

FICTION

Martha Finley

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A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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ELSIE IN THE SOUTH

BY

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ELSIE IN THE SOUTH

CHAPTER I.

"What a storm! there will be no going out to-day even for the early stroll about the grounds with papa," sighed Lucilla Raymond one December morning, as she lay for a moment listening to the dash of rain and sleet against her bedroom windows. "Ah, well! I must not fret, knowing who appoints the changes of the seasons, and that all He does is for the best," her thoughts ran on. "Besides, what pleasures we can all have within doors in this sweetest of homes and with the dearest and kindest of fathers!"

With that she left her bed and began the duties of the toilet, first softly closing the communicating door between her own and her sister's sleeping apartments lest she should disturb Grace's slumbers, then turning on the electric light in both bedroom and bathroom, for, though after six, it was still dark.

The clock on the mantel struck seven before she was quite through with these early morning duties, but the storm had in no wise abated in violence, and as she heard it she felt sure that outdoor exercise was entirely out of the question.

"And I'll not see Chester to-day," she sighed half-aloud. "It was evident when he was here last night that he had taken a cold, and I hope he won't think of venturing out in such weather as this."

Just then the door into Grace's room opened and her sweet voice said, "Good-morning, Lu. As usual, you are up and dressed before your lazy younger sister has begun the duties of the toilet."

"Take care what you say, young woman," laughed Lucilla, facing round upon her. "I am not going to have my delicate younger sister slandered in that fashion. She is much too feeble to leave her bed at the early hour which suits her older and stronger sister."

"Very kind in you to see it in that light," laughed Grace. "But I must make haste now with my dressing. Papa may be coming in directly, for it is certainly much too stormy for him and you to take your usual stroll in the grounds."

"It certainly is," assented Lu. "Just listen to the hail and rain dashing against the windows. And there comes papa now," she added, as a tap was heard at their sitting-room door.

She ran to open it and receive the fatherly caress that always accompanied his morning greeting to each one of his children.

"Grace is not up yet?" he said inquiringly, as he took possession of an easy-chair.

"Yes, papa, but not dressed yet; so that I shall have you to myself for a while," returned Lu in a cheery tone and seating herself on an ottoman at his knee.

"A great privilege that," he said with a smile, passing a hand caressingly over her hair as he spoke. "It is storming hard, so that you and I must do without our usual early exercise about the grounds."

"Yes, sir; and I am sorry to miss it, though a chat with my father here and now is not so bad an exchange."

"I think we usually have that along with the walk," he said, smiling down into the eyes that were gazing so lovingly up into his.

"Yes, sir; so we do; and you always manage to make the shut-in days very enjoyable."

"It is what I wish to do. Lessons can go on as usual with you and Grace as well as with the younger ones, and after that we can have reading, music, and quiet games."

"And Grace and I have some pretty fancy work to do for Christmas time."

"Ah, yes! and I presume you will both be glad to have a little--or a good deal--of extra money with which to purchase gifts or materials for making them."

"If you feel quite able to spare it, father," she returned with a pleased smile; "but not if it will make you feel in the least cramped for what you want to spend yourself."

"I can easily spare you each a hundred dollars," he said in a cheery tone. "Will that be enough, do you think?"

"Oh, I shall feel rich!" she exclaimed. "How very good, kind, and liberal you are to us and all your children, papa."

"And fortunate in being able to be liberal to my dear ones. There is no greater pleasure than that of gratifying them in all right and reasonable desires. I think that as soon as the weather is suitable for a visit to the city we will take a trip there for a day's shopping. Have you and Grace decided upon any particular articles that you would like to give?"

"We have been doing some bits of fancy work, father, and making up some warm clothing for the old folks and children among our poor neighbors--both white and colored; also a few things for our house servants. And to let you into a secret," she added with a smile and a blush, "I am embroidering some handkerchiefs for Chester."

"Ah, that is right!" he said. "Chester will value a bit of your handiwork more than anything else that you could bestow upon him."

"Except perhaps the hand itself," she returned with a low, gleeful laugh.

"But that he knows he cannot have for some time," her father said, taking in his the one resting on the arm of his chair. "This belongs to me at present and it is my fixed purpose to hold it in possession for at least some months to come."

"Yes, sir; I know that and highly approve of your intention. Please never give up your claim to your eldest daughter so long as we both live."

"No, daughter, nothing is further from my thoughts," he said with a smile that was full of affection.

"What do you want from Santa Claus, papa?" she asked.

"Really, I have not considered that question," he laughed; "but anything my daughters choose to give me will be highly appreciated."

"It is pleasant to know that, father dear; and now please tell me what you think would be advisable to get for Mamma V, Elsie, and Ned."

That question was under discussion for some time, and the conclusion was arrived at that it could not be decided until their visit to the city stores to see what might be offered there. Then Grace joined them, exchanged greetings and caresses with her father, and as the call to breakfast came at that moment, the three went down together, meeting Violet and the younger children on the way.

They were a cheerful party, all at the table seeming to enjoy their meal and chatting pleasantly as they ate. Much of their talk was of the approaching Christmas and what gifts would be appropriate for different ones and likely to prove acceptable.

"Can't we send presents to brother Max, papa?" asked Ned.

"Hardly, I think," was the reply, "but we can give him some when he comes home next month."

"And he'll miss all the good times the rest of us have. It's just too bad!" replied Ned.

"We will try to have some more good times when he is with us," said the captain cheerily.

"Oh, so we can!" was Neddie's glad response.

The captain and the young people spent the morning in the schoolroom as usual. In the afternoon Dr. Conly called. "I came in principally on your account, Lu," he said, when greetings had been exchanged. "Chester has taken a rather severe cold so that I, as his physician, have ordered him to keep within doors for the present; which he deeply regrets because it cuts him off from his daily visits here."

"Oh, is he very ill?" she asked, vainly trying to make her tones quite calm and indifferent.

"Oh, no! only in danger of becoming so unless he takes good care of himself."

"And you will see to it that he does so, Cousin Arthur?" Violet said in a sprightly, half-inquiring tone.

"Yes; so far as I can," returned the doctor, with a slight smile. "My patients, unfortunately, are not always careful to obey orders."

"When they don't the doctor cannot be justly blamed for any failure to recover," remarked the captain. "But I trust Chester will show himself docile and obedient."

"Which I dare say he will if Lu sides strongly with the doctor," Grace remarked, giving Lucilla an arch look and smile.

"My influence, if I have any, shall all be on that side," was Lucilla's quiet rejoinder. "He and I might have a bit of chat over the telephone, if he is able to go to it."

"Able enough for that," said the doctor, "but too hoarse, I think, to make himself intelligible. However, you can talk to him, bidding him to be careful, and for your sake to follow the doctor's directions."

"Of course I shall do that," she returned laughingly, "and surely he will not venture to disregard my orders."

"Not while he is a lover and liable to be sent adrift by his lady-love," said Violet, in sportive tone.

Just then the telephone bell rang and the captain and Lulu hastened to it.

It proved to be Mrs. Dinsmore of the Oaks, who called to them with a message from Chester to his affianced--a kindly greeting, a hope that she and all the family were well, and an expression of keen regret that he was, and probably would be for some days, unable to pay his accustomed visit to Woodburn.

"There, daughter, take your place and reply as you deem fit," said Captain Raymond, stepping aside from the instrument.

Lucilla at once availed herself of the permission.

"Aunt Sue," she called, "please tell Chester we are all very sorry for his illness, but hope he may soon be well. We think he will if he is careful to follow the doctor's directions. And when this storm is over probably some of us will call at the Oaks to inquire concerning his welfare."

A moment's silence; then came the reply. "Chester says, thank you; he will be glad to see any or all of the Woodburn people; but you must not venture out till the storm is over."

"We won't," returned Lucilla. "Good-by." And she and her father returned to the parlor where they had left the others, with their report of the interview.

Two stormy days followed; then came one that was bright and clear and they gladly availed themselves of the opportunity to go to the city, do their Christmas shopping, and call at the Oaks on their return. They reached home tired, but in excellent spirits, having been very successful in making their purchases, and found Chester recovering from his cold.

From that day until Christmas time the ladies and little girls of the connection were very busy in preparing gifts for their dear ones; Grandma Elsie as well as the rest. She did not come so often to Woodburn as was her custom, and the visits she did make were short and hurried.

Chester was a more frequent caller after partially recovering from his cold, but even while he was there Lucilla worked busily with her needle, though never upon the gift intended for him. She now wore and highly prized a beautiful diamond ring which he had given her in token of their betrothal, though she had told him at the time of its bestowal that she feared it had cost more than he could well afford. At which he laughed, telling her that nothing could be too good or expensive for one so lovely and charming as herself.

"In your partial eyes," she returned with a smile. "Ah, it is very true that love is blind. Oh, Chester! I often wonder what you ever found to fancy in me!"

In reply to that he went over quite a list of the attractive qualities he had discovered in her.

"Ah," she laughed, "you are not blind to my perhaps imaginary good qualities, but see them through multiplying glasses; which is certainly very kind in you. But, oh, dear! I'm afraid you'll find out your mistake one of these days!"

"Don't be disturbed. I'll risk it," he laughed. Then added more seriously, "Oh, Lu, darling, I think I'm a wonderfully fortunate fellow in regard to the matter of my suit for your heart and hand."

"I wish you may never see cause to change your mind, you dear boy!" she said, glad tears springing to her eyes, "but ah, me! I fear you will when you know me better."

"Ah," he said teasingly, "considering our long and rather intimate acquaintance, I think you are not giving me credit for any great amount of discernment."

"Well," she laughed, "as regards my faults and failings probably the less you have of that the better for me."

They were alone in the library and the house was very quiet, most of the family having already retired to their sleeping rooms.

Presently Captain Raymond came in, saying with his pleasant smile, "I should be sorry to seem inhospitable, Chester, but it is growing late and I am loath to have my daughter lose her beauty sleep. Don't for a moment think I want to hurry you away from Woodburn, though; the room you occupied during your illness is at your service and you are a most welcome guest."

"Many thanks, captain; but I think I should go back to the Oaks at once lest someone should be waiting up for me. I should have brought my night key, but neglected to do so," Chester replied, and in a few minutes took leave.

The captain secured the door after him, then turned to Lucilla, saying:

"Now, daughter, you may bid me good-night, then make prompt preparations for bed."

"Oh, papa, let me stay five minutes with you," she entreated. "See, I have something to show you," holding out her hand in a way to display Chester's gift to advantage.

Her father took the hand in his. "Ah, an engagement ring!" he said with a smile; "and a very handsome one it is. Well, dear child, I hope it may always have most pleasant associations to you."

"I should enjoy it more if I were quite sure Chester could well afford it," she said with a half sigh.

"Don't let that trouble you," said her father. "Chester is doing very well, and probably your father will be able to give some assistance to you and him at the beginning of your career as a married couple. Should Providence spare me my present income, my dear eldest daughter shall not be a portionless bride."

"Papa, you are very, very good to me!" she exclaimed with emotion, "the very dearest and best of fathers! I can hardly bear to think of living away from you, even though it may not be miles distant."

"Dear child," he said, drawing her into his arms, "I do not intend it shall be even one mile. My plan is to build a house for you and Chester right here on the estate, over yonder in the grove. Some day in the near future we three will go together and select the exact spot."

"Oh, papa, what a delightful idea!" she exclaimed, looking up into his face with eyes dancing with pleasure; "for I may hope to see almost as much of you as I do now, living in the same house."

"Yes, daughter mine; that is why I want to have your home so near. Now bid me good-night and get to bed with all speed," he concluded with a tender caress.

CHAPTER II.

"They are going to have a Christmas tree at Ion, one at Fairview, one at Roselands, and I suppose one at the Oaks," remarked Ned Raymond one morning at the breakfast table. "But I guess folks think Elsie and I have grown too old for such things," he added in a tone of melancholy resignation and with a slight sigh.

"A very sensible conclusion, my son," said the captain cheerfully, with a twinkle of amusement in his eye. "But now that you have grown so manly you can enjoy more than ever giving to others. The presents you have bought for your little cousins can be sent to be put on their trees, those for the poor to the schoolhouses; and if you choose you can be there to see the pleasure with which they are received. Remember what the Bible says: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

"Oh, yes, so it is!" cried the little fellow, his face brightening very much. "I do like to give presents and see how pleased folks look that get them."

"And as papa is so liberal to all of us in the matter of pocket money, we can every one of us have that pleasure," said Grace.

"Yes; and I know we're going to," laughed Ned. "We didn't go so many times to the city and stay so long there for nothing. And I don't believe grandma and papa and mamma did either."

"No," said his mother; "and I don't believe anybody--children, friend, relative, servant, or poor neighbor--will find himself neglected. And I am inclined to think the gifts will be enjoyed even if we have no tree."

"Oh, yes, mamma! and I'm glad to be the big fellow that I am, even if it does make me have to give up some of the fun I had when I was small," Ned remarked with an air of satisfaction.

"And to-night will be Christmas Eve, won't it, papa?" asked Elsie.

"Yes, daughter; and some of us will be going this afternoon to trim the tree in the schoolhouse. Do you, Elsie and Ned, want to be of the party?"

"Oh, yes, sir! yes, indeed!" was the joyous answering exclamation of both. Then Elsie asked: "Are you going too, mamma? Sisters Lu and Gracie too?" glancing inquiringly at them.

All three replied that they would like to go, but had some work to finish at home.

A part of that work was the trimming of the tree, which was brought in and set up after the departure of the captain, Elsie, and Ned for the schoolhouse.

Violet's brothers, Harold and Herbert, came in and gave their assistance as they had done some years before when Max, Lucilla, and Grace had been the helpers of their father at the schoolhouse. The young girls had enjoyed that, but this was even better, as those for whom its fruits were intended were nearer and dearer. They had a merry, happy time embellishing the tree with many ornaments, and hanging here and there mysterious packages, each carefully wrapped and labelled with the name of its intended recipient.

"There!" said Violet at length, stepping back a little and taking a satisfied survey, "I think we have finished."

"Not quite," said Harold. "But you and the girls may please retire while Herbert and I attend to some small commissions of our good brother--the captain."

"Ah! I was not aware that he had given you any," laughed Violet. "But come, girls, we will slip away and leave them to their own devices."

"I am entirely willing to do so," returned Lucilla gayly, following in her wake as she left the room.

"I, too," said Grace, hastening after them, "for one never loses by falling in with papa's plans."

"What is it, Harold?" asked Herbert. "The captain has not let me into his secret."

"Only that his gifts to them--his wife and daughters--are in this closet and to be taken out now and added to the fruits of this wondrous tree," replied Harold, taking a key from his pocket and unlocking a closet door.

"Ah! something sizable, I should say," laughed Herbert, as four large pasteboard boxes came into view.

"Yes; what do you suppose they contain?" returned his brother, as they drew them out. "Ah, this top one--somewhat smaller than the others--bears little Elsie's name, I see, and the other three must be for Vi, Lu, and Grace. Probably they are new cloaks or some sort of wraps."

"Altogether likely," assented Herbert. "Well, when they are opened in the course of the evening, we shall see how good a guess we have made. And here," taking a little package from his pocket, "is something Chester committed to my care as his Christmas gift to his betrothed."

"Ah! do you know what it is?"

"Not I," laughed Herbert, "but though a great deal smaller than her father's present, it may be worth more as regards moneyed value."

"Yes; and possibly more as regards the giver; though Lu is evidently exceedingly fond of her father."

"Yes, indeed! as all his children are and have abundant reason to be."

Herbert hung the small package on a high branch, then said: "These large boxes we will pile at the foot of the tree; Vi's at the bottom, Elsie's at the top, the other two in between."

"A very good arrangement," assented Herbert, assisting him.

"There, we have quite finished and I feel pretty well satisfied with the result of our labors," said Harold, stepping a little away from the tree and scanning it critically from top to bottom.

"Yes," assented Herbert, "it is about as attractive a Christmas tree as I ever saw. It is nearing tea time now and the captain and the children will doubtless soon return. I think I shall accept his and Vi's invitation to stay to that meal; as you will, will you not?"

"Yes; if no call comes for my services elsewhere." And with that they went out, Harold locking the door and putting the key into his pocket.

They found the ladies in one of the parlors and chatted there with them until the Woodburn carriage was seen coming up the drive. It drew up before the door and presently Elsie and Ned came bounding in, merry and full of talk about all they had done and seen at the schoolhouse.

"We had just got all the things on the tree when the folks began to come," Elsie said: "and oh, Mamma, it was nice to see how glad they were to get their presents! I heard one little girl say to another, 'this is the purtiest bag, with the purtiest candy and the biggest orange ever I seed.' And the one she was talking to said, 'Yes, and so's mine. And aint these just the goodest cakes!' After that they each--each of the girls in the school I mean--had two pair of warm stockings and a woollen dress given them, and they went wild with delight."

"Yes; and the boys were just as pleased with their coats and shoes," said Ned. "And the old folks too with what they got, I guess. I heard some of them thank papa and say he was a very good, kind gentleman."

"As we all think," said Violet, with a pleased smile. "But come upstairs with me now; for it is almost tea time and you need to be made neat for your appearance at the table."

They were a merry party at the tea table and enjoyed their fare, but did not linger long over it. On leaving the table, Violet led the way to the room where she, her brothers, and Lucilla and Grace had been so busy; Harold produced the key and threw the door open, giving all a view of the Christmas tree with its tempting fruits and glittering ornaments.

Ned, giving a shout of delight, rushed in to take a nearer view, Elsie following close in his wake, the older ones not far behind her. Christine, having another key to the door, had been there before them and lighted up the room and the tree

so that it could be seen to the very best advantage.

"Oh, what a pile of big, big boxes!" exclaimed Elsie. "And there's my name on the top one! Oh, papa, may I open it?"

His only reply was a smile as he threw off the lid and lifted out a very handsome baby astrakhan fur coat.

"Oh! oh!" she cried, "is it for me, papa?"

"If it fits you," he replied. "Let me help you to try it on." He suited the action to the word, while Harold lifted the box and pointing to the next one, said, "This seems to be yours, Gracie. Shall I lift the lid for you?"

"Oh, yes, if you please," she cried. "Oh! oh! one for me too! Oh, how lovely!" as another baby astrakhan fur coat came to light.

He put it about her shoulders while Harold lifted away that box and, pointing to the address on the next, asked Lucilla if he should open that for her.

"Yes, indeed! if you please," she answered, her eyes shining with pleasure.

He did so at once, bringing to light a very handsome sealskin coat.

"Oh, how lovely! how lovely!" she exclaimed, examining it critically.

"Papa, thank you ever so much!"

"You are heartily welcome, daughters, both of you," he said; for Grace too was pouring out her thanks, her lovely blue eyes sparkling with delight.

And now Violet's box yielded up its treasure--a mate to Lu's--and she joined the young girls in their thanks to the giver and expressions of appreciation of the gift.

"Here, Lu, I see this bears your name," said Harold, taking a small package from the tree and handing it to her. She took it, opened it, and held up to view a beautiful gold chain and locket. As she opened the latter, "From Chester," she said with a blush and a smile, "and oh, what a good likeness!"

"His own?" asked Violet. "Ah, yes! and a most excellent one," she added, as Lucilla held it out for her inspection.

All, as they crowded around to look, expressed the same opinion.

"Oh, here's another big bundle!" exclaimed Ned; "and with your name, mamma, on it! And it's from grandma. See!" pointing to the label.

"Let me open it for you, my dear," said the captain, and doing so brought to light a tablecloth and dozen napkins of finest damask, with Violet's initials beautifully embroidered in the corner of each.

"Oh, they are lovely!" she said with a look of delight, "and worth twice as much for having such specimens of mamma's work upon them. I know of nothing she could have given me which I would have prized more highly."

There was still more--a great deal more fruit upon that wonderful tree; various games, books, and toys for the children of the family and the servants; suitable gifts for the parents of the latter, useful and handsome articles for Christine and Alma, and small remembrances for different members of the family from relatives and friends.

