learning fancy work.’ Still, girls, educate your fingers, and make your homes pretty and attractive. But don’t let stitches hinder the stars—God has his place for both.”

“Yes, the women worked pretty things for the Tabernacle,” I said. (For I love to make pretty things.)

"But she did know how to knit, and she knit stockings a yard long for her father as long as he lived. She studied while she knit, as I used to do when I was a little girl. When she was a little girl how she did read! Before she was ten years old she read through Rollin's *Ancient History*.

"One night in October, 1847, she was gazing through her telescope, and what do you think she saw? An unknown comet. She was afraid it was an old story. Frederick VI., King of Denmark, sixteen years before, had offered a gold medal to the person who should discover a telescopic comet. And the little Nantucket girl, who had knitted stockings a yard long, and washed endless dishes, discovered the telescopic comet, and to her was awarded the gold medal. And now the scientific journals announced Miss Mitchell's comet. In England she was eagerly welcomed by Sir John and Lady Herschel, and Alexander Von Humboldt took her beside him on a sofa and talked to her about everybody he knew and everything he knew. And, oh! the other great people who were glad to see her. She saw in Rome Frederika Bremer, of whose comical, interesting, sad girlhood I must tell you some day. But I musn't forget the little house Maria bought for her father before she went to the observatory of Vassar College. It cost sixteen hundred and fifty dollars, and she saved the money out of her yearly salary of one hundred dollars, and what she could earn in government work."

"I don't think I mind washing dishes so much now," declared Nan.

And we all laughed.

"Good," exclaimed Judith's listener. "Keep on with the dozen, and salt them down. *When I Was a Boy* series will be a good thing for you. Judith, honest, now, would you rather go away to school this winter, or read and write with Marion and me?"

"Study with you," was the quick decision; "I can think of nothing in the world I would like so well."

"Then that is settled," he replied with satisfaction; "I feared you would be restless. You are at the frisky and restless age. Marion was sure you would not be."

"But—" Judith hesitated and colored painfully, "if I am to teach by and by, would it be better for me to go to school? I can borrow the money and then earn it by teaching and repay Aunt Affy."

"We are not making a teacher of you; we are making an educated woman—"

"But, Roger," she persisted, "unless I go back to Aunt Affy I must support myself. I am not willing to be dependent upon any one except Aunt Affy."

"Upon whom are you dependent now? Are you not earning your board by being co-operative housekeeper?"

"If you and Marion think so."

"Ask Marion."

"But I would like to ask you, too?"

"I thought my little sister had more delicacy of feeling than to ask such a question."

"Roger, don't be a goose," she said, indignantly, "that was all very well when I was a child. You forget that I am grown up."

"You will not let me forget it."

"I wish you not to forget it. In the spring, on my nineteenth birthday, I shall decide upon my future. Just think, I have a future," she laughed. "I am only too glad of the study and music this winter. Then I shall go out into the world, or go back to Aunt Affy. I do not mean to be too proud—" with a quiver of the lip.

"Only just proud enough. You are exactly that. Let us live in peace this winter, and then your nineteenth birthday may do its worst for us all."

"You will not be serious," she answered, with vexed tears; "my life is a great deal to me."

"It is a great deal to us all, dear. Work and be patient, and you will have as happy an ending as any story you write."

"My children end as children," she said, with a quick laugh. "I shouldn't know what to do with them if they grew up."

"There is One who does know what to do with his children when they grow up," said Roger, bending as he stood beside her and touching her lips with his own. It was the first time he had ever kissed her. She took the kiss as gravely and simply as it was given. Something was sealed between them. She would never be proud with him again.

"I will not kiss you again," said Roger to himself, "until you promise to be my wife."

That afternoon Roger asked Marion to drive to Meadow Centre.

"I am glad you did not ask Judith," replied Marion, with something in her voice.

“Why not?” he asked, indignantly, “why shouldn’t I ask Judith to drive with me?”

“My point was not driving with you, but driving to Meadow Centre.”

“I confess I do not understand you.”

“I knew you didn’t. Men are blind creatures.”

“Then open the eyes of one blind creature.”

“Haven’t you seen that Mr. King is interested in Judith?” she asked, somewhat impatiently.

“We are all interested in Judith.”

“Not just as *he* is. You are not,” looking straight into his frank, smiling eyes.

“You don’t mean—”

“Yes, I do mean—”

“What about *her*?” he asked with the color hot in his face. But Marion was a “blind creature” then and did not see.

“I don’t know about her. She isn’t grown up enough to think. But I know he is wonderfully attractive to her.”

“He’s a good fellow. I will not stand in his way.”

“For pity’s sake, Roger, don’t think you must do anything,” cried Marion, dismayed; “let her alone. He will take care of himself.”

“I shall certainly let her alone. He is so artless that he will be taken care of. It is like him to stumble into the best thing in the universe and then wonder how he ever got it.”

“I hope you don’t call Meadow Centre one of the best things,” retorted Marion.

“It’s a good place for a man to make something of himself; he is writing sermons that will make a stir somewhere. Meadow Centre is to him what Paul’s three years in Arabia were to him.”

“Then we must do our best to make Judith ready—”

“What a plotter you are,” he exclaimed, angrily; then, more quietly: “But we will make Judith ready,” and he walked off with a laugh that was a mixture of things.

This day, in which God’s daily bread and his daily will were given to Judith as upon all the other days, was one of the very happiest days of her happy life.

Roger’s kiss gave her an undefined sense of safety and protection; if she were not wise enough to decide when the time came she would take refuge in that safety and protection, and—another kiss.

That evening Joe came for her, saying Aunt Rody was worse. She went home with him, and “watched” with Aunt Affy, until poor Aunt Rody passed away from the home she had toiled so unceasingly for and taken so little comfort in. One week she stayed with Aunt Affy: “I miss her so,” wept Aunt Affy broken-heartedly; “I never was in the world without her before.”

“I suppose we musn’t keep you, Judith,” Uncle Cephas remarked one evening behind his newspaper.

“Not yet,” said Judith. “I want to be as busy as a bee this winter to get ready for something.”

“Then we will have to adopt Joe; we must have some young thing about the house.”

Judith’s first words to Roger and Marion as they went out to welcome her on the piazza were in a burst: “I do think those two old people growing old together is the loveliest thing I ever saw.”

“How young must two people begin to grow old together?” inquired Roger, comically.

“As soon as they think about growing old,” said Marion.

“Then I will not begin to think until my birthday,” said Judith. “Marion, I am too happy in having two homes. Some better girl than I should have them.”

“You forget your third home in England,” remarked Roger, seriously.

“Oh, poor Don. Roger, I am afraid Don isn’t happy,” she said, with slow emphasis.

What Roger thought he did not say.