Chester joined them before the distribution was quite over and was highly pleased with his share, especially the handkerchiefs embroidered by the deft fingers of his betrothed.

The captain too seemed greatly pleased with his as well as with various other gifts from his wife, children, and friends.

The distribution over, Violet's brothers hastened to Ion to go through a similar scene there. And much the same thing was in progress at the home of each of the other families of the connection.

Grandma Elsie's gift to each daughter, including Zoe, was similar to that given to Violet, tablecloth and napkins of the finest damask, embroidered by her own hands with the initials of the recipient--a most acceptable present to each.

Ned had received a number of very gratifying presents and considered himself as having fared well; but Christmas

morning brought him a glad surprise. When breakfast and family worship were over his father called him to the outer door and pointing to a handsome pony grazing near at hand, said in his pleasant tones, "There is a Christmas gift from Captain Raymond to his youngest son. What do you think of it, my boy?"

"Oh, papa," cried the little fellow, clapping his hands joyously, "thank you, thank you! It's just the very best present you could have thought of for me! He's a little beauty and I'll be just as good to him as I know how to be."

"I hope so indeed," said his father; "and if you wish you may ride him over to Ion this morning."

"Oh, yes, papa! but mayn't I ride him about here a while just now, so as to be sure I'll know how to manage him on the road?"

"Why, yes; I think that's a good idea; but first put on your overcoat and cap. The air is too cool for a ride without them."

"Oh, mamma and sisters!" cried Ned, turning about to find them standing near as most interested spectators, "haven't I got just the finest of all the Christmas gifts from papa?"

"The very best for you, I think, sonny boy," returned his mother, giving him a hug and a kiss.

"And we are all very glad for you," said Grace.

"I as well as the rest, dear Ned," added Elsie, her eyes shining with pleasure.

"And we expect you to prove yourself a brave and gallant horseman, very kind and affectionate to your small steed," added Lucilla, looking with loving appreciation into the glad young face.

"Yes, indeed, I do mean to be ever so good to him," rejoined the little lad, rushing to the hat-stand and, with his mother's help, hastily assuming his overcoat and cap. "I'm all ready, papa," he shouted the next moment, racing out to the veranda where the captain was giving directions to a servant.

"Yes, my son, and so shall I be when I have slipped on my coat and cap," returned his father, taking them, with a smile of approval, from Lucilla, who had just brought them.

The next half hour passed very delightfully to little Ned, learning under his father's instruction to manage skilfully his small steed. Having had some lessons before in the riding and management of a pony, he succeeded so well that, to his extreme satisfaction, he was allowed to ride it to Ion and exhibit it there, where its beauty and his horsemanship were commented upon and admired to his heart's content.

The entire connection was invited to take Christmas dinner at Ion, and when they gathered about the table not one was missing. Everybody seemed in excellent spirits and all were well excepting Chester, who had a troublesome cough.

"I don't quite like that cough, Chester," said Dr. Conly at length, "and if you ask me for a prescription it will be a trip to Florida."

"Thank you, Cousin Art," returned Chester with a smile. "That would be a most agreeable medicine if I could spare the time and take with me the present company, or even a part of it."

"Meaning Lu, I presume, Ches," laughed Zoe.

"Among the rest; she is one of the present company," he returned pleasantly.

"What do you say, captain, to taking your family down there for a few weeks?" asked Dr. Conly, adding, "I don't think it would be a bad thing for Grace."

"I should have no objection if any of my family need it, or if they all wish to go," said the captain, looking at his wife and older daughters as he spoke.

"A visit to Florida would be something new and very pleasant, I think," said Violet.

"As I do, papa," said Grace. "Thank you for recommending it for me, Cousin Arthur," she added, giving him a pleased smile.

"Being very healthy I do not believe I need it, but I should greatly enjoy going with those who do," said Lucilla, adding in an aside to Chester, who sat next her, "I do hope you can go and get rid of that trying cough."

"Perhaps after a while; not just yet," was his low-toned reply. "I hardly know what I should like better."

"Well, don't let business hinder; your life and health are of far more importance than that, or anything else."

His only answer to that was a smile which spoke appreciation of her solicitude for him.

No more was said on the subject just then, but it was talked over later in the evening and quite a number of those present seemed taken with a desire to spend a part of the winter in Florida. Chester admitted that by the last of January he could probably go without sacrificing the interests of his clients, and the captain remarked that by that time Max would be at home and could go with them.

Grandma Elsie, her father and his wife, also Cousin Ronald and his Annis, pledged themselves to be of the party, and so many of the younger people hoped they might be able to join that it bade fair to be a large one.

"Are we going in our yacht, papa?" asked Ned Raymond.

"Some of us, perhaps, but it is unfortunately not large enough to hold us all comfortably," was the amused reply.

"Not by any means," said Dr. Conly, "but the journey can be taken more quickly by rail, and probably more safely at this time of the year."

Their plans were not matured before separating for the night, but it seemed altogether probable that quite a large company from that connection would visit Florida before the winter was over; and at the Woodburn breakfast the next morning the captain, in reply to some questions in regard to the history of that State, suggested that they, the family, should take up that study as a preparation for their expected visit there.

"I will procure the needed books," he said, "and distribute them among you older ones to be read at convenient times during the day and reported upon when we are all together in the evenings."

"An excellent idea, my dear," said Violet. "I think we will all enjoy it, for I know that Florida's history is an interesting one."

"Were you ever there, papa?" asked Elsie.

"Yes; and I found it a lovely place to visit at the right time of the year."

"That means the winter time, I suppose?"

"Yes; we should find it unpleasantly warm in the summer."

"How soon are we going, papa?" asked Ned.

"Probably about the 1st of February."

"To stay long?"

"That will depend largely upon how we enjoy ourselves."

"The study of the history of Florida will be very interesting, I am sure, father," said Lucilla; "but we will hardly find time for it until next week."

"No," he replied, "I suppose not until after New Year's--as we are to go through quite a round of family reunions. But in the meantime I will, as I said, procure the needed books."

"And shall we learn lessons in them in school time, papa?" asked Ned.

"No, son; when we are alone together in the evenings--or have with us only those who care to have a share in learning all they can about Florida. Our readers may then take turns in telling the interesting facts they have learned from the books. Do you all like the plan?"

All thought they should like it; so it was decided to carry it out.

That week except Sunday was filled with a round of most enjoyable family festivities, now at the home of one part of the connection, now at another, and wound up with a New Year's dinner at Woodburn. There was a good deal of talk among them about Florida and the pleasure probably to be found in visiting it that winter, to say nothing of the benefit to the health of several of their company--Chester especially, as he still had a troublesome cough.

"You should go by all means, Chester," said Dr. Conly, "and the sooner the better."

"I think I can arrange to go by the 1st of February," replied Chester, "and shall be glad to do so if I can secure the good company of the rest of you, or even some of you."

"Of one in particular, I presume," laughed his brother.

"Will you take us in the yacht, my dear?" asked Violet, addressing her husband.

"If the weather proves suitable we can go in that way--as many as the *Dolphin* can accommodate comfortably. Though probably some of the company would prefer travelling by rail, as the speedier and, at this season, the safer mode," replied Captain Raymond.

"If we take the yacht you, mamma, will go with us in it, of course," observed Violet. "Grandpa and Grandma, too."

"Thank you, daughter, the yacht always seems very pleasant and homelike to me, and I have great confidence in my honored son-in-law as her commander," returned Mrs. Travilla, with a smiling look at the captain.

He bowed his acknowledgments, saying, "Thank you, mother, I fully appreciate the kindness of that remark." Then turning to his wife's grandfather, "And you, sir, and your good wife, I hope may feel willing to be of our company should we decide to take the yacht?"

"Thank you, captain; I think it probable we will," Mr. Dinsmore said in reply.

"I wish my three brothers may be able to accompany us also," said Violet.

Neither one of them felt certain of his ability to do so, but all thought it would be a pleasure indeed to visit Florida in such company. No one seemed ready yet for definite arrangements, but as the trip was not to be taken for a month prompt decision was not esteemed necessary, and shortly after tea most of them bade good-night and left for their homes.

Chester was one of the last to go, but it was not yet very late when Lucilla and Grace sought their own little sitting-room and lingered there for a bit of chat together.

Their father had said they need not hasten with their preparations for bed, as he was coming in presently for a few moments. They had hardly finished their talk when he came in.

"Well, daughters," he said, taking a seat between them on the sofa and putting an arm about the waist of each, "I hope you have enjoyed this first day of a new year?"

"Yes, indeed, papa," both replied. "And we hope you have also," added Grace.

"I have," he said. "I think we may well be called a happy and favored family. But I wonder," he added with a smiling glance from one to the other, "if my older daughters have not been a trifle disappointed that their father has made them no New Year's gift of any account."

"Why, papa!" they both exclaimed, "you gave us such elegant and costly Christmas gifts and each several valuable books to-day. We should be very ungrateful if we did not think that quite enough."

"I am well satisfied that you should think it enough," he returned laughingly, "but I do not. Here is something more." As he spoke he took from his pocket two sealed envelopes and put one into the hand of each.

They took them with a pleased, "Oh, thank you, papa!" and hastened to open them and examine the contents.

"What is it, papa?" asked Grace with a slightly puzzled look at a folded paper found in hers.

"A certificate of stock which will increase your allowance of pocket money to about ten dollars a week."

"Oh, how nice! how kind and generous you are, papa!" she exclaimed, putting an arm about his neck and showering kisses on his lips and cheek.

"And mine is just the same, is it not, papa?" asked Lucilla, taking her turn in bestowing upon him the same sort of thanks. "But oh, I am afraid you are giving us more than you can well spare!"

"No, daughter dear," he said, "you need trouble yourselves with no fears on that score. Our kind heavenly Father has so prospered me that I can well afford it; and I have confidence in my dear girls that they will not waste it, but will use it wisely and well."

"I hope so, papa," said Grace. "You have taught us that our money is a talent for which we will have to give an account."

"Yes, daughter, I hope you will always keep that in mind, and be neither selfish nor wasteful in the use you put it to."

"I do not mean to be either, papa," she returned; "and I may always consult you about it, may I not?"

"Whenever it pleases you to do so I shall be happy to listen and advise you to the best of my ability," he answered with an affectionate look and smile.

CHAPTER III.

A few days later a package of books was received at Woodburn which, upon being opened, proved to be histories of Florida ordered by the captain from the neighboring city. They were hailed with delight by Violet and the older girls, who were cordially invited to help themselves, study up the subject in private, and report progress in the evenings. Each one of them selected a book, as did the captain also.

"Aren't Elsie and I to help read them, papa?" asked Ned, in a slightly disappointed tone.

"You may both do so if you choose," their father replied, "but I hardly think the books will prove juvenile enough to interest you as much as it will to hear from us older ones some account of their contents."

"Oh, yes, papa! and your way is always best," exclaimed Elsie, her eyes beaming with pleasure. "Neddie," turning to her brother, "you know we always like listening to stories somebody tells us; even better than reading them for ourselves."

"Yes, indeed!" he cried, "I like it a great deal better. I guess papa's way is best after all."

Just then Chester came in and, when the usual greetings had been exchanged, glancing at the books, he exclaimed, "Ah, so they have come--your ordered works on Florida, captain?"

"Yes; will you help yourself to one or more and join us in the gathering up of information in regard to the history, climate, productions, et cetera, of that part of our country?"

"Thank you, captain, I will be very glad to do so," was the prompt and pleased reply. "Glad to join in your studies now and your visits to the localities afterward."

"That last, I am thinking, will be the pleasantest part," said Grace; "but all the more enjoyable for doing this part well first."

"Father," said Lucilla, "as you have visited Florida and know a great deal about its history, can't you begin our work of preparation for the trip by telling us something of the facts as we sit together in the library just after tea to-night?"

"I can if it is desired by all of you," was the pleasant-toned reply.

"Before Neddie and I have to go to bed, papa, please," exclaimed little Elsie coaxingly.

"Yes, daughter, you and Neddie shall be of the audience," replied her father, patting affectionately the little hand she had laid upon his knee. "My lecture will not be a very lengthy one, and if not quite over by your usual bedtime, you and Ned, if not too sleepy to be interested listeners, may stay up until its conclusion."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" exclaimed the little girl joyfully.

"Thank you, papa," said her brother. "I'll not grow sleepy while you are telling the story, unless you make it very dull and stupid."

"Why, son, have I ever done that?" asked his father, looking much amused, and Elsie exclaimed, "Why, Ned! papa's stories are always ever so nice and interesting."

"Most always," returned the little fellow, hanging his head and blushing with mortification; "but I have got sleepy sometimes because I couldn't help it."

"For which papa doesn't blame his little boy in the least," said the captain soothingly, drawing the little fellow to him and stroking his hair with caressing hand.

At that moment wheels were heard on the drive and Grace, glancing from the window, exclaimed joyfully, "Oh, here comes the Ion carriage with Grandma Elsie and Evelyn in it. Now, papa, you will have quite an audience."

"If they happen to want the same thing that the rest of you do," returned her father, as he left the room to welcome the visitors and help them to alight.

They had come only for a call, but it was not very difficult to persuade them to stay and spend the night, sending back word to their homes by the coachman. In prospect of their intended visit to Florida they were as greatly interested as the others in learning all they could of its history and what would be the best points to visit in search of pleasure and profit.

On leaving the tea table all gathered in the library, the ladies with their fancy needlework, Chester seated near his betrothed, the captain in an easy-chair with the little ones close beside him--one at each knee and both looking eagerly expectant; for they knew their father to be a good story-teller and thought the subject in hand one sure to prove very interesting.

After a moment's silence in which the captain seemed to be absorbed in quiet thought, he began:

"In the year 1512--that is nearly four hundred years ago--a Spaniard named Juan Ponce De Leon, who had amassed a fortune by subjugating the natives of the island of Puerto Rico, but had grown old and wanted to be young again, having heard of an Indian tradition that there was a land to the north where was a fountain, bathing in which, and drinking of the water freely, would restore youth and make one live forever--set sail in search of it. On the 21st day of April he landed upon the eastern shore of Florida, near the mouth of the St. Johns River.

"The day was what the Romanists called Paschal Sunday, or the Sunday of the Feast of Flowers, and the land was very beautiful--with magnificent trees of various kinds, stalwart live-oaks, tall palm trees, the mournful cypress, and the brilliant dogwood. Waving moss drooped from the hanging boughs of the forest trees; golden fruit and lovely blossoms adorned those of the orange trees; while singing birds filled the air of the woods with music, and white-winged waterfowls skimmed quietly on the surface of the water. The ground was carpeted with green grass and beautiful flowers of various hues; also in the forest was an abundance of wild game, deer, turkeys, and so forth.

"De Leon thought he had found the paradise of which he was in search. He went up the river, but by mistake took a chain of lakes, supposing them to be a part of the main river, and finally reached a great sulphur and mineral spring which is now called by his name. He did not stay long, but soon sailed southward to the end of the peninsula, then back to Puerto Rico. Nine years afterward he tried to plant a colony in Florida, but the Indians resisted and mortally wounded him. He retreated to Cuba and soon afterward died there."

The captain paused in his narrative and Elsie asked, "Then did the Spaniards let the Indians have their own country in peace, papa?"

"No," replied her father. "Cortez had meanwhile conquered Mexico, finding quantities of gold there, of which he basely robbed its people. He landed there in 1519 and captured the City of Mexico in 1521.

"In the meantime Narvaez had tried to get possession of Florida, and its supposed treasures. He had asked and obtained of the king of Spain authority to conquer and govern it, with the title of Adelantado, his dominion to extend from Cape Florida to the River of Palms.

"On the 14th of April he landed near Tampa Bay with four hundred armed men and eighty horses.

"He and his men were entirely unsuccessful: they found no gold, the Indians were hostile, provisions scarce; and finally they built boats in which to escape from Florida. The boats were of a very rude sort and the men knew nothing about managing them. So, though they set sail, it was to make a most unsuccessful voyage. They nearly perished with cold and hunger and many were drowned in the sea. The boat that carried Narvaez was driven out to sea and nothing more was ever heard of him. Not more than four of his followers escaped."

The captain paused for a moment, then turning to his wife, said pleasantly, "Well, my dear, suppose you take your turn now as narrator and give us a brief sketch of the doings of Fernando de Soto, the Spaniard who next undertook to conquer Florida."

"Yes," said Violet, "I have been reading his story to-day with great interest, and though I cannot hope to nearly equal my husband as narrator, I shall just do the best I can.

"History tells us that Cabeza de Vaca--one of the four survivors of the ill-fated expedition of Narvaez--went back to Spain and for purposes of his own spread abroad the story that Florida was the richest country yet discovered. That

raised a great furor for going there. De Soto began preparations for an expedition and nobles and gentlemen contended for the privilege of joining it.

"It was on the 18th of May, 1539, that De Soto left Cuba with one thousand men-at-arms and three hundred and fifty horses. He landed at Tampa Bay--on the west coast--on Whitsunday, 25th of May. His force was larger and of more respectable quality than any that had preceded it. And he was not so bad and cruel a man as his predecessor--Narvaez."

"Did Narvaez do very bad things to the poor Indians, mamma?" asked Elsie.

"Yes, indeed!" replied her mother; "in his treatment of them he showed himself a most cruel, heartless wretch. Wilmer, in his 'Ferdinand De Soto,' tells of a chief whom he calls Cacique Ucita, who, after forming a treaty of peace and amity with Pamphilo de Narvaez, had been most outrageously abused by him--his aged mother torn to pieces by dogs, in his absence from home, and when he returned and showed his grief and anger, himself seized and his nose cut off."

"Oh, mamma, how very, very cruel!" cried Elsie. "Had Ucita's mother done anything to Narvaez to make him treat her so?"

"Nothing except that she complained to her son of a Spaniard who had treated a young Indian girl very badly indeed.

"Narvaez had shown himself an atrociously cruel man. So that it was no wonder the poor Indians hated him. How could anything else be expected of poor Ucita when he learned of the dreadful, undeserved death his poor mother had died, than that he would be, as he was, frantic with grief and anger, and make, as he did, threats of terrible vengeance against the Spaniards? But instead of acknowledging his cruelty and trying to make some amends, as I have said, Narvaez ordered him to be seized, scourged, and sadly mutilated.

"Then, as soon as Ucita's subjects heard of all this, they hastened from every part of his dominions to avenge him upon the Spaniards. Perceiving their danger the Spaniards then fled with all expedition, and so barely escaped the vengeance they so richly deserved.

"But to go back to my story of De Soto--he had landed a few miles from an Indian town which stood on the site of the present town of Tampa. He had with him two Indians whom he had been training for guides and interpreters; but to his great disappointment they escaped.

"The Spaniards had captured some Indian women, and from them De Soto learned that a neighboring chief had in his keeping a captured Spaniard, one of the men of Narvaez.

"After Narvaez landed he had sent back to Cuba one of his smaller vessels--on board of which was this Juan Ortiz--to carry the news of his safe arrival to his wife. She at once sent additional supplies by the same vessel and it reached the bay the day after Narvaez and his men had fled, as I have already told you, from the vengeance of the outraged Ucita and his indignant subjects.

"Ortiz and those with him, seeing a letter fixed in a cleft of a stick on shore, asked some Indians whom they saw to bring it to them. They refused and made signs for the Spaniards to come for it. Juan Ortiz, then a boy of eighteen, with some comrades, took a boat and went on shore, when they were at once seized by the Indians, one of them, who resisted, instantly killed, and the rest taken to the cruelly wronged and enraged chief Ucita, who had made a vow to punish with death any Spaniard who should fall into his hands.

"Ortiz' mind, as they hurried him onward, was filled with the most horrible forebodings. When they reached the village the chief was waiting in the public square to receive them. One of the Spaniards was at once seized, stripped of his clothes and bade to run for his life.

"The square was enclosed by palisades and the only gateway was guarded by well-armed Indians. As soon as the naked Spaniard began to run one of the Indians shot an arrow, the barbed edge of which sank deeply into his shoulder. Another and another arrow followed, the man in a frenzy of pain hurrying round and round in a desperate effort to find some opening by which he might escape; the Indians looking on with evident delight.

"This scene lasted for more than an hour, and when the wretched victim fell to the ground there were no less than thirty arrows fixed in his flesh, and the whole surface of his body was covered with blood.

"The Indians let him lie there in a dying condition and chose another victim to go through the same tortures; then

another and another till all were slain except Ortiz. By that time the Indians seemed to be tired of the cruel sport and he saw them consulting together, the chief apparently giving the others some directions.

"It seems that from some real or fancied resemblance Ucita saw in the lad to the cruel wretch, Pamphilo de Narvaez, he supposed him to be a relative; and therefore intended him to suffer some even more agonizing death than than just meted out to his fellows. For that purpose some of them now busied themselves in making a wooden frame. They laid parallel to each other two stout pieces of wood--six or seven feet long and three feet apart, then laid a number of others across them so as to form a sort of grate or hurdle to which they then bound Ortiz with leathern thongs. They then placed it on four stakes driven into the ground, and kindled a fire underneath, using for it such things as would burn slowly, scarcely making a blaze!

"Oh, mamma! were they going to burn him to death?" exclaimed Elsie, aghast with horror.

"Yes," replied her mother; "and he was soon suffering terribly. But one of the Indian women who was present felt sorry for him and hastened away to the house of Ucita and told his daughter Ulelah what was going on. She was a girl of eighteen and not so hard as the men. She was sorry for the poor young man and made haste to run to the scene of his sufferings, where he was shrieking with pain and begging for mercy.

"Hearing those sounds before she reached the spot she ran faster and got there panting for breath. At once she threw herself at her father's feet and begged him to stop the execution for a few minutes. He did so, ordering some of his men to lift the frame to which Ortiz was fastened, and lay it on the ground. Ulelah then begged her father to remember that Ortiz had never offended him, and that it would be more humane--more to his honor--to keep him as a prisoner, than to put him to death without any reason or justification.

"The chief sternly replied that he had sentenced the Spaniard to death and no consideration should prevent him from executing him. Then Ulelah begged him to put it off for a day that was annually celebrated as a religious festival, at which time he might be offered as a sacrifice to their gods.

"To that at length Ucita consented. Ortiz was unbound and the princess placed him under the care of the best physician of their tribe.

"As soon as Ortiz began to recover every care was taken that he should not escape. He was made to busy himself in the most laborious and slavish occupations. Sometimes he was compelled to run incessantly, from the rising of the sun to its setting, in the public square where his comrades had been put to death, Indians armed with bows and arrows standing ready to shoot him if he should halt for a moment. That over, he would lie exhausted, and almost insensible, on the hard earthen floor of a hut, the best lodging the chief would allow him.

"At such times Ulelah and her maids would come to him with food, restoratives, medicines, and words of consolation and encouragement, all of which helped him to live and endure.

"When Ortiz had been there about nine months the Princess Ulelah came to him one evening and told him that their religious festival would be celebrated on the first day of the new moon. Ortiz had heard that the chief intended to sacrifice him on that occasion and of course he was sorely distressed at the dreadful prospect before him, and as the time drew near he tried to prepare his mind for his doom, for he could see no way of escape. Ulelah told him she had done all she could to induce her father to spare his life, but could gain nothing more than a promise to delay the execution of the sentence for a year--on one condition, that he should keep guard over the cemetery of the tribe, where, according to the custom of their people, the bodies of the dead were exposed above ground until the flesh wasted away, leaving only the naked skeletons.

"The cemetery was about three miles from the village, in an open space of ground surrounded by forests. The bodies lay on biers on stages raised several feet above the ground, and it was necessary to keep a watch over them every night to protect them from the wild beasts of prey in the surrounding woods. Generally those who were compelled to keep this watch were criminals under sentence of death, who were permitted to live, if they could, so long as they performed that duty faithfully. But they ran great risks from the wild beasts of prey in the surrounding forests and from effluvia arising from the decaying bodies.

"It seemed a terrible alternative, but Ortiz took it rather than suffer immediate death. Ulelah wept over him, and her sympathy abated something of the horror of his hard fate and helped him to meet it manfully.

"Next day he was taken to the place by the chief's officers, who gave him a bow and arrows and other weapons, told him to be vigilant, and warned him against any attempt to escape.

"His little hut of reeds was in the midst of the cemetery. The stench was horrible and for several hours overpowered him with sickness and stupor such as he had never known before. But from that he partially recovered before night, and toward morning the howling of wolves helped to arouse him; yet presently he nearly lost consciousness again.

"In the early part of the night he had contrived to scare away the wolves by waving a lighted torch which was kept ready for the purpose. But at length he became conscious that some living thing was near him, as he could hear the sound of breathing; then by the light of his torch he saw a large animal dragging away the body of a child.

"Before he could arouse himself sufficiently to attack the animal it had reached the woods and was out of sight. He was very ill, but roused all his energies, fitted an arrow to his bow and staggered toward that part of the forest where the beast had disappeared. As he reached the edge of the wood he heard a sound like the gnawing of a bone. He could not see the creature that made it, but sent an arrow in the direction of the sound, and at the same moment he fell to the ground in a faint; for the exertion had entirely exhausted his small portion of strength.

"There he lay till daybreak, then recovering consciousness, he by great and determined effort managed to crawl back to his hut.

"Sometime later came the officers whose duty it was to make a daily examination. They at once missed the child's body and were about to dash out the brains of Ortiz, but he made haste to tell of his night adventure; they went to the part of the forest which he pointed out as the spot where he had fired at the wild animal; found the body of the child, and lying near it, that of a large dead animal of the tiger kind. The arrow of Ortiz had struck it between the shoulders, penetrated to the heart, and doubtless killed it instantly.

"The Indians greatly admired the skill Ortiz had shown by that shot, and as they recovered the body of the child they held him blameless.

"Gradually he grew accustomed to that tainted air and strong enough to drive away the wolves, killing several of them. The Indian officers brought him provisions, and so he lived for about two weeks. Then one night he was alarmed by the sound of footsteps which seemed those of human beings. He thought some new trouble was coming upon him, but as they drew near he saw by the light of his torch that they were three women--the Princess Ulelah and two female attendants. He recognized the princess by her graceful form and the richness of her dress. She told him the priests of her tribe would not consent to any change of his sentence or delay in carrying it out. That Ucita had promised them he should be sacrificed at the approaching festival, and they were determined not to allow their deity to be defrauded of his victim. She said she had exposed herself to great risk by coming to warn him of his danger, for if the priests should learn that she had helped him to escape they would take her life--not even her father's authority could save her from them,--and to save his life she advised him to fly at once.

"He thought all this proved that she loved him, and told her he loved her; that in his own country he belonged to an ancient and honorable family and was heir to a large estate. He begged her to go with him and become his wife.

"When he had finished speaking she was silent for a few moments; then answered in a tone that seemed to show some displeasure. 'I regret,' she said, 'that any part of my conduct should have led you into so great an error. In all my efforts to serve you I have had no motives but those of humanity; and I would have done no less for any other human being in the same circumstances. To fully convince you of your mistake I will tell you that I am betrothed to a neighboring cacique, to whose protection I am about to recommend you. Before daybreak I will send a faithful guide to conduct you to the village. Lose no time on the way, and when you are presented to Mocosso, give him this girdle as a token that you come from me. He will then consider himself bound to defend you from all danger, at the hazard of his own life.'

"Ulelah and her maidens then left him and before morning came the promised guide, who conducted Ortiz through the trackless forest in a northerly direction, urging him to walk very fast, as he would certainly be pursued as soon as his absence was discovered.

"In telling his story afterward Ortiz said they travelled about eight leagues and reached Mocosso's village, at whose entrance the guide, fearing to be recognized by some one of Mocosso's subjects, left him to enter it alone.

"Some Indians were fishing in a stream near by. They saw Ortiz come out of the woods, and frightened by his outlandish appearance, snatched up their arms with the intention of attacking him. But when he showed the girdle which Ulelah had given him they understood that he was the bearer of a message to their chief, and one of them came forward to give the usual welcome, and then led him to the village, where his Spanish dress, which he still wore, attracted much attention, and he was ushered into the presence of Mocosso. He found that chief a youthful Indian of noble bearing, tall and graceful in person, and possessed of a handsome and intelligent face. Ortiz presented the girdle.

Mocoso examined it attentively, and greatly to the surprise of Ortiz seemed to gain from it as much information as if its ornamental work had been in written words.

"Presently raising his eyes from the girdle Mocoso said, 'Christian, I am requested to protect you and it shall be done. You are safe in my village; but do not venture beyond it, or you may have the misfortune to be recaptured by your enemies.'

"From that time Mocoso treated Ortiz with the affection of a brother."

"Oh, how nice!" exclaimed little Elsie. "But when Ucita heard that Ortiz was gone, what did he do about it?"

"When he heard where he was he sent ambassadors to demand that he be given up. Mocoso refused. That caused a misunderstanding between the two chiefs and delayed the marriage of Ulelah and Mocoso for several years. At the end of three years the priests interposed and the wedding was allowed to take place, but the two chiefs did not become reconciled and held no communication with each other.

"For twelve years Ortiz was kept in safety by Mocoso, then De Soto and his men came and Ortiz, hearing of their arrival, wanted to join them and set out to do so in company with some of his Indian friends.

"At the same time a Spaniard named Porcalla had started out to hunt some Indians for slaves. On his way he saw Ortiz with his party of ten or twelve Indians, and with uplifted weapons he and his men spurred their horses toward them. All but one fled, but he drew near and, speaking in Spanish, said, 'Cavaliers, do not kill me. I am one of your own countrymen; and I beg you not to molest these Indians who are with me; for I am indebted to them for the preservation of my life.'

"He then made signs for his Indian friends to come back, which some few did, and he and they were taken on horseback behind some of the cavaliers, and so conveyed to De Soto's camp where Ortiz told his story; the same that I have been telling you.

"'As soon as Mocoso heard of your arrival,' he went on, 'he asked me to come to you with the offer of his friendship, and I was on my way to your camp with several of his officers when I met your cavaliers.'

"While listening to this story De Soto's sympathies had been much excited for Ortiz. He at once presented him with a fine horse, a suit of handsome clothes, and all the arms and equipments of a captain of cavalry.

"Then he sent two Indians to Mocoso with a message, accepting his offers of friendship and inviting him to visit the camp; which he shortly afterward did, bringing with him some of his principal warriors. His appearance and manners were such as at once to prepossess the Spaniards in his favor. De Soto received him with cordiality and thanked him for his kindness to the Spaniard who had sought his protection.

"Mocoso's reply was one that could not fail to be pleasing to the Spaniards. It was that he had done nothing deserving of thanks; that Ortiz had come to him well recommended and his honor was pledged for his safety. 'His own valor and other good qualities,' he added, 'entitled him to all the respect which I and my people could show him. My acquaintance with him disposes me to be friendly to all his countrymen.'

"The historian goes on to tell us that when Mocoso's mother heard where he had gone she was terrified at the thought of what injury might be done to him--no doubt remembering the sad misfortune of Ucita and his mother, so cruelly dealt with by the treacherous Spaniards. In the greatest distress she hurried to the camp of De Soto and implored him to set her son at liberty and not treat him as Ucita had been treated by Pamphilo. 'If he has offended you,' she said, 'consider that he is but young and look upon his fault as one of the common indiscretions of youth. Let him go back to his people and I will remain here and undergo whatever sufferings you may choose to inflict.'"

"What a good kind mother!" exclaimed Elsie Raymond. "I hope they didn't hurt her or her son either."

"No," said her mother; "De Soto tried to convince her that he considered himself under obligations to Mocoso, and that he had only intended to treat him in a most friendly manner. But all he could say did not remove the anxiety of the poor frightened woman, for she had come to believe the whole Spanish nation treacherous and cruel. Mocoso himself at last persuaded her that he was entirely free to go or stay as he pleased. Still she could not altogether banish her fears, and before leaving she took Juan Ortiz aside and entreated him to watch over the safety of his friend, and especially to take heed that the other Spaniards did not poison him."

"Did Mocosso stay long? and did they harm him, mamma?" asked Elsie.

"He stayed eight days in the Spanish camp," replied Violet; "being inspired with perfect confidence in the Christians."

"Christians, mamma? What Christians?" asked Ned.

"That was what the Spaniards called themselves," she answered; "but it was a sad misnomer; for theirs was anything else than the spirit of Christ."

CHAPTER IV.

The next evening the same company, with some additions, gathered in the library at Woodburn, all full of interest in the history of Florida and anxious to learn what they could of its climate, productions, and anything that might be known of the tribes of Indians inhabiting it before the invasion of the Spaniards.

At the earnest request of the others Grandma Elsie was the first narrator of the evening.

"I have been reading Wilmer's 'Travels and Adventures of De Soto,'" she said. "He tells much that is interesting in regard to the Indians inhabiting Florida when the Spaniards invaded it. One tribe was the Natchez, and he says that they and other tribes also had made some progress in civilization; but the effect of that invasion was a relapse into barbarism from which they have never recovered. At the time of De Soto's coming they had none of the nomadic habits for which the North American Indians have since been remarkable. They then lived in permanent habitations and cultivated the land, deriving their subsistence chiefly from it, though practising hunting and fishing, partly for subsistence and partly for sport. They were not entirely ignorant of arts and manufactures and some which they practised were extremely ingenious. They had domestic utensils and household furniture which were both artistic and elegant. Their dresses, especially those of the females, were very tasteful and ornate. Some specimens of their earthenware are still preserved and are highly creditable to their skill in that branch of industry. Among their household goods they had boxes made of split cane and other material, ingeniously wrought and ornamented; also mats for their floors. Their wearing apparel was composed partly of skins handsomely dressed and colored, and partly of a sort of woven cloth made of the fibrous bark of the mulberry tree and a certain species of wild hemp. Their finest fabrics, used by the wives and daughters of the caciques, were obtained from the bark of the young mulberry shoots beaten into small fibres, then bleached and twisted or spun into threads of a convenient size for weaving, which was done in a very simple manner by driving small stakes into the ground, stretching a warp across from one to another, then inserting the weft by using the fingers instead of a shuttle. By this tedious process they made very beautiful shawls and mantillas, with figured borders of most exquisite patterns."

"They must have been very industrious, I think," said Elsie.

"Yes," assented her grandmother. "The weavers I presume were women; but the men also seem to have been industrious, for they manufactured articles of gold, silver, and copper. None of iron, however. Some of their axes, hatchets, and weapons of war were made of copper, and they, like the Peruvians, possessed the art of imparting a temper to that metal which made it nearly equal to iron for the manufacture of edge tools. The Peruvians, it is said, used an alloy of copper and tin for such purposes; and that might perhaps be harder than brass, which is composed chiefly of copper and zinc."

"Had they good houses to live in, grandma?" asked Ned.

"Yes," she replied; "even those of the common people were much better than the log huts of our Western settlers, or the turf-built shanties of the Irish peasantry. Some were thirty feet square and contained several rooms each, and some had cellars in which the people stored their grain. The houses of the caciques were built on mounds or terraces, and sometimes had porticos, and the walls of some were hung with prepared buckskin which resembled tapestry, while others had carpets of the same material. Some of their temples had sculptured ornaments. A Portuguese gentleman tells of one on the roof or cupola of a temple which was a carved bird with gilded eyes.

"The religion of the Natchez resembled that of the Peruvians; they worshipped the sun as the source of light and heat, or a symbol of the divine goodness and wisdom. They believed in the immortality of the human soul and in future rewards and punishments; in the existence of a supreme and omnipotent Deity called the Great Spirit and also in an evil spirit of inferior power, who was supposed to govern the seasons and control the elements. They seem not to have been image-worshippers until the Spaniards made them such. Their government was despotic, but not tyrannical. They were ruled by their chiefs, whose authority was patriarchal, who were like popes or bishops, rather than princes, but who never abused their power."

Grandma Elsie paused as if she had finished her narration and Ned exclaimed, "Oh, that isn't all, grandma, is it?"

"All of my part of the account, for the present at least," she said with her sweet smile. Then turning to Lucilla:

"You will tell us the story of the Princess Xualla, will you not?"

"You could surely do it much better than I, Grandma Elsie," was the modest rejoinder; "but if you wish it I will do my best."

"We do," replied several voices, and Lucilla, encouraged by a look and smile from her father which seemed to speak confidence in her ability, at once began.

"It seems that De Soto, not finding there the gold for which he had come, and encouraged by the Indians, who wanted to be rid of him, to think that it might be discovered in regions still remote, started again upon his quest, taking a northerly or northwesterly direction.

"As they journeyed on they came to a part of Florida governed by a female cacique--a beautiful young girl called the Princess Xualla. Her country was a fine open one, well cultivated. They reached the neighborhood of her capital--a town on the farther side of a river--about an hour before nightfall. Here they encamped and were about to seize some Indians to get from them information of the country and people. But some others on the farther side of the stream hastened over in a canoe to ask what was wanted.

"De Soto had had a chair of state placed on the margin of the stream and placed himself in it. The Indians saluted him and asked whether he was for peace or for war. He replied that he wished to be at peace and hoped they would supply him with provisions for his army.

"They answered that they wished to be at peace, but the season had been one of scarcity and they had barely enough food for themselves. Their land, they said, was governed by a maiden lady and they would report to her of the arrival of the strangers and what they demanded.

"They then returned to their canoe and paddled back to the town to carry the news to the princess and chieftains. The Spaniards, watching the canoe, saw those in it received by a crowd of their countrymen at the landing place, and that their news seemed to cause some commotion. But soon several canoes left the wharf and came toward the Spaniards. The first was fitted up with a tasteful canopy and various decorations. It was filled with women all gayly dressed, among them the princess, the splendor of whose appearance almost dazzled the eyes of the beholders. There were five or six other canoes, which held her principal officers and attendants.

"When the boats reached the shore the Indians disembarked and placed a seat for their lady opposite to De Soto's chair of state. She saluted the strangers with grace and dignity, then, taking her seat, waited in silence as if expecting her visitors to begin the conference.

"For several minutes De Soto gazed upon her with feelings of admiration and reverence. He had seldom seen a more beautiful female, or one in whom the conscious pride of elevated rank was so nicely balanced with womanly reserve and youthful modesty. She seemed about nineteen years of age, had perfectly regular features and an intellectual countenance, a beautiful form, and she was richly dressed. Her robe and mantilla were of the finest woven cloth of native manufacture and as white and delicate of texture as the finest linen of Europe. Her garments were bordered with a rich brocade composed of feathers and beads of various colors interwoven with the material of the cloth. She wore also a profusion of pearls and some glittering ornaments which the Spaniards supposed to be of gold. Her name was Xualla and she ruled over several provinces.

"Juan Ortiz, being acquainted with several Indian dialects, acted as interpreter and told of the needs of the Spaniards. Xualla was sorry the harvest had been so poor that she had little ability to relieve their wants. She invited them to fix their quarters in her principal village while it was convenient for them to stay in the neighborhood. Then she took from her neck a necklace of pearls of great value and requested Juan Ortiz to present it to the governor, as it would not be modest for her to give it herself.

"De Soto arose, took it respectfully, and presented a ruby ring in return, taking it from his own finger. That seems to have been considered a ratification of peace between them. The Spanish troops were taken over the river and quartered in the public square in the centre of the town and the princess sent them a supply of good provisions, and poultry and other delicacies for De Soto's table.

"Xualla's mother was living in retirement about twelve leagues from her daughter's capital. Xualla invited her to come and see these strange people--the Spaniards--but she declined and reproved her daughter for entertaining travellers of

whom she knew nothing. And events soon showed that she was right; for the Spaniards, acting with their usual perfidy, made Xualla a prisoner, robbed the people, the temples and burial places, and tried to get possession of her mother. Xualla was urged and probably finally compelled by threats to direct them to the mother's abode.

"A young Indian warrior, evidently occupying some prominent position under her government, was given directions which were not heard or understood by the Spaniards. He made a sign of obedience, then turned to the Spaniards and gave them to understand that he was ready to be their conductor. One of them, named Juan Anasco, had been selected to go in search of the widow, and now thirty Spaniards, under his command, started on that errand.