Don’s letters were brief, constrained; Judith’s letter to her “new, dear Cousin Florence” had met with no response—that Judith knew.

XXX. A TALK AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

> "There is nothing which faith does not overcome; nothing which it will not accept."
>
> —Bishop Huntington.

"Roger," began Judith, doubtfully.

"Begin again, I don't like that tone."

"I was afraid you were thinking—"

"I should be sorry not to be."

"I was afraid you were thinking too deeply to be disturbed."

"Then I shouldn't *be* disturbed; my mind would be absent from my ear and I should not hear that doubtful appeal. The *doubt* is what I object to."

Marion and her mother had not returned from their drive to Meadow Centre, where Mrs. Kenney had a school friend. They intended to "spend an old-fashioned day," Mrs. Kenney remarked at the breakfast table; it was five o'clock in the November afternoon and the old-fashioned day was not yet ended.

Judith and her fancy work, covers for Nettie's bureau, had taken possession of the light in the bay window; as the light faded, she sat thinking with her work in her lap. Roger entered and threw himself upon the lounge, clasping his hands above his head; his thinking was weaving itself in and out of a suggestion of his mother's that she should take Judith home for the winter.

To the suggestion he had replied nothing at all.

"Then the doubt is gone," answered Judith, brightly. "I do not know how to put my thought."

"Isn't that rather a new experience?"

"It is the experience of every day," she answered, unmindful of his teasing. "I wonder why God keeps us so much in the dark."

"Perhaps we keep ourselves in the dark."

"That is what I wanted to know."

"Can you tell me exactly what you mean? Are you in the dark about anything?"

"About everything," she exclaimed with such energy that his only reply was a laugh.

"Just now I mean one special thing that I cannot tell you about."

"O, Judith, are you growing up to have secrets?" he groaned.

"I am growing up *with* secrets. Aunt Rody used to exasperate me by telling me I would 'outgrow' something, when all the time I knew I was growing into something."

"Growing into a new thing is the best way to outgrow an old thing."

"Then I am satisfied about something."

Roger wished that he could be—about something.

"I wish I could tell you. But I don't know why I shouldn't. I'm afraid Marion doesn't care for Mr. King, and I want her to so much."

In the twilight she could not see the illumination in the face across the room on the lounge.

He was satisfied about something.

"What are you getting down into?" he asked jubilantly.

"Why," pricking her work with her needle, "I think he—cares a great deal, and he is so splendid that I want her to care. How they would work together. Bensalem has been getting her ready."

"Well, I declare!" he exclaimed, rising to his feet.

"Are you displeased?"

"There's nothing to be displeased about. Is this the way girls plot against each other? No wonder we men have to tread softly."

“It isn’t plotting exactly. It’s only hoping.”

“Is that your secret?”

“Yes, and don’t you tell,” she said, alarmed.

“No; it shall be my secret; yours and mine. Now what are we going to do about it?”

“We cannot do anything. She admires him around the edges, somehow. And he’s as shy of her as he can be. I seem to be always interpreting them to each other.”

He laughed, greatly amused.

“In spite of my selecting the most innocent love-stories for you, you have grown up to the depth, or height, of this. I’ll never dare put a finger in a girl’s education again.”

“But, Roger—”

“Don’t ask me to help you out.”

“Marion will not. She doesn’t seem to understand anything.”

“No wonder,” thought Roger, remembering her early experience; “she has been a burnt child; she’ll never play with that kind of fire again.”

Aloud he replied: “She needs a wise head like yours. What would you advise her to do?”

“To be *natural*; just her own self, and she isn’t. I believe she’s afraid.”

“So will you be when you are as old as she is.”

“I don’t know what to be afraid of.”

“May you never know. Is that all you are in the dark about?” he questioned, seating himself in his study chair, and wheeling around to face the girl in the bay window.

A girl in blue, as she was when she sat in the bay window in Summer Avenue and wrote letters to Aunt Affy; the same trustful eyes, loving mouth, and yellow head.

Now, as then, she did not know what to be afraid of. It was only this last month that she had brought her questions to Roger. Marion had not grown ahead of her to answer her. And Aunt Affy had been so absorbed in Aunt Rody this last year that she had feared to trouble her with questions.

“I have a book-full of questions laid up for you; rather the answers would be a book-full. Life seems full of questions. There’s always something to ask about everything I read.”

“Ask the next book.”

“The next book doesn’t always know.”

“The next person may not always know.”

“I can easily find out,” she laughed.

Then she became grave, and, after a moment’s silence, said: “I wish I knew why we couldn’t have *an idea*, as we pray a long time for something, whether it were going to be given us or not.”

“Something that you have no special promise for?”

“Yes; something in the ‘what-so-ever.’ It does seem so hard to have it grow darker and harder, and not to know whether you may keep on or not; whether giving up would be in faith—or despair.”

“Judith, you’ve touched a sensitive point in many a heart that keeps on praying.”

“Do *you* know?” she asked.

“I can tell you a story.”

His story was all she desired.

“You know when Jairus came to the Lord to plead for his daughter, he fell at his feet and besought him greatly, saying: ‘My little daughter lieth at the point of death.’ Then Jesus went with him. We do not know what he said, but he went with him. Then, as they went together, the crowd came to a stand-still that the Lord might perform a miracle and answer the prayer of a touch. But, by this time, Jesus had been so long on the way that news came of the death of the little daughter. It was too late. She was dead. They said to the father: ‘Why troublest thou the Master any further?’ He might as well go home to his dead child, the Master had not cared to hasten—this woman was not at the point of death, she might have been healed another day. But think of the comfort: *as soon as* Jesus heard the message, he said to the father: ‘Be not afraid; only believe.’ Is he not saying that every hour to us who are fainting because

he is so long on the way?”

“Yes,” said Judith, “but he did not *say* he would raise her from the dead. Perhaps the ruler did not know he had power to raise from the dead.”

“No; he only said: Be not afraid: only believe. Is not that assurance enough for you?”

“Now, don’t think I am dreadfully wicked, but I know I am; I want him to say: ‘Be not afraid, I know she is dead, but I have power enough for that; believe I can do *that*. He did not tell him *what* to believe.”

“He told him to believe in the sympathy and power that had just healed this woman who had been incurable twelve years, all the years his daughter had been living.”

“But,” persisted Judith, “he might believe that, for he had just seen it; but to raise from the dead was beyond everything he had seen, and Christ gave him no promise for that.”

“Perhaps he believed that the Master had power in reserve—he surely knew he was going to his house for something—he did not bid him believe, and then turn back; he went on with him to his house.”

“Now you have said what I wanted. It was the *going on with him* that kept up his faith. As long as Jesus kept on going his way he couldn’t but believe. He gave him something even better than his word to believe in. I shouldn’t think he would be afraid of anything then.”

“Then don’t you be afraid of anything. Not until the Master turns and goes the other way.”