"As they proceeded on their way the young chief seemed to grow more melancholy. After travelling about five miles they stopped for a rest, and while the soldiers were taking some refreshments the guide sat in pensive silence by the side of the road, refusing to partake of the repast. He laid aside his mantle, or cloak, which was made of the finest of sable furs, took off his quiver, and began to draw out the arrows one by one.

"The curiosity of the Spaniards was excited; they drew near and admired the arrows, which were made of reeds, feathered with the dark plumage of the crow or raven, and variously pointed, some with bones properly shaped, others with barbs of very hard wood, while the last one in the quiver was armed with a piece of flint cut in a triangular form and exceedingly sharp. This he held in his hand while the Spaniards were examining the others, and suddenly he plunged the barb of flint into his throat and fell dead.

"The other Indians stood aghast and began to fill the air with their lamentations. From them I presume it was that the Spaniards then learned that the young chief was affianced to the princess and was very much beloved and respected by the whole nation. He had committed suicide to escape betraying the mother of his betrothed into the hands of the Spaniards. In obedience to the order of the princess he had undertaken to guide those cruel enemies to the widow's hiding place, but he well knew that she was forced to give the order and that the carrying out of it would be the cause of increased trouble to her and her parent, and he had told one of the Indians who were of the party that it would be better for him to die than to be the means of increasing the afflictions of those whom he so dearly loved.

"The grief and despair of Xualla, when she heard of the death of her betrothed, were so great that even the Spaniards were moved to pity. For several days she shut herself up in her own dwelling and was not seen by either the Spaniards or her own people.

"In the meantime the Spaniards were robbing the tombs and temples of the country, finding great spoil there.

"About a week after the death of the young chief, De Soto told Xualla she must send another guide with a party of Spaniards to her mother's habitation. She promptly and decidedly refused to do so, saying she had been justly punished once for consenting to place her poor mother in his power, and no fears for herself would ever make her do so again. She said he had made her as miserable as she could be, and now she set him at defiance. She wished she had listened to the advice of her wise counsellors and driven him away from her shores when he first came with his false and deceitful promises of peace and friendship; for she would have saved herself from that sorrow and remorse which now made her life insupportable. 'Why do you still remain in my country?' she asked. 'Are there no other lands to be robbed, no other people to be made miserable? Here there is nothing for you to do; you have taken all we had, and you can add nothing to our wretchedness. Go, coward as you are! Cease to make war on helpless women; and if you must be a villain, let your conduct prove that you are a man!'"

"I think she was very brave to talk to him in that way," said Elsie.

"Did he kill her for it?"

"No," replied Lucilla, "he was polite and courteous as usual, but told her that the King of Spain was the true sovereign and lawful proprietor of the country over which she claimed to be princess, and that, in all those matters which had offended her, the Spanish army had acted under the authority of that great monarch, to whom she herself was bound to render obedience.

"Next he told her she must accompany the Spaniards on their march as far as the border of her dominions and that she would be expected to control her subjects and to make them entirely submissive to the Spaniards. He promised that she should be treated with the respect and delicacy due to her rank and sex.

"But the one who tells the story says she did not receive such usage as she deserved. It was on the 3d day of May, 1540, that the Spaniards left Cofachiqui, compelling the princess to accompany them and requiring her to call upon her subjects to carry burdens for them from one stopping place to another. They passed through a delightful valley called Xualla, which had many groves, plantations, and pasture grounds. On the seventh day they came to a province called

Chulaque, supposed to have been inhabited by a tribe of Cherokees. But before the Spaniards had reached this point Xualla had contrived to escape, assisted by two of her female slaves who were in attendance upon her."

"Oh, I hope they didn't catch her again--the Spaniards, I mean," exclaimed Ned.

"No," replied Lucilla; "De Soto would not allow her to be pursued."

"Did he and his men stay there in that beautiful valley, Lu?" asked Elsie.

"No; as he could not find the gold he so coveted in Florida, he travelled on in a westerly direction till he reached the Mississippi; a hard journey through a wilderness of forests and marshes. He could nowhere find the gold he so coveted, became discouraged and worn out, was stricken with malignant fever, and died on the banks of the Mississippi in June, 1542."

"A victim to the love of gold, like so many of his countrymen," sighed Grandma Elsie. "The Bible tells us 'the love of money is the root of all evil,' and history repeats the lesson. The love of money led to Pizarro's wicked attack upon the Peruvians, and the conquest of that country was a source of trouble and calamity to all, or nearly all who were concerned in it. As soon as De Soto left, after the capture of Cuzco, the victors began to quarrel with each other for the spoils. Almagro provoked a war with Pizarro, was taken prisoner and strangled. Gonzalo Pizarro was beheaded by his own countrymen. Another of the brothers, Hernando, returned to Spain, where he was thrown into prison and kept there for many years. Francisco Pizarro himself fell a victim to the resentment of Almagro's soldiers. He was assaulted in his own palace, where he had just finished his dinner when the avengers entered. All his servants and guests except his half-brother, Martinez de Alcantara, instantly fled and abandoned him to his fate. It was midday when the assassins entered the palace with drawn weapons and loudly proclaiming their intention to kill the tyrant. There were upward of a thousand persons in the plaza, but no one opposed them; they merely looked coldly on, saying to each other, 'These men are going to kill the governor.'"

"He deserved it for killing Almagro, didn't he, grandma?" asked Ned.

"He certainly did," replied Grandma Elsie. "But they should, if possible, have given him a trial; everyone has a right to that. It is right that murderers should be put to death, lawfully--for the Bible says, 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.' History tells us it is probable that not more than twenty Spaniards in getting the mastery of the great empire of Peru--one of the largest upon earth--became rich, and in the end they made nothing; all that they gained was ruin--individual and national. Few, if any of them, carried back to their own land any evidences of their success. They dissipated their ill-gotten riches in riotous living, or lost them by unfortunate speculations.

"I must tell you of the fate of another of Pizarro's band--the priest Vincent, or Válverde. He counselled, or consented to, many of the most enormous crimes committed by that monster of cruelty and avarice Pizarro, who, after some years of their association in crime, made him Bishop of Cuzco. In November, 1541, he (Vincent) went with a considerable number of Spaniards, who had served under Pizarro, to the island of Puna, where they were all massacred by the Indians. On that very island, about nine years before, Pizarro had butchered the people, Vincent conniving at the crime. The historian says 'the murderers slandered the Archangel Michael, by pretending that he assisted them in their bloody performance; but no angel interposed when Vincent and his fellow assassins were about to be put to death by the infidels.'"

CHAPTER V.

The next day, by Grandma Elsie's invitation, the students of the history of Florida gathered at Ion, and Chester took his turn in relating some of the facts he had come upon in his reading.

"De Soto," he said, "died in June, 1542. Nearly twenty years later--in February, 1562--two good vessels under command of Captain Jean Ribaut, a French naval officer of experience and repute, were sent out by Admiral Coligny, the chief of the Protestants in France, to establish colonies in unexplored countries where the Protestants would be at liberty to follow the dictates of their consciences without fear of persecution.

"The admiral obtained a patent from Charles IX., armed those two ships, put in them five hundred and fifty veteran soldiers and sailors, besides many young noblemen who embarked as volunteers, and appointed Ribaut as commander.

"They made a prosperous voyage, going directly to the coast of Florida, avoiding the routes in which they were likely to meet Spanish vessels, as the success of their expedition depended upon secrecy.

"On the 30th of April they sighted a cape which Ribaut named Francois. It is now one of the headlands of Matanzas inlet. The next day he discovered the mouth of a river which he named May, because they entered it on the 1st day of that month, but which is now called the St. Johns. Here they landed and erected a monument of stone with the arms of France engraved upon it. It is said to have been placed upon a little sand hillock in the river. They re-embarked and sailed northward, landing occasionally and finding themselves well received by the many Indians, to whom they made little presents such as looking-glasses and bracelets. They continued to sail northward till they entered the harbor of Port Royal, where they anchored. There they built a small fort upon a little island and called it Fort Charles, in honor of the King of France.

"Ribaut then selected twenty-five men to remain in the fort, and one of his trusted lieutenants, Charles d'Albert, to command them; gave them a supply of ammunition and provisions and left with a parting salute of artillery, replied to from the fort. With that the vessels sailed away for France, from which they had been absent about four months.

"For some time the colony prospered, and made various excursions among the Indians, who received and treated them well. But finally this effort to found a colony proved a failure.

"In 1564 Rene de Laudonniere was charged with the direction of a new one--this also sent out by Coligny. Three vessels were given him, and Charles IX. made him a present of fifty thousand crowns. He took with him skilful workmen and several young gentlemen who asked permission to go at their own expense. He landed in Florida on the 22d of June, sailed up the River St. Johns, and began the building of a fort which he named Caroline in honor of the king.

"The Indians proved friendly. But soon the young gentlemen who had volunteered to come with him complained of being forced to labor like common workmen, and fearing that they would excite a mutiny, he sent the most turbulent of them back to France on one of his vessels.

"But the trouble increased among the remaining colonists and he sent out part of them under the orders of his lieutenant, to explore the country. A few days later some sailors fled, taking with them the two boats used in procuring provisions; and others, who had left France only with the hope of making their fortunes, seized one of his ships and went cruising in the Gulf of Mexico. Also the deserters had had a bad influence upon the Indians, who now refused to supply the colonists with provisions, and they were soon threatened with famine. I cannot see why they should have been, with abundance of fish in river and sea, and wild game and fruits in the woods," remarked Chester, then went on with his story. "The historians tell us that they lived for some time on acorns and roots, and when at the last extremity were saved by the arrival of Captain John Hawkins, August 3, 1565. He showed them great kindness, furnishing them with provisions and selling to Laudonniere one of his ships in which they might return to France.

"In telling the story of his visit to Florida Hawkins mentions the abundance of tobacco, sorrel, maize, and grapes, and ascribes the failure of the French colony 'to their lack of thrift, as in such a climate and soil, with marvellous store of deer and divers other beasts, all men may live.'

"Laudonniere was waiting for a favorable wind to set sail, when Jean Ribaut arrived with seven vessels carrying

supplies and provisions, some emigrants of both sexes, and four hundred soldiers. He told Laudonniere his loyalty was suspected by the French court, and that he had been deprived of the governorship of Florida. That news only made Laudonniere the more eager to go back to France that he might justify himself.

"After landing his troops Ribaut went to explore the country, leaving some of his men to guard the ships. Ribaut's arrival was on the 29th of August. On the 4th of September the French in his vessels sighted a large fleet approaching and asked their object. 'I am Pedro Menendez de Aviles, who has come to hang and behead all Protestants in these regions,' was the haughty reply of the fleet's commander. 'If I find any Catholic he shall be well treated, but every heretic shall die.'

"The French fleet, surprised and not strong enough to cope with the Spaniards, cut their cables and left, and Menendez entered an inlet which he called St. Augustin, and there began to intrench himself.

"Ribaut called together all his forces and resolved to attack the Spaniards, contrary to the advice of Laudonniere and all his officers. On the 10th of September he embarked for that purpose, but was scarcely at sea when a hurricane dispersed his fleet. Then the Spaniards attacked Fort Caroline.

"Laudonniere was still in the fort, but was sick and had only about a hundred men, scarcely twenty of them capable of bearing arms. The Spaniards took the fort, massacred all the sick, the women and children, and hanged the soldiers who fell into their hands.

"After doing all he could to defend the fort Laudonniere cut his way through the enemy and plunged into the woods, where he found some of his soldiers who had escaped. He said what he could for their encouragement and during the night led them to the seashore, where they found a son of Ribaut with three vessels. On one of these--a small brig--Laudonniere, Jacques Ribaut, and a few others escaped from the Spaniards and carried the news of the disaster to France.

"Laudonniere's purpose had been to rejoin and help Jean Ribaut, but his vessel being driven out to sea, he was unable to carry out that intention.

"Three days after the fort was taken Ribaut's ships were wrecked near Cape Canaveral, and he at once marched in three divisions toward Fort Caroline. When the first division came near the site of the fort they were attacked by the Spaniards, surrendered to Menendez, and were all put to death. A few days later Ribaut arrived with his party, and as Menendez pledged his word that they should be spared, they surrendered and were all murdered, Menendez killing Ribaut with his own hand. Their bodies were hung on the surrounding trees with the inscription, 'Executed, not as Frenchmen, but as Lutherans.'"

"Lutherans?" echoed Ned inquiringly.

"Yes; meaning Protestants," replied Chester. "That was an age of great cruelty. Satan was very busy, and multitudes were called upon to seal their testimony to Christ with their blood.

"But to go on with the story. About two years after a gallant Frenchman--Dominic de Gourgues, by name--got up an expedition to avenge the massacre of his countrymen by the Spaniards at Fort Caroline. He came to Florida with three small vessels and a hundred and eighty-four men, secured the help of the natives, attacked the fort--now called by the Spaniards Fort San Mateo--and captured the entire garrison. Many of the captives were killed by the Indians, the rest De Gourgues hanged upon the trees on which Menendez had hanged the Huguenots, putting over the corpses the inscription, 'I do this, not as to Spaniards, nor as to outcasts, but as to traitors, thieves, and murderers.' His work of revenge accomplished, De Gourgues set sail for France."

"Oh," sighed little Elsie, "what dreadful things people did do in those days! I'm glad I didn't live then instead of now."

"As we all are," responded her mother; "glad for you and for ourselves."

"Yes," said Chester; "and I think I have now come to a suitable stopping place. There seems to me little more in Florida's history that we need recount."

"No," said Grandmother Elsie, "it seems to be nothing but a round of building and destroying, fighting and bloodshed, kept up between the Spaniards and the French; the English also taking part; the Indians too, and in later years negroes also.

In 1762 the British captured Havana and in the treaty following the next year Great Britain gave Cuba to Spain in exchange for Florida.

"Florida took no part in the Revolutionary War and became a refuge for many loyalists, as it was afterward for fugitive slaves. In 1783 Florida was returned to Spanish rule, Great Britain exchanging it for the Bahamas."

"And when did we get it, grandma?" asked Ned.

"In 1819, by a treaty between our country and Spain."

"Then the fighting stopped, I suppose?"

"No; the Seminole wars followed, lasting from 1835 to 1842. Florida was admitted into the Union in 1845, seceded in 1861, bore her part bravely and well through the Civil War, and at its close a State Convention repealed the ordinance of secession."

"So since that she has been a part of our Union like the rest of our States; hasn't she, grandma?" asked Ned.

"Yes; a part of our own dear country--a large and beautiful State."

"And probably it won't be long now till some of us, at least, will see her," observed Grace with satisfaction.

"How soon will the *Dolphin* be ready, papa?"

"By the time we are," replied the captain, "which will be as soon as Max can join us."

"Dear Max! I long for the time when he will be with us again," said Violet.

"I suppose by this time he knows how to manage a vessel almost as well as you do, papa?" observed Ned in an inquiring tone.

"I hope so," his father replied with a smile.

"So the passengers may all feel very safe, I suppose," said Mrs. Lilburn.

"And that being the case you are willing to be one of them, Cousin Annis, are you not?" queried Violet hospitably.

"More than willing; glad and grateful to you and the captain for the invitation to be, as my husband is also, I know."

"I am neither able nor desirous to deny that, my dear," laughed Cousin Ronald. "Ah, ha; ah, ha; um, hm! It will be my first visit to Florida, and I'm thinking we'll have a grand time of it--looking up the sites and scenes of the old histories we've been reading and chatting over."

CHAPTER VI.

The yacht was ready in due season, and the weather being favorable Captain Raymond invited as many of the connection as could be comfortably accommodated on board, to go with him to witness the graduation of Max and his classmates. Certainly his own immediate family, Mr. and Mrs. Dinsmore and Grandma Elsie would be of that number; Evelyn Leland also and Cousins Ronald and Annis Lilburn.

Max's joy in meeting them all--especially his father and the others of his own immediate family--was evidently very great, for it was the first sight he had had of any of them for two years or more. He passed his examination successfully, received his diploma, and was appointed to the engineer corps of the navy. He received many warm congratulations and valuable gifts from friends and relatives; but the pleasure in his father's eyes, accompanied by the warm, affectionate clasp of his hand, and his look of parental pride in his firstborn, was a sweeter reward to the young man than all else put together.

"You are satisfied with me, father?" he asked in a low aside.

"Entirely so, my dear boy," was the prompt and smiling rejoinder; "you have done well and made me a proud and happy father. And now, if you are quite ready for the homeward-bound trip, we will go aboard the yacht at once."

"I am entirely ready, sir," responded Max in joyful tones; "trunk packed and good-byes said."

But they were detained for a little, some of Captain Raymond's old friends coming up to congratulate him and his son on the latter's successful entrance into the most desirable corps of the navy. Then, on walking down to the wharf, they found the *Dolphin's* dory waiting for them and saw that the rest of their party was already on board, on deck and evidently looking with eager interest for their coming.

Max remarked it with a smile, adding, "How the girls have grown, father! and how lovely they all are! girls that any fellow might be proud to claim as his sisters--and friend. Evelyn, I suppose, would hardly let me claim her as a sister."

"I don't know," laughed his father; "she once very willingly agreed to a proposition from me to adopt her as my daughter."

"Yes? I think she might well be glad enough to do that; but to take me for a brother would not perhaps be quite so agreeable."

"Well, your Mamma Vi objecting to having so old a daughter, we agreed to consider ourselves brother and sister; so I suppose you can consider her your aunt, if you wish."

"There now, father, what a ridiculous idea!" laughed Max.

"Not so very," returned his father, "since aunts are sometimes younger than their nephews."

But they had reached the yacht and the conversation went no farther. In another moment they were on deck, and the dear relatives and friends there crowding about Max to tell of their joy in having him in their midst again and in knowing that he had so successfully finished his course of tuition and fully entered upon the profession chosen as his life work.

Max, blushing with pleasure, returned hearty thanks and expressed his joy in being with them again. "The two years of absence have seemed a long time to be without a sight of your dear faces," he said, "and I feel it a very great pleasure to be with you all again."

"And it will be a delight to get home once more, won't it?" asked Grace, hanging lovingly on his arm.

"Indeed it will," he responded; "and getting aboard the dear old yacht seems like a long step in that direction; particularly as all the family and so many other of my dear friends are here to welcome me."

"Well, we're starting," said Ned. "The sailors have lifted anchor and we begin to move down stream."

At that a silence fell upon the company, all gazing out upon the wintry landscape and the vessels lying at anchor in the river as they passed them one after another. But a breeze had sprung up, the air was too cool for comfort, and presently all went below.

Then came the call to the table, where they found an abundance of good cheer awaiting them. The meal was enlivened by much cheerful chat, Max doing his full share of it in reply to many questions in regard to his experiences during the two years of his absence; especially of the last few weeks in which he had not been heard from, except in a rather hurried announcement of his arrival at Annapolis. They were all making much of the fine young fellow, but, as his father noticed with pleasure, it did not seem to spoil him. His manner and speech were modest and unassuming, and he listened with quiet respect to the remarks and queries of the older people. The younger ones were quiet listeners to all.

At the conclusion of the meal all withdrew to the saloon and the younger ones collected in a group by themselves. Max, seated near to Evelyn Leland, turned to her and in a grave and quiet tone remarked, "It seems a long time since we have had a bit of chat together, Aunt Evelyn."

At that her eyes opened wide in astonishment.

"Aunt?" she repeated. "Why--why, Max, what do you mean by calling me that?"

"I supposed it was the proper title for my father's sister," he returned with a twinkle of fun in his eye.

"Oh!" she laughed. "I had nearly forgotten that bargain made with the captain so long ago. And he has told you of it?"

"Yes; it was in answer to a remark of mine showing that I should like to include you among my sisters. But can you hold that relationship to my father and to me at the same time?"

"That is a question to be carefully considered," she laughed; "and in the meantime suppose you just go back to the old way of calling me simply Evelyn or Eva. And shall I call you Max, as of old?"

"Yes, yes, indeed! it's a bargain! And now, girls," glancing from her to his sisters, "as I haven't heard from home in some weeks, perhaps you may have some news to tell me. Has anything happened? or is anything out of the usual course of events likely to happen?"

At that Grace laughed, Lucilla blushed and smiled, and little Ned burst out in eager, joyful tones, "Oh, yes, brother Max! papa is going to take us all to Florida in a day or two, you as well as the rest."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Max, "that will be very pleasant, I think."

"Yes," continued Neddie, "it's because Cousin Dr. Arthur says Chester must go to get cured of his bad cough that he's had so long; and of course Lu must go if he does--Cousin Chester, I mean--and if Lu goes the rest of us ought to go too. Don't you think so, brother Max?"

Max's only reply for the moment was a puzzled look from one to another.

"You may as well know it at once, Max," Lucilla said with a smile.

"Chester and I are engaged, and naturally he wants us all with him."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Max, giving her a look of surprise and interest. "Why, Lu, I thought father was quite determined to keep his daughters single till they were far beyond your present age."

"Yes," she returned with a smile; "but circumstances alter cases. Chester saved my life--at nearly the expense of his own," she added with a tremble in her voice. "So father let him tell me--what he wanted to, and allowed us to become engaged. But that is to be all, for a year or more."

"Saved your life, Lu? Tell me all about it, do, for I haven't heard the story."

"You remember the anger of the burglar whom you and I testified against some years ago, and his threat to be revenged on me?"

"Yes; and that in one of father's letters I was told that he had escaped from prison. And he attacked you?"

"Yes; he fired at me from some bushes by the roadside, but missed, Chester, who was with me, backing our horses just in time; then they fired simultaneously at each other and the convict fell dead, and Chester terribly wounded, while I escaped unhurt. But I thought father had written you all about it."

"If so that letter must have missed me," said Max. "And Chester hasn't recovered entirely?"

"Not quite; his lungs seem weak, but we are hoping that a visit to Florida will perfect his cure."

"I hope so indeed! I have always liked Chester and shall welcome him as a brother-in-law, since he has saved my sister's life and won her heart."

"And that of her father," added the captain, coming up at that moment and laying a hand on Lucilla's shoulder while he looked down at her with eyes of love and pride. "He has proved himself worthy of the gift of her hand."

"I think I must have missed one of your letters, father," said Max; "for surely you did not intend to keep me in ignorance of all this?"

"No, my son; I wrote you a full account of all but the engagement, leaving that to be told on your arrival here. One or more of my recent letters must have missed you."

"Too bad!" exclaimed Max, "for a letter from my father, or from any one of the home folks, is a great treat when I am far away on shipboard or on some distant shore."

"And, oh, Max, but we feel it a great treat when one comes from you," said Grace.

"Ah! that's very good of you all," he returned with a pleased smile. "But I think we may look forward to a fine time for the next few weeks or months, as we expect to spend them together."

"Yes," said his father, then asked, "Are you well up in the history of Florida, my son?"

"Not so well as I should like to be, sir," returned Max. "But perhaps I can refresh my memory, and also learn something new on that subject, while we are on the way there."

"Yes; we have a good supply of books in that line, which we will carry along for your benefit--and to perhaps refresh our own memories occasionally. And possibly the girls may like to recount to you some of the tales of early times in that part of our country, which have interested them of late," the captain continued with a smiling glance at Evelyn and his daughters. All three at once and heartily expressed their entire willingness to do so, and Max returned his thanks with the gallant remark that that would be even more delightful than reading the accounts for himself.

"Papa, can't we keep right on now to Florida?" asked Ned.

"No, my son; there are several reasons why that is not practicable--matters to be attended to at home, luggage to be brought aboard the yacht, and so forth. Besides, your brother no doubt wants a sight of Woodburn before setting out upon a journey that is likely to keep us away from there for some weeks."

"Yes, indeed, father, you are right about that," said Max. "I have always esteemed my Woodburn home a lovely and delightful place, and dare say I shall find it even more beautiful now than when I saw it last."

"Then we'll expect to hear you say so when you get there," said Lucilla, with a smile of pleasure and assurance.

And she was not disappointed; when at length Woodburn was reached Max's admiration and delight were evident and fully equal to her expectations. But of necessity his stay at this time must be brief, scarce allowing opportunity to see all the relatives and connections residing in that neighborhood, if he would not miss having a share in the contemplated trip to Florida.

CHAPTER VII.

The *Dolphin* carried to Florida the same party that she had brought from Annapolis, with the addition of Chester Dinsmore and Dr. Harold Travilla; while some others of the connection were intending to travel thither by land. The voyage was but a short one, the weather pleasant--though cool enough to make the cabin a more comfortable place for family gatherings than the deck--the vessel in fine condition, well manned, well officered, and provided with everything necessary for convenience, comfort, and enjoyment. Amusements--such as music, books, and games--were always to be had in abundance aboard the yacht, but on this occasion the collection of information in regard to the history and geography of Florida took precedence of everything else. As soon as the vessel was well under way they gathered about a table in the saloon on which were maps and books bearing upon the subject, and while examining them chatted freely and gayly in regard to which points they should visit, and how long remain in each place.

"That last is a question which would better be decided upon the spot," Captain Raymond said when it had been asked once or twice. "There is little or nothing to hurry us, so that we may move forward, or tarry in one place or another, as suits our convenience or inclination."

"We will call at Jacksonville, I suppose, father?" Lucilla said inquiringly. "I see it is spoken of as the travel-centre and metropolis of the State."

"Yes; and if my passengers desire to go there we will do so."

"Can we go all the way in the *Dolphin*, papa?" asked little Elsie.

"Yes; I think, however, we will call at Fernandina first, as it is nearer."

"It is on an island, is it not?" asked Evelyn.

"Yes; Amelia Island, at the mouth of St. Mary's River."

"There are a very great many islands on Florida's coast, I think," said Elsie. "I was looking at the map to-day and it seemed to me there were thousands."

"So there are," said her father; "islands of various sizes, from a mere dot in some cases to from thirty to fifty miles of length in others."

"Then we won't stop at all of them, I suppose," remarked Ned sagely; "only at the big ones, won't we, papa?"

"Yes; and not at every one of them either," answered his father, with a look of amusement. "Ten thousand or more stoppages would use up rather too much of our time."

"Yes, indeed!" laughed Ned. "Most of them I'd rather just look at as we pass by."

"We will want to see St. Augustine and other places mentioned in the history we have been reading," said Grace.

"Certainly," replied her father, "we will not neglect them. The mouth of St. John's River is about the first we will come to. Do you remember, Elsie, what they called it, and what they did there?"

"Oh, yes, papa," she answered eagerly. "They named the river May, and set up a monument of stone on a little sand bank in the river and engraved the arms of France upon it."

"Quite correct, daughter," the captain said in a tone of pleased commendation; "I see you have paid good attention to our reading and talks on the subject, and I hope soon to reward you with a sight of the scenes of the occurrences mentioned; though of course they are greatly changed from what they were nearly four hundred years ago."

"Wasn't Jacksonville formerly known by another name, captain?" asked Evelyn.

"Yes," he replied, "the Indian name was Waccapilatka--meaning Cowford or Oxford--but in 1816 it became a white man's town and in 1822 its name was changed to Jackson, in honor of General Andrew Jackson. I think we should go up the St. Johns to that city before going farther down the coast."

"Yes," said Mrs. Travilla, "and then on up the river and through the lakes to De Leon Springs. We all want to see that place."

All in the company seemed to approve of that plan and it was presently decided to carry it out. They did not stop at Fernandina, only gazed upon it in passing, made but a short stay at Jacksonville, then passed on up the river and through the lakes to De Leon Springs.

Here they found much to interest them;--the great mineral spring, one hundred feet in diameter and thirty feet deep, its water so clear that the bottom could be distinctly seen and so impregnated with soda and sulphur as to make it most healthful, giving ground for the legend that it is the veritable Fountain of Perpetual Youth sought out by Ponce de Leon.

The ruins of an old Spanish mill close at hand interested them also. These consisted of an immense brick smokestack and furnace covered with vines; two large iron wheels, thrown down when the mill was destroyed, in a way to cause one to overlap the other, and now a gum tree grows up through them so that the arms of the wheels are deeply imbedded in its trunk.

Our friends found this so charming a spot that they spent some days there. Then returning down the river, to the ocean, they continued their voyage in a southerly direction.

Their next pause was at St. Augustine, which they found a most interesting old city--the oldest in the United States--noted for its picturesque beauty, its odd streets ten to twenty feet wide, without sidewalks, its crumbling old city gates, its governor's palace, its coquina-built houses with overhanging balconies, its sea walls and old fort, its Moorish cathedral, and the finest and most striking hotel in the world.

But what interested our party more than anything else was the old fort--called San Marco by the Spaniard, but now bearing the American name of Fort Marion. They went together to visit it and were all greatly interested in its ancient and foreign appearance; in the dried-up moat, the drawbridges, the massive arched entrance, dark under-ways and dungeons.

"Papa," said Elsie, "it's a dreadful place, and very, very old, isn't it?"

"Yes," he answered; "it was probably begun in 1565. About how long ago was that?"

"More than three hundred years," she returned after a moment's thought. "Oh, that is a long, long while!"

"Yes," he said, "a very long while, and we may be very thankful that our lives were given us in this time rather than in that; for it was a time of ignorance and persecution."

"Yes, yes, ignorance and persecution;" the words came in sepulchral tones from the depths of the nearest dungeon, "here have I lain for three hundred years with none to pity or help. Oh, 'tis a weary while! Shall I never, never escape?"

"Oh, papa," cried Elsie in tones of affright, and clinging to his hand, "how dreadful! Can't we help him out?"

"I don't think there is anyone in there, daughter," the captain said in reassuring tones, her Uncle Harold adding, with a slight laugh, "And if there is he must surely be pretty well used to it by this time."

All their little company had been startled at first and felt a thrill of horror at thought of such misery, but now they all laughed and turned to Cousin Ronald, as if saying surely it was his doing.

"Yes," he said, "the voice was mine; and thankful we may be that those poor victims of such hellish cruelty have long, long since been released from their pain."

"Oh, I am glad to know that," exclaimed Elsie with a sigh of relief; "but please let's go away from here, for I think it's a dreadful place."

"Yes," said her father, "we have seen it all now and will try to find something pleasanter to look at." And with that they turned and left the old fort.

Captain Raymond and his little company, feeling in no haste to continue their journey, lingered for some time in St. Augustine and its neighborhood. One day they visited an island where some friends were boarding. It was a very pretty place. There were several cottages standing near together amid the orange groves, one of them occupied by the proprietor--a finely educated Austrian physician--and his wife, the others by the boarders. The party from the *Dolphin* were much interested in the story of these people told them by their friend.

"The doctor," he said, "had come over to America before our Civil War, and was on the island when Union troops came into the neighborhood. He was one day walking in the woods when suddenly a party of Union soldiers appeared and, seeing him, took him for a spy, seized him and declared their intention to shoot him. They tied his hands behind his back, led him to what they deemed a suitable spot on the edge of a thick part of the wood, then turned and walked away to station themselves at the proper distance for firing. But the instant their eyes were off him the prisoner started into the wood and was out of sight before they were aware that he was making an attempt to escape.

"They pursued, but favored by the thick growth of trees and shrubs, he kept out of sight until he reached a palmetto, which he climbed--having contrived to get his hands free as he ran--and there concealed himself among the leaves. He had hardly ensconced himself there before he could see and hear his foes running past beneath his place of shelter, beating about the bushes and calling to each other to make sure of catching the rascally spy. But he was safely hidden and at length they gave up the search for the time.

"But they had encamped in the neighborhood and for several days and nights the Austrian remained in the tree, afraid to descend lest he should be caught and shot. He did not starve, as he could eat of the cabbage which grows at the top of that tree, but he suffered from thirst and lack of sleep, as he could rest but insecurely in the treetop. When two or three days and nights had passed he felt that he could stand it no longer; he must get water and food though at the risk of his life. Waiting only for darkness and a silence that led him to hope his foes were not near at hand, he descended and cautiously made his way through the wood. He presently reached a house occupied by a woman only, told her his story and asked for food and drink. Her heart was touched with pity for his hard case, she supplied his wants and told him she would put food in a certain spot where he could get it the next night.

"He thanked her and told her he wanted to get away from that neighborhood, as there was no safety for him there. She said she thought she might be able to secure a skiff in which he could go up or down the coast and so perhaps escape the soldiers. He was, you know, a physician--not a sailor--and knew but little about managing a boat; but anything seemed better than his present situation, so he thanked her and said he would be glad to try it.

"Shortly afterward she informed him that the boat was ready. He entered it, took up the oars, and started down the coast. But a storm came on, he was unable to manage his small craft, it was upset by the waves, he was thrown into the water and presently lost consciousness. When he recovered it he was lying in a berth on board a much larger vessel than the canoe, a kindly-looking man leaning over him using restoratives. 'Ah, doctor,' he said with a pleased smile, 'I am glad, very glad to have succeeded in restoring you to consciousness; glad to have been able to rescue you from a watery grave.'

"The doctor expressed his thanks, but acknowledged that he did not know this new friend, who seemed to know him; then the other asked if he did not remember having prescribed for a sick man in such a time and at such a place. 'It was I,' he added; 'you then saved my life, and I am most happy to have been enabled to save yours from being lost in the ocean.'

"The talk went on; the doctor told of his danger, his escape, and his anxiety to keep out of the way of the soldiers until the war should be over.

"The captain told him he was bound for Philadelphia, and that if he chose he could go there and live in safety to the end of the war and longer. So that was what he did; he stayed there till peace came, and in the meantime met and married a countrywoman of his own, a lovely and amiable lady, whom he brought back with him to Florida."

"I noticed her as we passed," said Grandma Elsie; "she is a lovely-looking woman. But have they no children?"

"None now; they had two--a son and a daughter--who lived to grow up, were children to be proud of, highly educated by their father, and very fond of each other and of their parents. The son used to act as guide to visitors boarding here in the cottages, going with them on fishing expeditions and so forth. On one of those occasions he was caught in a storm and took cold; that led to consumption and he finally died. They buried him under the orange trees. His sister was so overwhelmed with grief that she fretted herself to death, and now lies by his side."

"Ah, the poor mother!" sighed Grandma Elsie. "And the father too," added Captain Raymond in a moved tone.

CHAPTER VIII.

Leaving St. Augustine the *Dolphin* pursued her way down the Florida coast, pausing here and there for a day or two at the most attractive places, continuing on to the southernmost part of the State, around it, past Cape Sable and out into the Gulf of Mexico. Then, having accepted an invitation from Grandma Elsie to visit Viamede, they sailed on in a westerly direction.

They had pleasant weather during their sojourn in and about Florida, but as they entered the Gulf a rain storm came up and continued until they neared the port of New Orleans. That confined the women and children pretty closely to the cabin and active little Ned grew very weary of it.

"I wish I could go on deck," he sighed on the afternoon of the second day. "I'm so tired of staying down here where there's nothing to see."

As he concluded a voice that sounded like that of a boy about his own age, and seemed to come from the stairway to the deck, said, "I'm sorry for that little chap. Suppose I come down there and try to get up a bit of fun for him."

"By all means," replied the captain. "We will be happy to have you do so."

Ned straightened himself up and looked eagerly in the direction of the stairway.

"Who is it, papa?" he asked.

"Why, don't you know me?" asked the voice, this time seeming to come from the door of one of the staterooms.

"No, I don't," returned Ned. "I didn't know there was any boy on board, except myself."

"Nor did I," said a rough man's voice, "What are you doing here, you young rascal? came aboard to steal, did you?"

"Nothing but my passage, sir; and I'm not doing a bit of harm," replied the boyish voice.

"Oh, I guess I know who you are," laughed Ned. "At least I'm pretty sure you're either Cousin Ronald or brother Max."

At that a loud guffaw right at his ear made the little boy jump with an outcry, "Oh, who was that?"

"Why don't you look and see?" laughed Lucilla.

"Why, it doesn't seem to have been anybody," returned Ned, looking around this way and that. "But I'm not going to be frightened, for I just know it's one or the other of our ventriloquists. Now, good sirs, please let's have some more of it, for it's real fun."

"Not much, I should think, after you are in the secret," said Max.

"It's some, though," said Ned, "because it seems so real even when you do know--or guess--who it is that's doing it."

"Well, now, I'm glad you are so easily pleased and entertained, little fellow," said the voice from the state-room door.

"Perhaps now the captain will let me pay my fare on the yacht by providing fun for his little son. That oldest one doesn't seem to need any; he gets enough talking with the ladies."

"Oh, do you, brother Max?" asked Ned, turning to him.

"Yes," laughed Max; "it's very good fun."

"Hello!" shouted a voice, apparently from the deck, "Mr. Raymond, sir, better come up here and see that we don't run foul of that big steamer--or she of us."

The captain started to his feet, but Max laughed, and said in a mirthful tone, "Never mind, father, it's a false alarm, given

for Ned's amusement."

"Please don't scare anybody else to amuse me, brother Max," said Ned, with the air of one practising great self-denial.

"I don't think father was really very badly scared," laughed Lucilla; "and we may feel pretty safe with two good naval officers and a skilful crew to look out for threatening dangers and help us to avoid them."

"That's right, miss; no occasion for anxiety or alarm," said the man's rough voice that had spoken before.

"Thank you; I don't feel a particle of either," laughed Lucilla.

"And I am sure neither you nor any of us should, under the care of two such excellent and skilful seamen," added Violet in a sprightly tone.

"That's right and I reckon you may feel pretty safe--all o' you," said the man's voice.

"Of course; who's afraid?" cried the boyish voice, close at Ned's side. "Some of those old Spaniards were drowned in this gulf, but that was because they knew nothing about managing a vessel."

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Ned, "but my father does know how, and so does brother Max."

"That's a mighty good thing," said the voice, "and we needn't fear shipwreck, but can just devote ourselves to having a good time."

"So we can," said Ned. "And we do have good times here in the *Dolphin*. Anybody is pretty sure of good times when papa is at the head of affairs."

"Quite a complimentary speech from my little son," laughed the captain.

"And where are you going in this *Dolphin*?" asked the voice.

"To New Orleans, then to Berwick Bay and on through the lakes and bayous to my grandma's place--Viamede. I've been there before and it's just beautiful."

"Then I'd like to go too," said the voice. "Won't you take me along?"

"Yes, yes, indeed! whether you are Cousin Ronald or brother Max, I know grandma will make you welcome."

At that everybody laughed and his grandma said:

"Yes, indeed, they are both heartily welcome."

"And whichever you are I'm obliged to you for making this fun for me," continued Ned. "Oh, what was that!" as a loud whistle was heard seemingly close in his rear. He turned hastily about, then laughed as he perceived that there was no one there. "Was it you did that, brother Max?" he asked.

"Did it sound like my voice?" asked Max.

"As much as like any other. But oh, there's the call to supper and I suppose the fun will have to stop for this time."

"Yes, you can have the fun of eating instead," said his father, leading the way to the table.

In due time the next day they reached New Orleans, where they paused for a few days of rest and sight-seeing, then returning to their yacht, they passed out into the Gulf, up the bay into Teche Bayou and beyond, through lake and lakelet, past plain and forest, plantation and swamp. The scenery was beautiful; there were miles of smoothly shaven and velvety green lawns, shaded by magnificent oaks and magnolias; there were cool, shady dells carpeted with a rich growth of flowers; lordly villas peering through groves of orange trees, tall white sugar-houses, and long rows of cabins for the laborers. The scenes were not entirely new to anyone on the boat, but were scarcely the less enjoyable for that--so great was their beauty.

When they reached their destination and the boat rounded to at the wharf, they perceived a welcoming group awaiting their landing--all the relatives from Magnolia, the Parsonage, and Torriswood. There was a joyful exchange of greetings with them and then with the group of servants standing a little in the rear.