“He will never do that,” Judith said to herself.

The clock on the mantel struck the half hour: half-past five. Judith rolled up her work and went out to the kitchen. The tea kettle was singing on the range; everything was ready for the supper, biscuits and cake of her own making, jelly and fruit that she and Marion had put up together in the long summer days, to which she would add an omelet and creamed potatoes, for Roger was always hungry after a walk, and then coffee, for Mrs. Kenney would like coffee after her drive.

“I don’t mind now if my prayers do get stopped in the middle,” she thought as she arranged the pretty cups and saucers on the supper table, “if Jesus goes all the way with me—he will take care of the rest of it, and next year—if something *dies* this year, he can bring it to life next year. If He wants to; *and I don’t want Him to, if He doesn’t want to*.”

Roger came out into the kitchen to watch her as she moved about, and, to his own surprise, found himself asking her the question he had intended not to ask at all.

“Would you like to go back home with mother for the winter? You may have a music teacher, you have had none but Marion, and take lessons in anything and everything. Mother would like it very much,” he said, noting the gladness and gratitude in her face; “Martha will take your place here with Marion.”

“Oh, yes, I *would* like it,” she answered, doubtfully. “Did she propose it?”

“Yes.”

“You are sure you didn’t suggest it, even,” she questioned, still doubtfully.

“I am not unselfish enough for that,” he answered, dryly.

“But who would pay for it?” she questioned, with a flush of shame. “No; I will not go—until I earn money myself.”

“A letter came last night from your Cousin Don—I really believe I forgot to tell you—perhaps I was jealous of his right to spend money for you. He asked me to decide what would be best for you, from my knowledge of yourself, and said any amount would be forthcoming that your plans needed. His heart is in his native land still. He will never come home to stay as long as his wife”—“lives” in his thought was instantly changed to “objects” upon his lips.

“So you would really like to go back to city life?”

“Yes,” said Judith with slow decision.

Why should she not go home with John Kenney’s mother, she argued, as she stood silent before Roger. He was studying medicine in New York; he had written her once, only once, and then to tell her that he had decided upon the medical course: “If I cannot have something else I want I will have *this*. Life has got to have something for me.”

A week later Lottie Kindare had written one of her infrequent letters; the burden of the letter seemed to be a twenty-mile drive with John Kenney and an engagement to go to see pictures with him.

“I have always liked John, you know—John with the crimson name.” She was glad of both letters; they both revealed something she had no other way of learning. She had not hurt John beyond recovery, and Lottie would have something she wished for most.

“Don will be glad to take the responsibility of you. You give him another reason for staying alive.”

“Hasn’t he reasons enough—without me?”

“He ought to have,” was the serious reply. “Everybody should have, excepting yourself.”

“Myself appears to be the chief reason to me.”

“Take as much time as you like to decide—and remember, you go of your own free will.”

“Roger, you know it isn’t that I choose to *go*—” she began, earnestly.

“Oh, no,” he said, as he turned away, “not Caesar less, but Rome more.”

He went into the study and shut the door.

“The child, the child,” he groaned, “she has no more thought of me than—Uncle Cephas.”

When his mother and sister returned, and the supper bell rang, he opened the door to say to Marion that he would have no supper, he had work to do.

“Yes,” he thought grimly, “I *have* work to do—to fight myself into shape.”

XXXI. ABOUT WOMEN.

“Like a blind spinner in the sun,
 I tread my days;
I know that all the threads will run
 Appointed ways;
I know each day will bring its task,
And, being blind, no more I ask.”

—H. H.

“I wish you would tell Judith Mackenzie all you know about women’s doings,” said Jean Draper Prince one morning late in November.

“I am ready to give the Bensalem girls a lecture upon what women outside of Bensalem are doing,” said the lady in the bamboo rocker with her knitting. “All the ambitious girls, all the discouraged girls.”

The bamboo rocker was Jean’s wedding present from Judith Mackenzie; Jean had told Mrs. Lane that the broad blue ribbon bow tied upon it was exactly the color of Judith’s eyes.

Mrs. Lane had not visited Bensalem since the summer she gave Jean Draper the inspiration of her outing; but many letters had kept alive her interest in the Bensalem girl, and kept growing the love and admiration of the village girl for the lady who lived in the world and knew all about it.

Jean said her loveliest wedding present was the week Mrs. Lane came to Bensalem to give to her. The loveliest wedding present was shared with Judith Mackenzie.

Jean’s husband was the village blacksmith; his new, pretty house was next door to his shop. It was not all paid for, and Jean was helping to pay for it by saving all the money she could out of her housekeeping. If she only might earn money, she sighed, but her husband laughed at the idea, saying his two strong hands were to be forever at her service.

The small parlor was in its usual pretty order; in the sitting-room were a flower stand, and a canary’s cage; Mrs. Lane preferred the sitting-room, but with her instinct that “company” should have the best room, Jean had urged her into the parlor, drawing down the shades a little that the sunlight should not fade the roses in the new carpet.

“Judith is the craziest girl about doing things,” replied Jean; “she is ambitious, and she thinks she must earn money. I told her you wrote for a paper that was full of business for women, and could tell her what to do.”

“What does she wish to do?”

“Study, and write—she writes the dearest little stories,—or anything else, if she cannot do that. She has *ideas*,” said Jean, gravely; “she is a rusher into new things. I wish she would be married and have a nice little home and care how the bread rises and the pudding comes out of the oven.”

“Isn’t she interested in housekeeping?”

“Oh, yes. But it is Miss Marion’s. Not her own. It is the *own* that makes the difference,” replied the girl-wife contentedly, nodding and smiling out the window to the man in shirt-sleeves and leather apron who

stood in the doorway of the shop talking to the minister on horseback.

How could she ever tell Judith that Bensalem was gossiping about her staying at the parsonage?

“Your work is your own; it comes to be your own, whatever it is. Every girl cannot marry a blacksmith, Jean, and have a small home of her own.”

“I know it. I wish they could. What I wish most for Judith is for her to go back to Aunt Affy’s.”

That afternoon as the three sat together in the blacksmith’s parlor, Jean with towels she was hemming for her mother, and the other two with idle hands and work upon their laps, Jean suddenly asked Mrs. Lane to tell them about women and their doings.

“As I waited in the station for my train the day I came here,” began Mrs. Lane in the conversational tone of one prepared for a long talk, “a lady sat near me, also waiting, with a bag in her hand. I had a bag in my hand, but there was nothing unusual in mine; she told me she was going to Dunellen to take care of ladies’ finger-nails. She had a good business in Dunellen and the suburbs in summer, when the people were in their country homes; there were a few ladies who expected her that day.”

“I wouldn’t like to do that,” declared Jean, “although I would do almost anything to pay off our mortgage.”