In accordance with written directions sent by Grandma Elsie some days in advance of her arrival, a feast had been prepared and the whole connection in that neighborhood invited to partake of it. And not one older or younger had failed to come, for she was too dearly loved for an invitation from her to be neglected unless the hinderance were such as could not be ignored or set aside. Dr. Dick Percival and his Maud were there among the rest; Dick's half brother Dr. Robert Johnson, and Maud's sister Sidney also. They gave a very joyful and affectionate greeting to their brother Chester and to Lucilla Raymond, then attached themselves to her for the short walk from the wharf up to the house.

"Oh, Lu," said Maud, "we are so glad that we are to have you for our sister. I don't know any other girl I should be so pleased to have come into the family. And Ches will make a good kind husband, I am sure, for he has always been a dear good brother."

"Indeed he has," said Sidney. "And we are hoping that he and Frank will come and settle down here near us."

"Oh, no, indeed!" exclaimed Lulu. "I should like to live near you two, but nothing would induce me to make my home so far away from my father. And Chester has promised never to take me away from him."

"Oh, I was hoping you would want to come," said Maud. "But Ches is one to keep his word; so that settles it."

But they had reached the house and here the talk ended for the time.

The new arrivals retired to their rooms for a little attention to the duties of the toilet, then all gathered about the well-spread board and made a hearty meal, enlivened by cheerful chat mingled with many an innocent jest and not a little mirthful laughter. It was still early when the meal was concluded, and the next hour or two were spent in pleasant, familiar intercourse upon the verandas or in the beautiful grounds. Then the guests began to return to their homes, those with young children leaving first. The Torriswood family stayed a little longer, and at their urgent request Chester consented to become their guest for the first few days, if no longer.

"There are two good reasons why you should do so," said Dick in a half-jesting tone: "firstly, I having married your sister, by that we are the most nearly related; and secondly, as Bob and I are both physicians, we may be better able to take proper care of you than these good and kind relatives."

"Dick, Dick," remonstrated Violet, "how you forget! or is it professional jealousy? Have we not been careful to bring along with us one of the very physicians who have had charge of Chester's case?"

"Why, sure enough!" exclaimed Dick. "Harold, old fellow, I beg your pardon! and to make amends, should I get sick I shall certainly have you called in at once."

"Which will quite make amends," returned Harold, laughing; "as it will give me a good opportunity to punish your impertinence in ignoring my claims as one of the family physicians."

"Ah!" returned Dick, "I perceive that my wiser plan will be to keep well."

There was a general laugh, a moment's pause, then Robert, sending a smiling glance in Sidney's direction, said, "Now, dear friends and relatives, Sid and I have a communication to make. We have decided to follow the good example set us by our brother and sister--Maud and Dick--and so we expect in two or three weeks to take each other for better or for worse."

The announcement caused a little surprise to most of those present, but everyone seemed pleased; thinking it a suitable match in every way.

"I think you have chosen wisely--both of you," said Grandma Elsie, "and I hope there are many years of happiness in store for you; happiness and usefulness. And, Chester," turning to him, "remember that these doors are wide open to you at all times. Come back when you will and stay as long as you will."

"Thank you, cousin; you are most kindly hospitable," Chester said with a gratified look and smile. "The two places are so near together that I can readily divide my time between them; which--both being so attractive--is certainly very fortunate for me."

"And for all of us," said Violet; "as we shall be able to see more of each other than we could if farther apart."

"Yes; I shall hope and expect to see you all coming in every day," added her mother with hospitable cordiality.

"Thank you, Cousin Elsie," said Maud, "but, though it is delightful to come here, we must not let it be altogether a one-sided affair. Please remember to return our visits whenever you find it convenient and pleasant to do so."

With that they took leave and departed, and a little later those constituting the family for the time bade each other good-night, and most of them retired to their sleeping apartments.

Not quite all of them, however. Max, Evelyn, and Lucilla stepped out upon the veranda again, Max remarking, "The grounds are looking bewitchingly beautiful in the moonlight; suppose we take a little stroll down to the bayou."

"You two go if you like, but I want to have a word or two with papa," said Lucilla, glancing toward her father, who was standing quietly and alone at some little distance, seemingly absorbed in gazing upon the beauties of the landscape.

"Well, we will not be gone long," said Evelyn, as she and Max descended the steps while Lucilla glided softly in her father's direction.

He did not seem aware of her approach until she was close at his side, and laying a hand on his arm, said in her low, sweet tones:

"I have come for my dear father's good-night caresses, and to hear anything he may have to say to his eldest daughter."

"Ah, that is right," he said, turning and putting an arm about her and drawing her into a close embrace. "I hope all goes well with you, dear child. If not, your father is the very one to bring your troubles to."

"Thank you, dear papa," she said; "if I had any troubles I should certainly bring them to you; but I have not. Oh, I do think I am the happiest girl in the land! with your dear love and Chester's too. And Max with us again; and all of us well and in this lovely, lovely place!"

"Yes, we have a great deal to be thankful for," he returned. "But you will miss Chester, now that he has left here for Torriswood."

"Oh, not very much," she said with a happy little laugh; "for he has assured me that he will be here at least a part of every day; the ride or walk from Torriswood being not too long to be taken with pleasure and profit."

"And doubtless some of the time you will be there. By the way, you should give Sidney something handsome as a wedding present. You may consider what would be suitable and likely to please, consult with the other ladies, and let your father know what the decision is--that he may get the article, or supply the means."

"Thank you ever so much, father dear," she replied in grateful tones, "but you have given me such a generous supply of pocket money that I don't think I shall need to call upon you for help about this. But I shall ask your advice about what the gift shall be and be sure not to buy anything of which you do not approve."

"Spoken like my own dear, loving daughter," he said approvingly, and with a slight caress. "By the way, did Robert Johnson's bit of news make my daughter and her lover a trifle jealous that their engagement must be so long a one?"

"Not me, papa; I am entirely willing--yes, very glad--to be subject to your orders; very loath to leave the dear home with you and pass from under your care and protection. Oh, I sometimes feel as if I could never do it. But then I say to myself, 'But I shall always be my dear father's child and we need not--we will not love each other the less because another claims a share of my affection.' Is that not so, papa?"

"Yes, daughter; and I do not believe anything can ever make either one of us love the other less. But it is growing late and about time for my eldest daughter to be seeking her nest, if she wants to be up with the birds in the morning and ready to share a stroll with her father through these beautiful grounds before breakfast."

"Yes, sir; but, if you are willing, I should like to wait for Evelyn. She and Max will be in presently, I think. Papa, I do think they have begun to be lovers, and I am glad; for I should dearly love to have Eva for a sister."

"And I should not object to having her for a daughter," returned the captain, with a pleased little laugh. "And you are not mistaken, so far as Max is concerned. He asked me to-day if I were willing that he should try to win the dear girl, and I told him most decidedly so; that I heartily wished him success in his wooing. Though, as in your case, I think

marriage would better be deferred for a year or two."

"Yes, Max would be quite as much too young for a bridegroom as I for a bride," she said with a slight and amused laugh; "and I don't believe he would disregard his father's advice. All your children love you dearly and have great confidence in your opinion on every subject, father dear."

"As I have in their love and willingness to be guided by me," the captain responded in a tone of gratification. "You may wait for Evelyn. I think she and Max will be in presently. Ah, yes; see they are turning this way now."

Max had given his arm to Evelyn as they left the house, and crossing the lawn together they strolled slowly along the bank of the bayou.

"Oh, such a beautiful night as it is!" exclaimed Evelyn, "and the air is so soft and balmy one can hardly realize that in our more northern homes cold February reigns."

"No," said Max, "and I am glad we are escaping the blustering March winds that will soon be visiting that section. Still, for the year round I prefer that climate to this."

"Yes; but it is very pleasant to be able to go from one section to another as the seasons change," said Eva. "I think we are very fortunate people in being able to do it."

"Yes," returned Max, "but after all one's happiness depends far more upon being in congenial society and with loved ones than upon climate, scenery--or anything else. Eva," and he turned to her as with sudden determination, "I--I think I can never again be happy away from you. I love you and want you for my own. You have said you would like to be my father's daughter, and I can make you that if you will only let me. Say, dearest, oh, say that you will let me--that you will be mine--my own dear little wife."

"Max, oh, Max," she answered in low, trembling tones, "I--I am afraid you don't know me quite as I am--that you would be disappointed--would repent of having said what you have."

"Never, never! if you will only say yes; if you will only promise to be mine--my own love, my own dear little wife." And putting an arm about her he drew her close, pressing an ardent kiss upon her lips.

She did not repulse him, and continuing his endearments and entreaties he at length drew from her an acknowledgment that she returned his love.

Then presently they turned their steps toward the mansion, as happy a pair as could be found in the whole length and breadth of the land.

Captain Raymond and Lucilla were waiting for them, and Max, leading Evelyn to his father, said in joyous tones, "I have won a new daughter for you, father, and a dear sweet wife for myself. At least she has promised to be both to us one of these days."

"Ah, I am well pleased," the captain said, taking Eva's hand in his, and bending down to give her a fatherly caress. "I have always felt that I should like to take her into my family and do a father's part by her."

"Oh, captain, you are very, very kind," returned Eva, low and feelingly; "there is nobody in the wide world whose daughter I should prefer to be."

"And oh, Eva, I shall be so glad to have you really my sister!" exclaimed Lucilla, giving her friend a warm embrace. "Max, you dear fellow, I'm ever so glad and so much obliged to you."

"You needn't to be, sis. Eva is the one deserving of thanks for accepting one so little worthy of her as this sailor brother of yours," returned Max, with a happy laugh.

"Yes, we will give her all the credit," said the captain; "and hope that you, my son, will do your best to prove yourself worthy of the prize you have won. And now, my dears, it is high time we were all retiring to rest; in order that we may have strength and spirits for the duties and pleasures of to-morrow."

Evelyn and Lucilla were sharing a room communicating directly with the one occupied by Grace and little Elsie, and that opened into the one where the captain and Violet slept.

In compliance with the captain's advice the young girls at once retired to their room to seek their couches for the night; but first they indulged in a bit of loving chat.

"Oh, Eva," Lucilla exclaimed, holding her friend in a loving embrace, "I am so glad, so very, very glad that we are to be sisters. And Max I am sure will make you a good, kind husband. He has always been the best and dearest of brothers to me--as well as to Grace and the little ones."

"Yes, I know it," said Evelyn softly. "I know too that your father has always been the best and kindest of husbands and that Max is very much like him."

"And you love Max?"

"How could I help it?" asked Evelyn, blushing as she spoke. "I thought it was as a dear brother I cared for him, till--till he asked me to--to be his wife; but then I knew better. Oh, it was so sweet to learn that he loved me so! and I am so happy! I am not the lonely girl I was this morning--fatherless and motherless and without brother or sister. Oh, I have them all now--except the mother," she added with a slight laugh--"for of course your Mamma Vi is much too young to be that to me."

"Yes; as she is to be a mother to Max, Gracie, and me. But with such a father as ours one could do pretty well without a mother. Don't you think so?"

"Yes; he seems to be father and mother both to those of his children who have lost their mother."

"He is indeed. But now I must obey his last order by getting to bed as quickly as I can."

"I, too," laughed Evelyn; "it seems really delightful to have a father to obey." She ended with a slight sigh, thinking of the dear father who had been so long in the better land.

CHAPTER IX.

Lucilla woke at her usual early hour, rose at once, and moving so quietly about as not to disturb Evelyn's slumbers, attended to all the duties of the time, then went softly from the room and down to the front veranda, where she found her father pacing slowly to and fro.

"Ah, daughter," he said, holding out his hand with a welcoming smile, "good-morning. I am glad to see you looking bright and well;" and drawing her into his arms he gave her the usual welcoming caress.

"As I feel, papa," she returned, "and I hope you too are quite well."

"Yes; entirely so. It is a lovely morning and I think we will find a stroll along the bank of the bayou very enjoyable. However, I want you to eat a bit of something first; and here is Aunt Phillis with oranges prepared in the usual way for an early morning lunch," he added as an elderly negress stepped from the doorway bearing a small silver waiter on which was a dish of oranges ready for eating.

"Yes, Massa Captain, and I hopes you, sah, and Miss Lu kin eat what's heah; dere's plenty moah for de res' ob de folks when dey gets out o' dere beds."

"Yes," said the captain, helping Lucilla and himself, "there is always a great abundance of good cheer where your Miss Elsie is at the head of affairs."

"Father," Lucilla said as they set off across the lawn, "I am so pleased that Max and Eva are engaged. I should prefer her for a sister-in-law to anyone else; for I have always loved her dearly since we first met."

"Yes; I can say the same; she is a dear girl, and Max could have done nothing to please me better," was the captain's answering remark.

"And she loves you, father," returned Lucilla, smiling up into his eyes; "which of course seems very strange to me."

"Ah? although I know you to be guilty of the very same thing yourself," he returned with an assured smile and pressing affectionately the hand he held in his.

"Ah, but having been born your child, how can I help it?" she asked with a happy little laugh. Then went on, "Father, I've been thinking how it would do for you to make that house you have been talking of building near your own, big enough for two families--Max's and Eva's, Chester's and mine."

"Perhaps it might do," he answered pleasantly, "but it is hardly necessary to consider the question yet."

"No, sir," she returned. "Oh, I am glad I do not have to leave my sweet home in my father's house for months or maybe years yet. I do so love to be with you that I don't know how I can ever feel willing to leave you; even for Chester, whom I do really love very dearly."

"And I shall find it very hard to have you leave me," he said. "But we expect to be near enough to see almost as much of each other as we do now."

"Yes, papa, that's the pleasant part of it," she said with a joyous look; then went on, "Chester has been talking to me about plans for the house, but I tell him that, as you said just now, it is hardly time to think about them yet."

"There would be no harm in doing so, however," her father said; "no harm in deciding just what you want before work on it is begun. I should like to make it an ideal home for my dear eldest daughter."

"Thank you, father dear," she said. "I do think you are just the kindest father ever anyone had."

"I have no objection to your thinking so," he returned with a pleased smile; then went on to speak of some plans for the building that had occurred to him. "We will examine the plans," he said, "and try to think in what respect each might be improved. I intend my daughter's home to be as convenient, cosy, and comfortable as possible; and you must not

hesitate to suggest any improvement that may occur to you."

"Thank you, papa; how good and kind you are to me! Oh, I wish I had been a better daughter to you--never wilful or disobedient."

"Dear child, you are a great comfort to me and have been for years past," he said; then went on speaking of the plans that he had been considering.

In the meantime they had walked some distance along the bank of the bayou, and glancing at his watch the captain said it was time to return, as it was not far from the breakfast hour, and probably they would find most, if not all of the others ready for and awaiting the summons to the table.

Lucilla had scarcely left her sleeping apartment when Eva awoke, and seeing that the sun was shining, arose and made a rapid toilet; careful, though--thinking of Max and his interest in her--that it should be neat and becoming.

She descended the stairs just as the captain and Lucilla were approaching the house on their return from their walk; and Max was waiting on the veranda while most of the other guests had gathered in the nearest parlor. Eva stepped out upon the veranda and Max came swiftly to meet her.

"My darling!" he said, low and tenderly, putting his arm about her and giving her an ardent kiss, "my own promised one. You are lovelier than ever. A treasure far beyond my deserts. But as you have given your dear self to me you are mine; and let this seal our compact," slipping upon her finger, as he spoke, a ring set with a very large and brilliant diamond.

"Oh, how lovely!" she exclaimed, looking at it and then lifting to his face eyes filled with love and joy. "It is very beautiful, dear Max, valuable for that reason, but still more for being the emblem of your dear love--love that makes me the happiest girl in the land."

"As yours makes me the happiest man. Ah, Eva dear, I am not worthy of you."

"Ah," she laughed, "I shall take your opinion on most subjects, but not on that. Here comes your father and Lu."

"Good-morning," they said, coming up the steps, the captain adding in jesting tones, "Ah, Max, my son, you seem to be making an early return to the business begun yesterday."

"And something more, captain," Eva said, displaying his gift. "Is it not lovely?"

"Oh, beautiful!" exclaimed Lucilla.

"As handsome a diamond as ever I saw," remarked the captain, examining it critically; "but none too handsome or expensive for a gift to my new daughter that is to be," he added with a smile, and imprinting a kiss upon the small white hand which wore the ring. "Shall we join the others in the parlor now? and will you let Max tell them of his good fortune? You will neither of you, surely, wish to keep it a secret from friends so near and dear."

"I do not," said Max; "but it shall be just as you decide, Eva dear," he added in low and tender tones, drawing her hand within his arm as he spoke.

"I think your--our father's opinions are always right, Max," she said with a smile and a blush.

"Will you go in first, father? you and Lu--and we will follow," said Max, and the captain at once, taking Lucilla's hand in his, led the way.

"Good-morning to you all, friends and relatives," was his cheerful-toned and smiling address as he entered the room, "I hope you are all well and in good spirits."

Then, stepping aside, he allowed Max to pass him with the blushing Evelyn on his arm.

He led her up to Mrs. Travilla, saying, "Good-morning, Grandma Elsie. I want to introduce to you my future wife. For this dear girl has, to my great joy, promised to become that one of these days."

"Ah! is that so, Max? I know of nothing that could please me better," exclaimed that dear lady, rising to her feet and bestowing a warm embrace upon the blushing, happy-faced Evelyn.

Violet was beside them in an instant, exclaiming in joyous tones, "Oh, Eva and Max! how glad I am! for I am sure you were made for each other, and will be very happy together."

"And are you willing now to let me be the captain's daughter?" asked Eva, with a charming blush, accompanied by a slightly roguish laugh.

"Yes; seeing that Max calls me Mamma Vi, and you are really younger than he," was Violet's laughing reply.

But Grace, little Elsie, and the others were crowding around with expressions of surprise and pleasure and many congratulations and good wishes. For everybody who knew them loved both Max and Eva.

But now came the call to breakfast and they repaired to the dining room and gathered about the table, as cheerful and gay a party as could be found in the whole length and breadth of the land.

"You seem likely to have a rapid increase in your family, captain," said Dr. Harold Travilla, with a smiling glance directed toward Lucilla, Max, and Eva, seated near together.

"Some time hence," returned the captain pleasantly. "I consider them all young enough to wait a little, and they are dutifully willing to do as I desire."

"As they certainly should be, considering what a good and kind father you are, sir, and how young they are."

"And how pleasant are the days of courtship," added Mr. Lilburn; "as no doubt they will prove with them."

"And how wise as well as kind our father is," said Max, giving the captain an ardently appreciative look and smile; "how patiently and earnestly he has striven to bring his children up for usefulness and happiness in this world and the next."

"That is true," said Violet. "I think no one ever had a better father than yours, Max."

"And certainly no one had a more appreciative wife or children than I," remarked Captain Raymond, with a smile. "We seem to have formed a mutual admiration society this morning."

"Surely the very best kind of society for families to form among themselves," laughed Herbert.

"And I like the way our young people are pairing off," remarked Mr. Dinsmore; "the matches arranged for among them seem to be very suitable. By the way, Elsie, we must be planning for some wedding gifts for Bob and Sidney."

"Yes, sir," replied Mrs. Travilla, "I have been thinking of that, but have not decided upon any particular article yet. I suppose our better plan will be to buy in New Orleans."

"Yes, I think so. And it will be well for us to have a consultation on the subject, in order to avoid giving duplicates."

"A very good idea, grandpa," said Violet, "and as there are so many of us--counting the Magnolia and Parsonage people, as well as those of Torriswood--might it not be well to have that consultation soon, to determine what each will give, and then set about securing the articles in good season for the wedding, which will probably take place in about three weeks?"

There was a general approval of that idea and it was decided to take prompt measures for carrying it out.

The meal concluded, all gathered in the family parlor and held the usual morning service of prayer, praise, and reading of the Scriptures. That over, they gathered upon the front veranda and were again engaged in discussing the subject of wedding gifts, when Dr. Percival drove up with his wife and her brother. They were most cordially greeted and invited to give their views in regard to the subject which was engaging the thoughts of the others at the moment.

"I think it would be wise for us all to agree as to what each one shall give, so that there will be no duplicates," said Maud.

"Yes," said Violet, "that is the conclusion we have all come to."

"Very good," said Maud. "And Sidney wanted me to consult with you older ladies in regard to the material of her wedding dress--whether it should be silk or satin; and about the veil. They are to be married in the morning, out under

the orange trees."

"Oh, that will be lovely," said Violet.

"Yes; I think so; and it will allow plenty of room," continued Maud; "and we need plenty because our two doctors want to invite so many of their patients lest somebody should feel hurt by being left out. Our idea is to have the ceremony about noon and the wedding breakfast on the lawn immediately after it."

"I like that," said Violet. "As to the wedding-dress question--suppose we send to New Orleans for samples, let Sidney choose from them and order the quantity she wants?"

"That strikes me as a very good idea," said Chester; "and I want it distinctly understood that I pay for this wedding dress. I had no opportunity to do a brother's part by Maud at the time of her marriage, but I insist that I shall be allowed to do so by this only remaining sister."

"Yes, Chester, you and I will both insist upon being allowed our rights this time," laughed Dick; "especially as there will be no single sister left to either of us."

"And between you, and with the other relatives to help, Sidney will fare well, I hope and believe," remarked Mr. Dinsmore with a smile.

"Chester," said Lucilla in a low aside, "I want your help in choosing my gift for your sister. I have the greatest confidence in your judgment and taste."

"Thank you, dearest," he returned with a pleased smile. "I shall be very glad to give my opinion for what it is worth."

"I presume you have sent or will promptly send word to Frank that his sister is about to marry?" Mr. Dinsmore remarked in a tone between assertion and inquiry.

"We have written," replied Dick, "but are not at all certain that the letter will reach him in time, as he may have left Florida before it could be received."

"I do not quite despair of getting him here in season," remarked Chester. "I think we will hear of his whereabouts in time to send him a telegram."

Just at that moment the Magnolia carriage was seen coming up the driveway with Mr. and Mrs. Embury in it.

They had come to consult with the Viamede relatives and friends in regard to preparations for the approaching wedding and suitable and desirable gifts for the bride; for Mrs. Embury, being own sister to Dr. Percival and half-sister to Dr. Robert Johnson, felt particularly interested and desirous to do her full share in helping the young couple with their preparations for making a home for themselves.

"Do they intend to go to housekeeping?" she asked of Maud.

"It is hardly decided yet," replied Maud. "We are trying to persuade them that it will be best for us all to continue to be one family. I think that will be the way for a time at least; and when we tire of that we can easily occupy the house as two families. It is large enough and so planned that it can readily be used in that way."

"A very good thing," remarked Mr. Embury. "I think you will be the more likely to agree if you do not feel that you are shut up to the necessity of remaining one family."

"You have hardly sent out your invitations yet?" Molly said half inquiringly.

"Only to the more distant relatives," replied Maud. "Of course we cannot expect that they will all come, but we did not want to neglect any of them."

"We must arrange to accommodate them if they should come," said Molly, "and I hope most of them will. Now about making purchases--of wedding gifts, wedding finery, and so forth. New Orleans will of course be our best place for shopping if we want to see the goods before buying. Does anybody feel inclined to go there and attend to the matter?"

There was silence for a moment. Then Captain Raymond said, "The *Dolphin* and I are at the service of any one--or any number--who would like to go."

Both Maud and Molly thought themselves too busy with home preparations, and after some discussion it was finally decided that Mrs. Travilla, Violet, and the captain, Eva and Max, Lulu and Chester, Grace and Harold should form the deputation and that they would go the next Monday morning--this being Saturday. That matter settled, the Emburys and Percivals took their departure.

Then a thought seemed to strike Grandma Elsie. "Annis," she said, turning to her cousin, "cannot you and Cousin Ronald go with us? I wish you would."

"Why, yes; if you want us I think we can," laughed Annis, turning an inquiring look upon her husband.

"If you wish it, my dear," he answered pleasantly. "I always enjoy being with the cousins." And so it was decided they would be of the party.

CHAPTER X.

"Now, my daughters, Lucilla and Grace, if you have any preparations to make for your trip to New Orleans, my advice is that you attend to them at once," Captain Raymond said when their callers had gone.

"Yes, sir," they both returned, making prompt movement to obey; Lucilla adding, "though I am sure we have but little to do."

"And what are your directions to me, Captain Raymond? or am I to be left entirely to my own devices?" laughed Violet.

"I think my wife is wise enough to be safely so left," he replied in his usual pleasant tones, and with a look of fond appreciation; "and perhaps might give some advice to my daughters," he added.

"And now I think of it, perhaps it might be well to consult with them in regard to some matters," said Violet, and hurried away after the girls, who had gone up to their sleeping apartments.

"Have not you some preparations to make also, Elsie?" asked Mr. Dinsmore of his daughter.

"Very little," she answered with a smile; "only some packing that my maid can do in a few minutes. Ah, there is someone wanting to speak to me, I think," as an elderly negro came out upon the veranda, bowed to the company in general, then looked toward her with a sort of pleading expression, as if he had a petition to offer.

She rose and went to him, asking in kindly inquiring tone, "What is it, Uncle Joe?"

"Ise come to ax a favor, mistiss," he replied, bowing low. "Ole Aunt Silvy she mighty porely--mos' likely gwine die befo' many days--an' she doan pear to feel pow'ful sure ob de road for to git to de bes' place on de furder side ob de river. She says Miss Elsie knows da way and maybe she come and 'struct her how to find it."

"Indeed I shall be very glad if I can help her to find it," Elsie answered with emotion. "I will go with you at once." Then turning to her son, "Harold," she said, "Uncle Joe reports a woman at the quarter as very ill; will you go down there with me and see if your medical skill can give her any relief?"

"Certainly, mother dear;" replied Harold, hastening to her side; and excusing herself to her guests and taking her son's arm, Mrs. Travilla at once set off for the quarter, Uncle Joe following respectfully at a little distance, ready to point out the cabin where the ailing negress lay.

They found her tossing about on her bed, moaning and groaning. "Oh, mistiss," she cried as they entered, "you's berry good comin' fo' to see dis po' ole darky. Ise pow'ful glad for to see you, mistiss, an' de young massa too. Uncle Joe, set out dat cheer fo' de mistiss and dat oder one for de young massa."

Uncle Joe hastened to do her bidding, while Harold felt her pulse and questioned her in regard to her illness.

She complained of misery in her head, misery in her back, and being "pow'ful weak," finishing up with the query, "Is I gwine die dis day, suh?"

"I think not," he replied, "you may live for weeks or months. But life is very uncertain with us all, and I advise you to promptly make every preparation for death and eternity."

"Dat's what I gwine do when mistiss tell me how," she groaned, with a look of keen distress directed toward Mrs. Travilla.

"I will try to make the way plain to you," that lady returned in compassionate tones. "It is just to come to the Lord Jesus confessing that you are a helpless, undone sinner and asking him to help you--to take away the love of sinning and wash you in his own precious blood. The Bible tells us 'He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.' And he says, 'Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.' So that if you come, truly seeking him with all your heart--desiring to be saved, not only from eternal death but from sin and the love of it--he will hear and

save you."

"Won' you pray de good Lawd for dis ole darky, mistiss?" pleaded the woman. "You knows bes' how to say de words, an' dis chile foller you in her heart."

At that Mrs. Travilla knelt beside the bed and offered up an earnest prayer couched in the simplest words, so that the poor ignorant creature on the bed could readily understand and feel it all.

"Dis chile am berry much 'bliged, mistiss," she said, when Mrs. Travilla had resumed her seat by the bedside. "I t'ink de good Lawd hear dat prayer an open de gate ob heaben to ole Silvy when she git dar."

"I hope so indeed," Mrs. Travilla replied. "Put all your trust in Jesus and you will be safe; for he died to save sinners such as you and I. We cannot do anything to save ourselves, but to all who come to him he gives salvation without money and without price. Don't think you can do anything to earn it; it is his free gift."

"But de Lawd's chillens got to be good, mistiss, aint dey?"

"Yes; they are not his children if they do not try to know and do all his holy will. Jesus said, 'If ye love me, keep my commandments.' 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.' We have no right to consider ourselves Christians if we do not try earnestly to keep all his commands, and do all his holy will."

Harold had sat there listening quietly to all his mother said and had knelt with her when she prayed. Now, when she paused for a little, he questioned Aunt Silvy about her ailments, gave her directions for taking some medicine, and said he would send it presently from the house. Mrs. Travilla added that she would send some delicacies to tempt the sickly appetite; then with a few more kindly words they left the cabin, bidding Uncle Joe a kindly good-by as they went.

"You do not think Aunt Silvy really a dying woman, Harold?" his mother said in a tone of inquiry, as they walked on together.

"No, mamma; I shall not be surprised if she lives for years yet," Harold answered cheerily. "No doubt she is suffering, but I think medicine, rest, and suitable food will relieve her and she will probably be about again in a week or two. But preparation for death and eternity can do her no harm."

"No, certainly; to become truly a Christian must add to the happiness--as well as safety--of anyone."

"And you have brought that happiness to many a one, my dear mother," Harold said, giving her a tenderly affectionate look. "How often in thinking of you I recall those words of the prophet Daniel, 'And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.'"

"'Tis a precious promise," she said with emotion. "Oh, my son, make it the business of your life to do that; to help to the healing of souls--the immortal part--even more than that of the frail bodies which must soon die."

"Yes, mother," he said with emotion, "I do try constantly to do that; and it is a great comfort and help to me to know that my dear mother is often asking for me help from on high."

"Yes," she said; "without that none of us could accomplish anything in the way of winning souls for Christ; and every Christian should feel that that is his principal work. This life is so short and the never-ending ages of eternity are so long. 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest.'"

They walked on in silence for a little, then Harold remarked that the air was delightful and a little more extended walk might prove beneficial to them both.

"Yes," replied his mother, "let us take a stroll through the orange orchard; the sight and perfume of the fruit and blossoms are delightful."

"Yes, indeed!" he said, "and you can see, mother, whether everything is properly cared for."

"I expect to find it so," she returned, "as I have every reason to believe my overseer both faithful and competent."

They enjoyed their stroll greatly and she found no reason to change her estimate of the overseer.

It was lunch time when they returned to the house, and on leaving the table some of their party went for a row on the

bayou while the rest chose riding or driving through the beautiful woods. Evelyn and Max, Lucilla and Chester formed the riding party and greatly enjoyed their little excursion. The courting of the two young couples was carried on in a very quiet way, but was none the less satisfactory and enjoyable for that. But all four of them felt a great interest in the approaching wedding and much of their talk as they rode was of it, and what gifts to the bride would be the most appropriate and acceptable.

"Chester, you know you have promised to advise me what to give to Sidney," Lucilla said, with a smile into his eyes.

"You dear girl! so I will and I make that same request of you, for I am sure you know far more about such matters than I do," he returned with a very loverlike look.

"Quite a mistake, Mr. Dinsmore," she laughed. "But I understood you intended to give some part of the trousseau--perhaps the wedding dress."

"Yes; that and pretty much all the rest of it. And I am sure your help will be invaluable in the choice of the various articles."

"Thank you," she said, with a pleased laugh. "It is very nice to have you think so highly of my judgment and taste; but I hope you will let Grandma Elsie and Mamma Vi and Eva assist in the selection."

"Certainly, if you wish it, but I do not promise to let their opinions have as much weight with me as yours."

"No, you needn't," she returned merrily; "it is by no means disagreeable to have you consider mine the most valuable, even though it be really worthless in other people's esteem. It is very possible Sidney might prefer their choice to mine."

"Ah! but she won't have the chance. By the way, your father has a good deal of taste in the line of ladies' dress, has he not?"

"I think so," she returned with a pleased smile; "he has selected many an article of dress for me, and always suited my taste as well as if I had been permitted to choose for myself. What he buys is sure to be of excellent quality and suited to the intended wearer's age, complexion, and needs."

"You are very fond of your father," Chester said with a smile.

"Indeed I am," she returned in an earnest tone. "I believe I give him all the love that should have been divided between him and my mother, had she lived. Mamma Vi calls him my idol; but I don't think I make him quite that. He has at least one rival in my affection," she added with a blush, and in a tone so low that he barely caught the words.

"And I may guess who that is, may I, dearest?" he returned in the same low key and with a look that spoke volumes of love, and joy in the certainty of her affection.

Max and Eva, riding on a trifle faster, were just far enough ahead and sufficiently absorbed in their own private chat to miss this little colloquy. There were some love passages between them also; some talk of what they hoped the future held in store for them when they should be old enough for the dear, honored father to give his consent to their immediate marriage. Neither of them seemed to have a thought of going contrary to his wishes; so strong was their affection for him and their faith in his wisdom and his love for them.

All four greatly enjoyed their ride and returned to their temporary home in fine health and spirits.

Chester had gotten rid of his troublesome cough before landing in Louisiana and was now looking younger and handsomer than he had before that almost fatal wound--a fact which greatly rejoiced the hearts of his numerous relatives and friends. None more so than that of his betrothed, for whose defence he had risked his life.

By the time the Viamede dinner hour had arrived all the pleasure parties had returned and were ready to do justice to the good cheer provided in abundance. And the meal was enlivened by cheerful chat. The evening was spent much as the previous one had been and all retired early, that Sabbath morning might find them rested, refreshed, and ready for the duties and enjoyments of the sacred day.

CHAPTER XI.

Sabbath morning dawned bright and clear and as in former days all the family, old and young, attended church and the pastor's Bible class. And in the afternoon the house and plantation servants collected on the lawn and were addressed by Captain Raymond and Dr. Harold Travilla. Hymns were sung too, and prayers offered.

The services over, the little congregation slowly dispersed; some lingering a few minutes for a shake of the hand and a few kind words from their loved mistress Mrs. Travilla, her father, her son, and Captain Raymond; then as the last one turned to depart, the captain and the doctor walked down to the quarter for a short call upon old Aunt Silvy, still lying in her bed.

Mrs. Travilla had seated herself in the veranda and seemed to be doing nothing but gaze out upon the lovely landscape--the velvety, flower-bespangled lawn, the bayou, and the fields and woods beyond. But the slight patter of little feet drew her attention from that and turning she found Elsie and Ned at her side.

"Grandma, will it be disturbing if I talk to you and ask some questions?" asked the little girl.

"No, dear child, not at all," was the kindly-spoken reply. "I am always glad to help my dear little grandchildren to information when it is in my power. Here is an empty chair on each side of me. Draw them up closely, you and Ned, and seat yourselves and then I hope we can have a nice talk."

"Yes, ma'am; and it will be a pleasant rest too," returned the little girl, as she and her brother followed the directions. "Papa told me once that the meaning of the word Sabbath is rest. But what I wanted particularly to ask about this time, grandma, is the Feast of the Passover. Will you please tell us why it was kept and why they called it that?"

"Surely, my dear children, you have heard the story of the institution of that feast of the Jews called the Passover!" said Grandma Elsie in some surprise. "In the twelfth chapter of Exodus there is a full account of its institution. Every householder in Israel was to take a lamb of a year old, without blemish; and at even on the 14th day of the month it was to be slain. The householder was then to take of the blood of the lamb and sprinkle the door-posts of his house. That was to be a sign to the destroying angel, who was to slay all the firstborn of the Egyptians that night, not to enter and slay here. Then they were to roast the flesh of the lamb and eat it that night with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The lives of the Israelites were saved by the angel passing over, instead of entering the house to destroy life."

"Oh, yes, grandma, I understand," said the little girl. "But why is Christ called our passover? You know the text--'for even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.'"

"You know," said her grandmother, "that Jesus is often called the 'Lamb of God'; that paschal lamb was a type of Christ and is so spoken of in many Scriptures."

"Thank you, grandma, for telling me," Elsie said gratefully. "And the Jews kept that feast every year from that time till the time of Christ, I suppose. And he kept it too. Wasn't it at that feast that he instituted what we call the Lord's Supper?"

"Yes," replied her grandmother; "he used the bread and wine which were a part of that feast, saying, 'Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.'"

"Oh, grandma, how good and kind he was to shed his blood for us! To die that dreadful, dreadful death of the cross that we might go to heaven!" exclaimed the little girl with tears in her sweet blue eyes. "I do love him for it, and I want to be his servant, doing everything he would have me do."

"That is as we all should feel, dear child," replied her grandmother, bending down to press a kiss upon the rosy cheek.

"I do, grandma," said Ned. "Do you think the Lord Jesus takes notice that we love him and want to do as he tells us?"

"Yes, Neddle dear, I am quite sure of it," replied his grandmother. "The Psalmist says, 'Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, oh, Lord, thou knowest it altogether.'"

"It is so good, grandma, that God doesn't think us not worth noticing," said Elsie; "that he sees and cares for us all the time and lets us ask his help whenever we will."

"It is indeed good, my child, and we are sure of it. Jesus said, 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.'"

"I think God was very good to give us our father and mother and grandma; brother Max too and our nice sisters and-- and all the rest of the folks," remarked Ned reflectively.

"I am very glad you appreciate all those blessings, my little son," said his mother's voice close at his side.

"Yes, mamma. And oh, mamma! can't Elsie and I go along with the rest of you to New Orleans to-morrow?"

"I think so," she replied with a smile. "I am pretty sure your father will say yes if you ask him. Then he will have all his children along, and that is what he likes."

"He and Uncle Harold went down to the quarter," said Elsie, "and here they come now."

Ned hurried to meet them, preferred his request, and the next moment came running back with the joyful announcement, "Papa says, yes we may. Oh, Elsie, aren't you glad?"

"Yes," she said. "I always like to be with papa and mamma and grandma, and it's ever so pleasant to be on our yacht."

"Specially when we have both papa and brother Max to make it go all right," said Ned.

"You think it takes the two of us, do you?" laughed his father, taking a seat near his wife and drawing the little fellow in between his knees.

"No, papa; I know you could do it all by your own self," returned Ned. "But when brother Max is there you don't have to take the trouble to mind how things are going all the time."

"No, that's a fact," returned his father, with a pleased laugh. "Brother Max can be trusted, and knows how to manage that large vessel quite as well as papa does. But what will you and Elsie do while we older people are shopping?"

"Why, my dear, there will be so many of us that we will hardly all want to go at once," remarked Violet. "I think there will always be someone willing to stay with the little folks."

"Yes, mamma," said Grace, who had drawn near, "I shall. Shopping is apt to tire me a good deal, and I think I shall prefer to spend the most of the time on the *Dolphin*."

"Yes, daughter, it will certainly be better for you," her father said, giving her an appreciative smile. "You can go when you wish and feel able, and keep quiet and rest when you will. But we will leave the rest of our talk about the trip until to-morrow, choosing for the present some subject better suited to the sacredness of the day. I will now hear the texts which my children have got ready to recite to me."

"Yes, sir," said Grace. "Shall I go and tell Max and Lu that you are ready?"

"You may," the captain answered and she went, to return in a moment with her brother and sister, Chester and Eva.

"Why, I have quite a class," the captain said, with a look of pleasure.

"I for my part esteem it a privilege to be permitted to make one of the number, captain," said Chester.

"As we all do, I think," said Eva.

"Thank you both," said the captain. "Our principal subject to-day is grace; God's grace to us. Can you give me a text that teaches it, Chester?"

"Yes, sir. Paul says in his epistle to the Ephesians, 'That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.'"

"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," quoted Max in his turn.

Then Evelyn, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all."

Lucilla's turn came next and she repeated a text from 2d Peter: "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen."

"I have two texts that seem to go well together," said Violet. "The first is in Proverbs, 'Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly.' The other is in James, 'But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud but giveth grace unto the humble.'"

It was Grace's turn and she repeated, with a look of joy, "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. Oh, Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee."

"I have a little one, papa," said his daughter Elsie: "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God."

"This is mine and it is short too," said Ned. "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

"Yes, my boy, that is a short verse, but long enough if you will be careful to put it in practice," said his father.