“In Buffalo is a woman who runs a street-cleaning bureau; in Kansas City a woman is at the head of a fire department.”

“Worse and worse,” laughed Jean.

“A Louisville lady makes shopping trips to Paris.”

“Splendid,” exclaimed Jean, who still dreamed of outings.

“A lady in New York makes flat-furnishing a business.”

“That is making a home for other people,” said Jean.

“But her own at the same time,” answered Judith.

“New Hampshire has a woman president of a street railway company; and in Chicago is a woman who embalms—”

“Dead people,” interrupted Jean; “oh, dear me!”

“The world is learning the resources of the nineteenth century woman. A Swiss woman has invented a watch for the blind. The hours on the dial are indicated by pegs, which sink in, one every hour.”

“That is worth doing,” observed Judith; “I want to do real work. I know I do not mean my work to end with myself.”

“Lady Somebody has classified her husband’s books, with a catalogue—his papers fill five rooms; think of the work before her.”

“But that is not for herself,” demurred Judith.

“I believe Judith would like to be famous,” said Jean with a laugh. “Bensalem is such a little spot to her.”

“A lady is about to translate King Oscar of Sweden’s works into English; would you like to do that, Judith?” asked Mrs. Lane, who felt that she had been a friend of Judith MacKenzie’s ever since Jean Draper had known her and written of their girlhood together.

“Not exactly that,” said Judith.

“The first woman rabbi in the world is in California. She has been trained in a Hebrew College; Rabbi Moses, the celebrated Jewish divine in Chicago, urges her to take a congregation.”

“Then how can the men give thanks in their prayers that they are not born women?” asked Judith quickly.

“Do the Jews do that?” inquired Jean.

“Yes. But I don’t believe old Moses did, or this Rabbi Moses,” said Judith.

“A lady has received the degree of electrical engineer,” continued Mrs. Lane, who appeared to both her listeners to be a Cyclopedia of Information Concerning Women.

“Judith doesn’t mean such things,” explained Jean; “I don’t believe she wants David to teach her to be a blacksmith. But there is a woman in Dunellen who has a sick husband, and she is doing his work in the butcher’s shop.”

“Would you rather go to Washington, that city of opportunities for girls? The government offices are

filled with women, and young women. Those who pass the civil service examination must be over twenty. Many states of the Union are represented. As the departments close at four in the afternoon, some of the girls take time for other employments, or for study. One I read of attends medical lectures at night. Some, who love study, belong to the Chautauqua Circle. French women, as a rule, have a good business education. In the common schools they are taught household bookkeeping. The French woman is expected to help her husband in his business."

"Not if he is a blacksmith," interjects the blacksmith's wife.

"Harper has published a series called the Distaff Series: all the mechanical work, type-setting, printing, binding, covering, and designing was all done by women."

"I think I would rather make the inside of a book," said Judith. "But think of the women that do that and every kind of a book."

"A lady took the four hundred dollar prize mathematical scholarship at Cornell University. There were twelve applicants; nine were women."

"That is *hard* work," acknowledged Judith, to whom Arithmetic and Algebra were never a success. She had even shed tears over Geometry, and how Roger had laughed at her.

"There's a lady on Long Island who has a farm of five hundred acres; they call the farm, 'Old Brick.'"

"Horrid name," interrupted Jean, turning carefully the narrow hem of the coarse towel.

"It was a dairy farm, but she found milk not profitable enough, and gave it up and made a study of live stock. She has made a reputation as a stock raiser; she raises trotters and road horses," said Mrs. Lane, watching the effect of her words upon Judith.

Judith colored and looked displeased. Was this all Mrs. Lane, Jean's ideal lady, had to tell her of women's brave work?

"In Italy nearly two millions of women are employed in industrial pursuits, cotton, silk, linen, and jute. Three million women are busy in agriculture. You might try agriculture here in Bensalem."

"What do their homes do?" inquired Jean, the home-maker.

"Oh, they do woman's work, beside."

"It is all woman's work, I suppose, if women do it," answered Judith, discouraged.

"Judith, who is the sweetest woman you know?" asked Mrs. Lane, touched by the droop of the girl's head and the trouble in her eyes.

"I know ever so many. No one could be sweeter than my mother. And my Aunt Affy is strong and sweet, and doing good to everybody. And Mrs. Kenney, Marion's mother, she is *in* things, busy and bright always."

"I have told you some things women may do; now I'll tell you some things a woman—one woman—may not do. She cannot do—is not allowed to do—some things a washer-woman in Bensalem may do—But I'll read you the slip; I have it in my pocket-book."

She took the cutting from her pocket-book and asked Judith to read it aloud.

Judith read: "Queen Victoria, not being born a queen, probably learned to read just like other persons. But after she became afflicted with royalty she found that a queen is not allowed to have a great many privileges that the humblest of her subjects can boast. For instance, she isn't allowed to handle a newspaper of any kind, nor a magazine, nor a letter from any person except from her own family, and no member of the royal family or household is allowed to speak to her of any piece of news in any publication. All the information the queen is permitted must first be strained through the intellect of a man whose business it is to cut out from the papers each day what he thinks she would like to know. These scraps he fastens on a silken sheet with a gold fringe all about it, and presents to her unfortunate majesty. This silken sheet with gold fringe is imperative for all communications to the queen.

"Any one who wishes to send the queen a personal poem or a communication of any kind (except a personal letter, which the poor lady isn't allowed to have at all) must have it printed in gold letters on one side of these silk sheets with a gold fringe, just so many inches wide and no wider, all about it. These gold trimmings will be returned to him in time, as they are expensive, and the queen is kindly and thrifty; but for the queen's presents they are imperative. The deprivations of the queen's life are pathetically illustrated by an incident which occurred not long ago. An American lad sent her majesty an immense collection of the flowers of this country, pressed and mounted. The queen was delighted with the collection and kept it for three months, turning over the leaves frequently with great delight. At the end of that time, which was as long as she was allowed by the court etiquette to keep it, she had it sent back with a letter saying that, being queen of England, she was not allowed to have any gifts, and that she parted from them with deep regret."

"Well," exclaimed Jean, with an energy that brought a laugh from her small audience, "I would rather be the Bensalem blacksmith's wife."

"I wish I could take this to Nettie," said Judith; "she thinks sometimes she would like to be a queen."

"She is, in her small province," replied Mrs. Lane. "I have something for her; I think I can help her step out into as wide a world as she cares to live in. No; don't ask me; it is to be her secret and my own. Now, Judith, tell me, what is the secret of the happy and useful lives you know?"

"I don't know," replied Judith, truthfully. "But they are all married. I am thinking of girls—like me. Their work came to them."

"As mine did," said Jean, contentedly, with a glance from her work out the window where the blacksmith was shoeing a horse.

"Your Aunt Affy was not married—"

"No, she was not. She had her work. It was in her home. She was born among her work. But I have not a home like that," Judith answered in short, sharp sentences.

"Why, Judith," reproached Jean, "what would Aunt Affy say to that?"

"It would hurt her. She would look sorry. I do not know what gets into me, sometimes. She would adopt me and be like my own mother."

"Do you resist such a sweet mothering as that?" rebuked Mrs. Lane. "I think I lost some of the sermon Sunday morning by looking at her face."

"I do not mean to *resist* her," said Judith, not able to keep the tears back.

"She told mother her heart ached to have you back," persuaded Jean, "since her sister died she had so longed for her little girl."

"I'm afraid I am not doing right," confessed Judith, "but I was almost homesick there, when Aunt Rody was sick. And then, I think I *must* learn to support myself, and not be dependent."

"Oh, you American girl," said Mrs. Lane.

"And with Aunt Affy for your *mother*," added Jean; "I told Mrs. Lane you had ideas."

"I should think I had," said Judith, laughing to keep the tears back. "I'm afraid I've forgotten Aunt Affy. She loves two people in me, she says; my mother and me. I don't know what *has* possessed me."

"Ambition, perhaps," Mrs. Lane suggested, taking up her knitting,—a long black stocking for her only grandchild.

"Not just that," Judith reasoned; "it is more making something of myself for myself. Culture for its own sake," she quoted from Roger, who had warned her against her devotion to self-culture; "and I give it a self-sacrificing name; the desire to be independent. I do not know why I should *not* be dependent on Aunt Affy. My mother was—and loved it."

"No service could be more acceptable than serving her," said Mrs. Lane; "the world is only a larger Bensalem."

"It isn't the *world* I wanted," replied Judith, impatiently.

When Judith went away Jean walked down the street with her. "Are you disappointed in Mrs. Lane?" she asked.

"She did not tell me what I hoped and expected. She told me something better. I think I can study at Aunt Affy's," in the tone of one having made a sacrifice.

"And go to the parsonage every day," said Jean eagerly, and yet afraid of pressing her point.

"Yes—if I wish to," replied Judith slowly, surprising herself by coming to a decision.

"Bensalem is such a place for talk," Jean ventured, not that she was confident of success. "Everybody knows everybody's business and is interested in it."

"But it is kindly talk," said Judith, whom gossip had touched lightly.

"Yes, sometimes—not always," Jean hesitated; "people will misjudge."

"Jean Draper, what do you mean?" asked Judith, blazing angrily; "are you trying to tell me something?"

"No," replied Jean, startled at Judith's unusual vehemence. "I only want you to understand that Aunt Affy is talked about for letting you stay so much at the parsonage."

"How could it hurt anybody?"

"They say Aunt Affy is—scheming," she said, watching the effect of her words.

“Scheming. What about? What does *she* gain?” asked Judith, provoked.

“The gain is for you,” said Jean, at last, desperately; “they say she wants to marry you to the minister.”

Now she had said it. She stood still, frightened. Judith left her without another word, going straight on to the parsonage. After a moment Jean turned and went home.

What would Judith do? She looked angry enough to do anything. But she had shielded her from further talk. Bensalem should have no more to say.

Judith went on dazed. Now she understood it all; Martha was coming that she might go; they did not like to tell her to go; they were all too kind. As if Aunt Affy could plot like that. As if Aunt Affy cared for that: Aunt Affy who wanted to keep her always.

Had Marion heard the talk? And Roger? Was he glad to send her away with his mother? She would fly to Aunt Affy that very night; the old house would be her refuge. She would go back to Aunt Affy—and her mother’s home. Roger, her saint, her hero, her ideal—he could never think of her—like that.

She opened the door and went in. Marion had taken her mother for a drive. The study door was shut, the usual signal when Roger was busy. But she often ventured; the shut door had never barred her out. Nothing had ever kept her away from Roger. She tapped; Roger called: “Come in.”

He was writing and did not lift his eyes.

She waited; he looked up and smiled.

“Can you stop one minute?” she asked, faintly.

“One and a half.”

“I came to tell you that I have thought it over; I would rather not go home with Mrs. Kenney.”

“Stay then, with all my heart.”

“But not with all my heart. I am going to Aunt Affy’s instead. She wants me,” she said, quietly, with a quiver of the lip.

“I should think she would.”

“I did not know how much. She herself would not tell me. Jean Draper told me. Aunt Affy told her mother.”

“That will not change our plans of study at all.”

“No; it need not.”

“It shall not.”

“I think I can get on alone awhile. You have taught me how to use books. You have shown me that they are tools. I can write by myself. You have been to me like Maria Edgeworth’s father. Perhaps it is time for Maria to stand alone.”

“You are tired of my teaching.”

“Oh, no; I am not tired of anything—excepting Bensalem. I *hate* Bensalem,” she burst out with anger and contrition.

“What has Bensalem done now?”

“Nothing unusual. Will you tell Marion I am going—home to stay to-night? Martha will come and help her in the housekeeping.”

“Judith, has any one hurt you?”

“No,” said Judith, smiling with the tears starting; “you are all too kind.”

“Is it for Aunt Affy you are going? Judith, you cannot deceive me.”

“No; I do not think I can. I am going for Aunt Affy’s sake, Roger.”

“Because she misses you?”

“Yes, because she misses me, and needs me. People think and say—she is not taking good care of me. I wish to prove to them that she is.”

“That is sheer nonsense,” he exclaimed, angrily.

“It is not nonsense that she misses me now that her sister is gone. I never had any sister excepting Marion, but I know it was dreadful for Aunt Affy to lose her sister. If you haven’t helped me to study

alone, to depend upon myself, you have been very little help to me."

"That is true," he laughed, "but the studying is only a part of what the parsonage is to you."

"It was my reason for coming, and staying," she said, simply, flushing and trembling.

"True; I had forgotten that. Yes; it is better for you to go; best for you to go. Come to-morrow and talk it over to Marion and my mother. I will tell them only that you have gone—home, to spend the night."

He took up his pen, it trembled in his grasp; Judith went out and shut the door that he might not be disturbed.

"I am giving it all up," she thought, as she pressed a few things into a satchel; "all I was going away to get; perhaps *this* is the way my prayer for work is being answered."

They were at supper when she stood in the doorway; Aunt Affy at the head of the table behind the tea-pot and the cups and saucers; her husband opposite her, genial, handsome, satisfied, and Joe, at one side of the round table, tall, fine-looking, with his gray, thoughtful eyes, refined lips, and modest manner. Joe was a son to be proud of, the old people sometimes said to each other.

There was no chair opposite Joe, no plate, and knife and fork and napkin. Uncle Cephas liked a hot supper; they had chicken stew to-night, and boiled rice. It was like home, the faces, the things on the supper-table. She was homesick enough to long for some place "like" home. The parsonage could never be her home again, with Martha in her place; perhaps Martha had been wishing to come for years; perhaps her selfishness had kept Martha away.

John would be married, Martha would be in her place at the parsonage,—Don was too far away to know, and too absorbed in his wife to care; Mrs. Kenney did not really *want* her, she had only asked her to go home with her to get her away from the parsonage; the only home she had a *right* to was this home where her mother had been a little girl.

"Why, Judith," cried Aunt Affy, rising, "dear child, what is the matter?"

"I wanted to come home," said Judith.

XXXII. AUNT AFFY'S PICTURE.

"That only which we have within can we see without."

—Emerson.

Judith stood at the sitting-room window looking out into the March snow-storm. There had been many snow-storms since that November night she came to the threshold and stood looking in at the happy supper-table. Aunt Affy had opened her arms and heart anew and folded her close: "My lamb has come back," she said.

"To stay back," Judith whispered, hiding her face on Aunt Affy's shoulder.

That night was nearly two years ago; she would be twenty in April. She was not "twenty in April" to Aunt Affy; she was still her "lamb" and her "little girl."

In her dark blue cloth dress, and with her yellow head and rose-tinted cheeks, she did not look as grown-up as she felt; she had taken life, not only with both hands, but with heart, brain, and spirit, and with all her might. There was nothing in her that she had not put into her life; her simple, Bensalem life.

"Aunt Affy," she said, as Aunt Affy's step paused on the threshold between kitchen and sitting-room, "Come and rest awhile in this fire-light. This fire on the hearth to-night reminds me of the glow of the grate in Summer Avenue when I used to tell pictures to mother."

Aunt Affy pulled down the shades; Judith drew Aunt Affy's chair to the home-made rug—Aunt Rody's rug,—to the hearth, and then sat down on the hassock at her feet, and looked into the fire, not the curly-headed girl in Summer Avenue, but the girl grown up.

"Aunt Affy, tell *me* a picture," she coaxed.

"What about?"

"About myself. I'm afraid I am too full of myself. I cannot understand something. I can tell you about it, for it is past, and I can look at it as something in the past. You know those years I was at the parsonage, at my boarding-school, I was crammed full with one hope."

Judith was looking at the fire; the eyes looking down at her were solicitous, tender. She had been afraid Judith "cared too much" for the young minister; but it must be over now, or she could not tell her about

it so frankly.

“I dreamed it, I studied it, I wrote it, I prayed about it, I *breathed* it.”

“Oh,” said Aunt Affy, with a quick, heavy sigh.

“Don’t pity me. It was good for me, blessed for me, or it could not have happened, you know. I thought there was some great work for me to do—”

“Oh,” said Aunt Affy, with a quick, relieved cry.

“I was not sure whether it were to write a book, or to teach, or to go as a foreign missionary; I think I hoped it would be the foreign missionary, because that was the most self-sacrificing. The book was all one great joy. The teaching was absorbing, but I must go away to study. I was afraid to go away, I did not like to go away from Bensalem, I would miss my mother away from Bensalem, and you, and all the parsonage, and the whole village. But I thought I was called; as called as Roger was to preach, or any woman, saint, or heroine, who had done a great thing. You cannot think what it was to me. It made me old. I wanted God to speak out of Heaven and tell me what to do. It began to lose its selfishness, after that. The first thing that began to shake my confidence was something Mrs. Lane said that afternoon she talked to Jean and me about what women were doing and could do. She did not make woman’s work attractive; she took the heart out of me. I did not know why she should do that. I knew better all the time. I knew what women had done and were doing. I knew she was doing a noble work, literary work, work in prisons, temperance work; the instances she gave me seemed trivial, as if she were laughing at me. But something opened my eyes; I felt that I might be disobedient to my heavenly vision, that I was looking up into the heavens for my call, and the voice might be all the time in my ear. That was the night I came back here and found you so cozy and satisfied under your own roof-tree, with the voice in your ear, and the work in your hand. The world went away from me. I stayed. I am glad I stayed. My only trouble is, and it is a real trouble, that God did not care for my purpose, or my prayers; that he has let them go as if they never entered into his mind; I thought they were in his heart as well as mine.”

“They are, Deary,” said Aunt Affy, wiping her eyes; “He will not let one of them go.”

“But He did not do anything with them. He did not *love* my plan, and my prayers,” said Judith, wearily.

“Do you remember one time when Jesus was on the earth, a man, clothed and in his right mind, sat at Jesus’ feet? He had so much to be thankful for; no man ever had so much. And he sat at Jesus’ feet, near him because he loved him, and looked up into his face and listened. That was all he wanted on the earth, to be with Jesus; to follow him everywhere, to obey every word he said, to always see his face, to serve him. Did not the Lord care for such love when so many were scorning him and ashamed to be his disciples? When he came to his own, and his own received him not. When the man found that Jesus was going away, that his countrymen were sending him away, beseeching him to go, he besought Jesus, which was more than one asking, that he might go with him. That was all he wanted: just to go with him. Just as all you wanted was to be with him and do something he said, *and be sure he said it*. But Jesus sent this man away. He refused him; he denied his prayer.”

“That was very hard,” said Judith.

“Very hard. It was like giving him a glimpse of Heaven—it was Heaven, and then shutting the door in his face as he prayed.”

“Yes,” said Judith, who understood.

“But he did speak to him; he told him what to do: ‘Return to thine own house.’ If he had father, mother, brother, sister, wife, children, go back to them and tell them how good God had been to him. When I look at you, Deary, stepping about the house, so pretty and bright, I think of how glad your mother must be if she sees you. How glad to know the little girl she left was taken care of. And in church when you play the organ, and in Sunday School, and at the Lord’s own table, and doing errands all around the village, you are a blessing in your ‘own house.’”

Judith’s head went down on Aunt Affy’s knee.

“This man went through the ‘whole city’ beside; his own house grew into the whole city. Your life isn’t ended yet; to old folks like Uncle Cephas and me, it seems just begun. Your own house is only just the beginning of the whole city. I’ve only had my own house and Bensalem, but I seem to think there’s a whole city for you. The Lord knew about the whole city when he denied his prayer and sent him to his own house.”

Judith did not lift her head; her tears were tears of shame and penitence.

“Now, here come the men folks,” roused Aunt Affy, cheerily; “and supper they must have to keep them good-natured.”

“I am only in my ‘own house’ yet,” said Judith, as she moved about setting the supper table as she had done when she was a little girl.

XXXIII. NETTIE'S OUTING.

"Does the road wind up hill all the way?"
"Yes, to the very end."
"Will the day's journey take the whole, long day?"
"From morn to night, my friend."

—Christina G. Rossetti.

This same evening, in the March snow-storm, Nettie Evans sat in her invalid chair beside the table in her chamber. Nettie had not grown up in appearance; face and figure were slight, her cheeks were pale, her eyes large and luminous; her laugh was as light-hearted as the laugh of any girl in the village; her father often told her that she was the busiest maiden in Bensalem.

Her busy times grew out of Mrs. Lane's secret.

Nettie was the member of a society; the Shut-In Society. It was an organized society; it published a magazine monthly: *The Open Window*, with a motto upon its title-page:

"The windows of my soul I throw
Wide open to the sun."

Since Mrs. Lane had told her about the Society and made her a member she had thrown the windows of her soul wide open to the sun.

And the Lord shut him in, was the motto of the Society. Nettie had marked the precious words in her Bible with the date of her accident, and another date: the day when she became a member of the Shut-In Society.

The Open Window had come in to-night's mail; Nettie had been counting the hours until mail time, and laughed a joyful little laugh all to herself when she heard her father say to her mother in the hall below: "It's mail time, and I must go to the office to-night, storm or no storm; Nettie will not sleep a wink unless she has her magazine."

It was her feast every month. The members and associates numbered hundreds and hundreds, Nettie did not know how many; and they were all around the world. Nettie herself had had a letter from the Sandwich Islands: the magazine was sent to a leper colony, but she would never dare to write a letter to such a place. With every fresh magazine she read the object and aim of the Society:—

"This Association shall be called the Shut-in Society, and shall consist of Members and Associates. Its object shall be: To relieve the weariness of the sick-room by sending and receiving letters and other tokens of remembrance; to testify to the love and presence of Christ in the hour of suffering and privation; to pray for one another at set times: daily, at the twilight hour, and weekly on Tuesday morning at ten o'clock; to stimulate faith, hope, patience, and courage in fellow-sufferers by the study and presentation of Bible promises.

"To be a sufferer, shut in from the outside world, constitutes one a proper candidate for membership in this Society. All members are requested to send with their application, if possible, the name of their pastor or their physician, or of some Associate of the Society, as introduction; and no name should be forwarded for membership until the individual has been consulted and consent obtained. If able, members are expected to pay 50 cents yearly for The Open Window. Any who are unable will please inform the Secretary.

"As this is not an almsgiving society, its members are requested not to apply for money or other material aid to the officers, Associates, or other members. Any assistance which can be given in the way of remunerative work will be cheerfully rendered.

"Members are not to urge upon any one in the Society the peculiar belief of any particular sect or denomination.

"Associate members are not themselves invalids, but, being in tender sympathy with the suffering, volunteer in this ministry of love for Jesus' sake."

Mrs. Lane had been an Associate member from the time of the organization of the Society in 1877. Jean Draper Prince, coming to Nettie's chamber upon the Shut-In's last birthday, and finding her with a tableful and lapful of mail packages, had told her that Mrs. Lane had given her the biggest "outing" any girl in the village ever had.

Nettie had fifteen regular correspondents, and never a week passed that she was not touched by an appeal for letters and did not write an extra letter to some one not on her "list." The wool slippers in her work-basket she had finished to-day for a Shut-In birthday gift next month. Every night in her prayer she gave thanks for the blessings that widened and brightened her life through "the dear Shut-In Society."

As she sat reading her magazine, too deep in it to hear a sound, light feet ran up the narrow stairway. She did not lift her eyes until Pet Draper, Jean's youngest sister, pushed the door open.

"Why, Pet," she exclaimed. "Are you out in this storm?"

"No," laughed Pet, "I am *in* in this storm. I came to stay all night."

"I shouldn't think you *would* want to go out again to-night."

"Oh, it isn't so bad. The snow is light. Joe brought me," she said, with sudden meaning in her tones.

"Did he?" asked Nettie, absently; "just let me read you this. 'This lady walked forty steps to go out to tea—for the first time in thirty-two years.' I wonder if I shall ever go out to tea."

"Nettie, you shall come to my wedding."

"Pet!" exclaimed Nettie, in delight and surprise.

"Yes. And I came to tell you. I told Joe tonight I would marry him," she said, laughing and coloring.

"I'm so glad. I'm so *glad*," repeated Nettie; "he is so good and kind."

"He is as good as David Prince any day. Jean needn't put on airs because he was only a farm boy. He is more than that now. Mr. Brush has promised to build a little house just opposite his house, across the road, and Joe is not to be paid wages, but to take the farm on shares. Plenty of people do that. Mr. Brush says he is his right-hand. Father will furnish our house—it will not take much. Perhaps some day Joe will have a farm of his own. My father had to earn his farm, and that's why the mortgage isn't off yet. Joe has saved some money, and so have I. Agnes Trembly will try to give me her customers when she is married; she always speaks a good word for me. I've made dresses for Mrs. Brush and Judith and Miss Marion."

"And wrappers for me," said Nettie.

"Yes, I shall always have you to make my fortune."

"That is splendid, and I am so glad. But here's my letter in the *Open Window*: do let me read it to you."

Pet laughed, and listened. She believed Nettie liked the Shut-In Society as well as having a new little house and a husband. Nettie would have told her she liked it better.

While Pet slept her happy, healthful sleep that night, after her somewhat hurried two minutes of kneeling to pray, Nettie lay peacefully awake remembering the "requests for prayer" in her *Open Window*.

"Our prayers are earnestly asked for an aged man, who has lost the home of his childhood, that he may feel that God does it for the best and may love God. Also a lady whose life is very sad, that she may look up to God and rejoice in him.

"Pray for one who fears blindness, that if possible it may be averted, but if it must be, in the midst of darkness there may be the light of God's countenance.

"Let us remember the sorrowing hearts from whom sisters or parents or children have been taken by death.

"One long a sufferer from disease, asks us to pray that if it be God's will she may be healed.

"One who feels that answers to our prayers have been granted, asks that we still pray that the use of his limbs may be restored and that a beloved mother may long be spared to him."

"One of our number writes, 'Pray that father and the children may be saved and that mother and I love God better.' It is hard sometimes for Christians so to live that unconverted members of the family be drawn by their lives toward Christ. This mother and daughter truly need our prayers.

"One of our band is trying to build up a church in a lonely spot. She asks us to pray God's help for her."

Nettie's outing went out farther than anyone knew. She could tell about her gifts and her letters, but never about her intercession.

"I wonder," she planned, "if I couldn't have a little Fair; all the girls would do something; I have so little money to give. I couldn't go—unless I have it in my room."

She wanted to wake Pet to talk about it, but that would be selfish, and then—Pet might be cross.

She fell asleep beside the strong young girl who lent her life from her own vitality; the full, breathing lips, the warm cheeks, the head with its masses of auburn hair, the touch of the hand upon her own were all life giving. Nettie loved girls; the girls who were what she might have been.

Awaking out of restless sleep, she remembered the Midnight Circle to pray for the sleepless, and prayed: "Father, give them all sleep, if thou wilt; but, if thy will be not so, give them all *something better than sleep*."

XXXIV. “SENSATIONS.”

“Being fruitful in every good work, and increasing
in the knowledge of God.”

This same March night in the snow-storm the Bensalem preacher sat alone in his study among his books, with his thoughts among his people whom he loved.

Marion brought her work-basket and took her seat on the other side of the lamp. The evening’s mail was upon the table.

“What do the letters bring to-night, Roger?” she inquired in the tone of one hungry for news.

“Enough to stir us up for one while.”

“Good. I am always ready to be stirred up. I have been stagnant all day.”

“What a girl you are for wanting new sensations.”

“Aren’t you always after them?”

“No, they are always after me.”

“Which one is after you now?”

“Four.”

“Four letters,” she said, eagerly.

“There are more than four letters. But four have sensations.”

“Do give me half a sensation.”

“What do you think of John writing me that he is tired of medicine, it is too big a pull; he wants me to break it to father, and ask him to take him into the business.”

“Father will be glad enough; but he will not like John to give up for such a reason.”

“I imagine that girl is at the bottom of it. Girls are usually at the bottom of things. Her father will be willing for the marriage if John goes into business; he did not relish the idea of a struggling professional man.”

“Lottie Kindare is not the girl to relish a long engagement, either. I am not surprised at *that* sensation.”

“You will not be surprised that Richard King has resigned and accepted a call to the Summer Avenue church.”

“Oh, no; father said they were determined to have him.”

“And he’s to be married, too.”

“I cannot be surprised at that. That is not a sensation. I knew he was taken with Agnes Trembly that first time he met her here. She did look as sweet as a violet. She has grown like a flower this last year.”

“Thanks to you. You have been a wonderful help to her. You took her into a new world.”

“That is what I tried to do. She was ready for it. And to think our little country dressmaker will be the wife of the Summer Avenue minister.”

“Oh, she’ll take to it. It is in her.”

“Yes; she has tact.”

“And natural ability.”

“That is only—how many sensations?”

“You saw that one letter was from Don. He is coming home next month. Really, this time.”

“His wife has been dead—”

“A year. Their married life was very short. All the happier because it was short. She has become a blessed memory to him. She was very sweet in the last month of her life. He loved her then as he had never loved her before. She told him that she did not love him when she married him; that she married him to get away from her uncle’s home. That last month was the one sweet drop in his bitter cup.”

“Roger, you knew his story all the time.”

“From the very first. He was not proud with me. He is so much like a woman that he had to tell somebody.”

“That proves how little you know of women,” was the woman’s unspoken comment.

“Now, for my last sensation. The First Church in Dunellen asks if I will accept a call.”

“O, Roger,” with a mingling of sensations.

“It is ‘O, Roger,’ I am torn in two.”

“One Roger for Bensalem and one for Dunellen.”

“I have known for some time that I might have the call. Dear old Dr. Kent has resigned. He told me he wanted to throw his mantle over me.”

“The salary is twenty-five hundred and parsonage,” remarked Marion.

“I suppose I am not above the consideration of salary. I cannot work at tent making.”

“Bensalem has had the best of you.”

“Well, I hope not—at my age.”

“Bensalem has been preparation for Dunellen, then,” she amended.

“What do you advise?”

“I do not advise a man when his mind is made up.”

“Bensalem has been good for us.”

“And we have not been so bad for Bensalem. Seven is the perfect number. We have been here seven years. What *will* Judith say?”

“I think I will go and see,” he said, rising.

“To-night? In the storm?”

“It will be the first storm I ever was afraid of.”

Left alone, Marion forgot her work. It was not only Dunellen. He would forget to ask Judith about Dunellen.

Judith was sitting before the fire on the hearth with a book when Roger stamped up on the piazza. Aunt Affy, mixing bread at the kitchen table, heard the gate swing to, and called to Uncle Cephas that somebody must want shelter for the night to come out in such a storm. Uncle Cephas dropped his newspaper and opened the sitting-room door that led to the piazza.

“Well, the minister, of all things!”

“Sakes alive!” exclaimed Aunt Affy, rubbing the flour off her hands.

Judith sat still by the fire.

“I had to come to see my elder,” explained Roger.

“Oh, church business,” said Aunt Affy enlightened.

“Young folks never mind a storm,” remarked the elder. “Shake off your snow, and come to the fire.”

As Judith arose with her book Roger detained her; “This isn’t a secret session, Judith. You and Aunt Affy must help me decide about Dunellen.”

“Dunellen! Has it come to that?” inquired the elder.

“Dunellen has come to me. The First Church has come to me.”

“I might have known what would come of your exchanging so often,” remarked Uncle Cephas, discontentedly.

“I thought you did it to rest Dr. Kent,” reproached Aunt Affy.

“I did. It did rest him.”

“And you got ensnared yourself. Roger Kenney, are you going there for the money?” asked Uncle Cephas, with solemnity.

“You know better than that,” replied Roger, angrily.

“The heart of man is deceitful. There’s a great difference in the salary. But there’s a difference in the man. You’ve grown some since you came here seven years ago.”

“Uncle Cephas, I think you are *wicked*,” protested Judith, with tearful vehemence. “If you don’t know Roger better than that you do not know him at all.”

“You don’t know men,” insisted the elder of the Bensalem church. “The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.”

“Judith knows mine is not,” laughed Roger.

“Judith, don’t fly at me and eat me up,” said Uncle Cephas; “I know this young man as well as most folks. He doesn’t love money *enough*. He may be going for something, but it isn’t for money.”

“He is going for more young folks,” said Aunt Affy, “and men about his own age. I’m willing, but it’s terrible hard.”

Judith turned to the fire again.

“Come, sit down and let’s talk it over,” said Uncle Cephas, in a pacified tone; “I won’t pull the wrong way if it’s best.”

An hour afterward Aunt Affy called her husband out into the kitchen.

“Cephas,” she whispered, “don’t you *know* he wants to ask Judith what she thinks?”

“She isn’t a member of the session,” replied Uncle Cephas, with dignity.

“She is a member of *his* session,” said wise Aunt Affy.

After this, what more would you know of Judith’s growing up?

She was married on her twentieth birthday, and her Cousin Don was at the wedding. She was married in the Bensalem church; Richard King performed the ceremony. Roger asked if she would have dear old Dr. Kent, but in memory of that afternoon at Meadow Centre, she chose Richard King.

“Don, it wouldn’t have been perfect without you,” she whispered when her Cousin Don kissed her. The next year Judith finished her book of children’s stories which she wished to take to Heaven to show her mother.

Marion was the maiden aunt at the Dunellen parsonage. Don Mackenzie was everybody’s good friend.

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