Grandma Elsie, sitting near, had been listening attentively to the quotations of the younger people and now she joined in with one: "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.' 'Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.'"

As she ceased, Cousin Ronald, who had drawn near, joined in the exercise, repeating the text, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?... Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid," then, at the captain's request, followed them with a few pertinent remarks. A little familiar talk from the captain followed and then came the call to the tea table. All retired early to their beds that night that they might be ready to leave them betimes in the morning and set out in good season on their trip to the city. They succeeded in so doing, all feeling well and in the best of spirits.

The weather was fine, their voyage a prosperous one without any remarkable adventure, and the shopping proved quite as interesting and enjoyable as any of the shoppers had expected.

They all made the yacht their headquarters while they stayed, and the little ones hardly left it at all. They had always a companion; generally it was Grace, and she exerted herself for their entertainment--playing games with them and telling them stories or reading aloud from some interesting book.

All enjoyed the return voyage to Viamede and the warm welcome from Grandpa and Grandma Dinsmore on their arrival there. Then it was a pleasure to display their purchases and hear the admiring comments upon them. The bridal veil and the material for the wedding dress were greatly admired and all the purchases highly approved of by both these grandparents and the relatives from the Parsonage, Magnolia, and Torriswood, all of whom came in early in the evening, full of interest in the results of the shopping expedition.

They had a pleasant social time together, the principal topic of conversation being the bride's trousseau and so forth, and the various arrangements for the coming festivities to be had in connection with the approaching marriage.

Chester had been very generous in providing the trousseau, and Sidney was very grateful to him. Each of the Raymonds made her a gift of a handsome piece of silver, Grandma Elsie adding a beautiful set of jewelry. Sidney was delighted with her gifts. "Oh, Ches, but you are good to me!" she exclaimed with glad tears in her eyes; "and all the rest of you, dear friends and relatives. This jewelry, Cousin Elsie, is lovely, and I shall always think of you when I wear it. All the silver is just beautiful too, and indeed everything. I feel as rich as a queen."

"And when you have Cousin Bob added to all the rest, how do you suppose you are going to stand it?" laughed Harold.

"Oh, as the gifts are partly to him, he will help me to stand it,"
Sidney returned, with a smiling glance at her affianced.

"I'll do my best," he answered, returning the smile.

"You must not allow yourselves to be overwhelmed yet," remarked Mr. Embury, "when not half the relatives and friends have been heard from."

"And I'll warrant my sister Betty will remember my bride with something worth while," remarked the bridegroom-elect.

"Yes, she will; I haven't a doubt of it," said Mrs. Embury; "and as they are in good circumstances it will no doubt be something handsome."

"Of course it will," said Dick. "Sister Betty was always a generous soul, taking delight in giving."

"Being related to you both, Bob and Sid, I want to give you something worth while. What would you like it to be?" said Mrs. Keith.

"Oh, never mind, Isa," exclaimed Dr. Johnson, jocosely, "your husband is to tie the knot, and if he does it right--as no doubt he will--he will give me my bride, and that will be the best, most valuable gift any one could bestow upon me."

"Yes," laughed Isa; "but it won't hurt you to have something else--something from me too."

"Oh, by the way, why shouldn't we have a triple wedding?" exclaimed Maud. "I think it would be just lovely! It struck me so when I heard yesterday of the engagement of Max and Eva."

At that the young people colored, the girls looking slightly embarrassed, but no one spoke for a moment.

"Don't you think it would make a pretty wedding, Cousin Vi?" asked Maud.

"I dare say it would, Maud," replied Mrs. Raymond, "but our young folks are too young yet for marriage, my husband thinks, and should all wait for a year or two. Besides," she added with playful look and tone, "there would be hardly time to make ready a proper trousseau for either, and certainly not for both."

"Oh, well, I hardly expected to be able to bring it about," returned Maud, "but I certainly do think it would be pretty."

"So it would," said Mrs. Embury; "very pretty indeed, but that wouldn't pay for hurrying anyone into marriage before he or she is ready."

"No," said Cousin Ronald, "it is always best to make haste slowly in matters so vitally important."

"Wouldn't you be willing to make haste quickly in this instance, dearest?" queried Chester in a low aside to Lucilla; for as usual they sat near together.

"No," she returned with a saucy smile, "I find courting times too pleasant to be willing to cut them short; even if father would let me; and I know he would not."

"And he won't let the other couple; which is good, since misery loves company."

"Ah, is courting me such hard work?" she asked, knitting her brows in pretended anger and disgust.

"Delightful work, but taking you for my very own would be still better."

"Ah, but you see that Captain Raymond considers me one of the little girls who are still too young to leave their fathers."

"Well, you know I am pledged never to take you away from him."

"Yes, I am too happy in the knowledge of that ever to forget it. But do you know I for one should not fancy being married along with other couples--one ceremony serving for all. I should hardly feel sure the thing had been thoroughly and rightly done."

"Shouldn't you?" laughed Chester. "Well, then, we will have the minister and ceremony all to ourselves whenever we do have it."

Just then the lady visitors rose to take leave, and Chester, who had promised to return with Dr. and Mrs. Percival to Torriswood for the night, had time for but a few words with Lucilla. "I hope to be here again to-morrow pretty soon after breakfast," he said. "I grudge every hour spent away from your side."

"Really, you flatter me," she laughed. "I doubt if anybody else appreciates my society so highly."

"You are probably mistaken as to that," he said. "I am quite aware that I am not your only admirer, and I feel highly flattered by your preference for me."

"Do you?" she laughed. "Well, I think it would not be prudent to tell you how great it is--if I could. Good-night," giving him her hand, which he lifted to his lips.

As usual she had a bit of chat with her father before retiring to her sleeping apartment for the night, and in that she repeated something of this little talk with Chester. "Yes, he is very much in love, and finds it hard to wait," said the captain; "but I am no more ready to give up my daughter than he is to wait for her."

"I am in no hurry, papa," said Lucilla, "I do so love to be with you and under your care--and authority," she added with a mirthful, loving look up into his eyes.

"Yes, daughter dear, but do you expect to escape entirely from that last when you marry?"

"No, sir; and I don't want to. I really do love to be directed and controlled by you--my own dear father."

"I think no man ever had a dearer child than this one of mine," he said with emotion, drawing her into his arms and caressing her with great tenderness. He held her close for a moment, then releasing her bade her go and prepare for her night's rest.

Max and Evelyn were again sauntering along near the bayou, enjoying a bit of private chat before separating for the night.

"What do you think of Maud's proposition, Eva?" he asked.

"It seems hardly worth while to think about it at all, Max," she replied in a mirthful tone; "at least not if one cares for a trousseau; or for pleasing your father in regard to the time of--taking that important step; tying that knot that we cannot untie again should we grow ever so tired of it."

"I have no fear of that last so far as my feelings are concerned, dearest, and I hope you have none," he said in a tone that spoke some slight uneasiness.

"Not the slightest," she hastened to reply. "I think we know each other too thoroughly to indulge any such doubts and fears. Still, as I have great faith in your father's wisdom, and courting times are not by any means unpleasant, I feel in no haste to bring them to an end. You make such a delightful lover, Max, that the only thing I feel in a hurry about is the right to call the dear captain father."

"Ah, I don't wonder that you are in haste for that," returned Max. "I should be sorry indeed not to have that right. He is a father to love and to be proud of."

"He is indeed," she responded. "I fell in love with him at first sight and have loved him more and more ever since; for the better one knows him the more admirable and lovable he seems."

"I think that is true," said Max. "I am very proud of my father and earnestly desire to have him proud of me."

"Which he evidently is," returned Eva, "and I don't wonder at it."

"Thank you," laughed Max; then added more gravely, "I hope I may never do anything to disgrace him."

"I am sure you never will," returned Eva in a tone that seemed to say such a thing could not be possible. "Had we not better retrace our steps to the house now?" she asked the next moment.

"Probably," said Max. "I presume father would say I ought not to deprive you of your beauty sleep. But these private

walks and chats are so delightful to me that I am apt to be selfish about prolonging them."

"And your experience on shipboard has accustomed you to late hours, I suppose?"

"Yes; to rather irregular times of sleeping and waking. A matter of small importance, however, when one gets used to it."

"But there would be the rub with me," she laughed, "in the getting used to it."

CHAPTER XII.

"Cousin Ronald, can't you make some fun for us?" asked Ned at the breakfast table the next morning. "We haven't had any of your kind since we came here."

"Well, and what of that, youngster? must you live on fun all the time?" asked a rough voice directly behind the little boy.

"Oh! who are you? and how did you come in here?" he asked, turning half round in his chair, in the effort to see the speaker. "Oh, pshaw! you're nobody. Was it you, Cousin Ronald? or was it brother Max?"

"Polite little boys do not call gentlemen nobodies," remarked another voice that seemed to come from a distant corner of the room.

"And I didn't mean to," said Ned, "but the things I want to say will twist up, somehow."

"That bird you are eating looks good," said the same voice; "couldn't you spare me a leg?"

"Oh, yes," laughed Ned, "if you'll come and get it. But one of these little legs wouldn't be much more than a bite for you."

"Well, a bite would be better than no breakfast at all; and somebody might give me one of those nice-looking rolls."

"I'm sure of it if you'll come to the table and show yourself," replied Ned.

"Here I am then," said the voice close at his side.

"Oh, are you?" returned Ned. "Well, help yourself. You can have anything you choose to take."

"Now, Ned, do you call that polite?" laughed Lucilla. "As you invited him to the table you surely ought to help him to what he has asked for."

At that Ned looked scrutinizingly at Cousin Ronald's plate, then at his brother's, and seeing that both were well filled remarked, "I see he's well helped already and oughtn't to be asking for more till he gets that eaten up."

"Oh, you know too much, young man," laughed Max. "It isn't worth while for Cousin Ronald and me to waste our talents upon you."

"Oh, yes, it is, Brother Max," said the little fellow, "for it's fun, even though I do know it's one or the other or both of you."

"Oh, Cousin Ronald," exclaimed Elsie, "can't you make some fun at the wedding, as you did when Cousin Betty was married? I don't remember much of it myself, but I've heard other folks tell about it."

"Why not ask Max instead of me?" queried Mr. Lilburn.

"Oh!" cried the little girl, "I'd like to have both of you do it. It's more fun with two than with only one."

"And it might be well to consult cousins Maud and Dick about it," suggested Grandmā Elsie. "You can do so to-day, as we are all invited to take lunch at Torriswood."

"Are we? oh, that's nice!" exclaimed Elsie, smiling brightly. "You will let us go, papa, won't you?"

"Yes; I expect to take you there."

"And if we all go Cousin Ronald and Max might make some fun for us there. I guess the Torriswood folks would like it," remarked Ned insinuatingly.

"But might not you grow tired--having so much of it?" asked Max.

"No, indeed!" cried the little fellow. "It's too much fun for anybody to get tired of it."

"Any little chap like you, perhaps," remarked the strange voice from the distant corner.

"Pooh! I'm not so very little now," returned Ned.

"Not too little to talk a good deal," laughed Grandpa Dinsmore.

"This is a lovely morning," remarked Dr. Harold, "the roads are in fine condition too, and I think the distance to Torriswood is not too great to make a very pleasant walk for those of us who are young and strong."

"And there are riding horses and conveyances in plenty for any who prefer to use them," added his mother.

Evelyn, Lucilla, and Max all expressed their desire to try the walk, and Grace said, "I should like to try it too;" but both her father and Dr. Harold put a veto upon that, saying she was not strong enough, so must be content to ride.

"Cousin Ronald and brother Max, can't we have some fun there to-day, as well as at the wedding time?" said Ned in his most coaxing tones.

"Possibly, bit laddie," returned the old gentleman pleasantly. "If I am not too auld, your good brother is no' too young."

"But you are the more expert of the two, sir," said Max; "and perhaps it may be the better plan for us both to take part."

"Ah, well, we'll see when the time comes," responded the old gentleman. "I like well to please the bit laddie, if it can be done without vexing or disturbing anybody else."

"I don't think it can do that," observed Ned wisely, "for it's good fun and everybody likes fun. Even my papa does," he added with a smiling glance up into his father's face.

"Yes; when it does not annoy or weary anyone else," the captain said in return.

"Will Chester be over here this morning, Lu?" asked Violet.

"He expected to when he went away last night," was the reply. "But possibly he may not come if he hears that we are to go there."

"I think he is too much a man of his word to be hindered by that," her father said, giving her a reassuring smile.

And he was right, for Chester was with them even a little earlier than usual.

"Maud told me you were all coming over to lunch with her," he said, "but as some of you have never seen the place, I thought you might not object to a pilot, and the exercise would be rather beneficial to me."

"You are right there," said Harold. "You know that as your physician I have prescribed a good deal of outdoor exercise."

"Yes; I have been taking the prescription, too, and I find it beneficial; especially when I am so fortunate as to secure pleasant company." His glance at Lucilla as he spoke seemed to imply that there was none more desirable than hers.

"Then, as the walk is a long one, I would suggest that we start as soon as may suit the convenience of the ladies," said Harold, and Evelyn and Lucilla hastened to make such preparation as they deemed necessary or desirable.

The Parsonage was scarce a stone's throw out of their path and they called there on their way. They owed Isadore a call and were willing to make one upon her sister Virginia also--now making her home at the Parsonage--though she had not as yet called upon them.

They found both ladies upon the veranda. Isadore gave them a joyful welcome, Virginia a cool one, saying, "I should have called upon you before now, but I know poor relations are not apt to prove welcome visitors."

"But I had thought you were making your home at Vamede," said Dr. Harold.

"No; not since Dick and Bob removed to Torriswood. I couldn't think of living on there alone; so came here to Isa, she being my nearest of kin in this part of the world."

Harold thought he did not envy Isa on that account, but prudently refrained from saying so.

Isa invited them to stay and spend the day there, but they declined, stating that they were on their way to Torriswood by invitation.

"Yes," said Virginia; "they can invite rich relations but entirely neglect poor me."

"Why, Virgie," exclaimed Isadore in surprise, "I am sure you have been invited there more than once since you have been here."

"Well, I knew it was only a duty invitation and they didn't really want me; so I didn't go. I have a little more sense than to impose my company upon people who don't really want it."

"I shouldn't think anybody would while you show such an ugly temper," thought Lucilla, but refrained from saying it. She and her companions made but a short call, presently bade good-by and continued on their way to Torriswood.

They received a warm welcome there and were presently joined by the rest of their party from Viamede. There was some lively and animated chat in regard to letters sent and letters received, the making of the wedding dress and various other preparations for the coming ceremony, to all of which little Ned listened rather impatiently; then, as soon as a pause in the conversation gave him an opportunity, he turned to Dr. Percival, saying, "Cousin Dick, wouldn't it be right nice to have a little fun?"

"Fun, Neddie? Why, certainly, my boy; fun is often quite beneficial to the health. But how shall we manage it? have you a good joke for us?"

"No, sir," said Ned, "but you know we have two ventriloquists here and--and I like the kind of fun they make. Don't you?"

"It is certainly very amusing sometimes, and I see no objection if our friends are willing to favor us with some specimens of their skill," was the reply, accompanied by a glance first at Mr. Milburn, then at Max.

"Oh!" exclaimed Maud, "that might be a good entertainment for our wedding guests!"

"Probably," returned her husband, "but if it is to be used then it would be well not to let our servants into the secret beforehand."

"Decidedly so, I should say," said Max. "It would be better to reserve that entertainment for that time."

"But surely it would do no harm to give us a few examples of your skill to-day, when the servants are out of the room," said Maud.

"No, certainly not, if anything worth while could be thought of," said Max; "but it seems to me that it must be quite an old story with all of us here."

"Not to me, brother Max," exclaimed Ned. "And the funny things you and Cousin Ronald seem to make invisible folks say make other people laugh as well as me."

"And laughter is helpful to digestion," said a strange voice, apparently speaking from the doorway. "But should folks digest too well these doctors might find very little to do. So it is not to be wondered at if they object to letting much fun be made."

"But the doctors haven't objected," laughed Dr. Percival, "and I have no fear that work for them will fail even if some of their patients should laugh and grow fat."

"I presume that's what the little fellow that wants the fun has been doing," said the voice; "for as regards fat he is in prime condition."

At that Ned colored and looked slightly vexed. "Papa, am I so very fat?" he asked.

"None too fat to suit my taste, my son," replied the captain, smiling kindly on the little fellow.

"And you wouldn't want to be a bag of bones, would you?" queried the voice.

"No," returned Ned sturdily, "I'd a great deal rather be fat; bones are ugly things any way."

"Good to cover up with fat, but very necessary underneath it," said the voice. "You couldn't stand or walk if you had no bones."

"No; to be sure not; though I never thought about it before," returned Ned. "Some ugly things are worth more, after all, than some pretty ones."

"Very true," said the voice; "so we must not despise anything merely because it lacks beauty."

"Is it you talking, Cousin Ronald, or is it brother Max?" asked Ned, looking searchingly first at one and then at the other.

"No matter which, laddie," said the old gentleman; "and who shall say it hasn't been both of us?"

"Oh, yes, maybe it was! I couldn't tell," exclaimed Ned.

But lunch was now ready and all repaired to the table. The blessing had been asked and all were sitting quietly as Dr. Percival took up a knife to carve a fowl. "Don't, oh, don't!" seemed to come from it in a terrified scream. "I'm all right. No need of a surgeon's knife."

Everyone was startled for an instant, the doctor nearly dropping his knife; then there was a general laugh and the carving proceeded without further objection. The servants were all out of the room at the moment.

"Ah, Cousin Ronald, that reminds me of very old times, when I was a little child," said Violet, giving the old gentleman a mirthful look.

"Ah, yes!" he said, "I remember now that I was near depriving you of your share of the fowl when breakfasting one morning at your father's hospitable board. Have you not yet forgiven that act of indiscretion?"

"Indeed, yes; fully and freely long ago. But it was really nothing to forgive--your intention having been to afford amusement to us all."

"Neddie, shall I help you? are you willing to eat of a fowl that can scream out so much like a human creature?" asked Dr. Percival.

"Oh, yes, Cousin Doctor; 'cause I know just how he did it," laughed the little boy.

Then the talk about the table turned upon various matters connected with the subject of the approaching wedding--whether this or that relative would be likely to come; when he or she might be expected to arrive, and where he entertained; the adornment of the grounds for the occasion; the fashion in which each of the brides's new dresses should be made and what jewelry, if any, she should wear when dressed for the ceremony. Also about a maid of honor and bridesmaids.

"I want to have two or three little flower girls," said Sidney; "and I have thought of Elsie Dinsmore, Elsie Embury, and Elsie Raymond as the ones I should prefer; they are near enough of an age, all related to me and all quite pretty; at least they will look so when handsomely dressed," she added with a laughing look at the one present, who blushed and seemed slightly embarrassed for a moment, but said not a word.

"I highly approve if we can get the other two here in season," said Maud.

"Then for my maid of honor I must have one of you older girls," continued Sidney. "Perhaps I'll want all three. I don't know yet how many groomsmen Robert is going to have."

"Cousin Harold and my friend Max, if they will serve," said Robert, glancing inquiringly at them in turn.

"Thank you, Bob," said Harold; "seeing you are a brother physician--cousin as well--I cannot think of refusing. In fact I consider myself quite honored."

Max also accepted the invitation with suitable words and the talk went on.

"Are you expecting to take a trip?" asked Harold.

"Yes; we talk of going to the Bahamas," said Robert. "It is said to be a delightful winter resort and neither of us has ever been there."

"Then I think you will be likely to enjoy your visit there greatly," responded Harold.

"So we think," said Robert. "But now about groomsmen; I'd like to add your brother Herbert and Sidney's brother Frank if we can get them here, and they are willing to serve. Chester won't, because Lu must not be a bridesmaid, having served twice or thrice already in that capacity--and you know the old saying, 'Three times a bridesmaid never a bride.'"

"I have little doubt of the willingness of the lads if they are here in season," returned Harold; "but I think Herbert's movements will depend largely upon those of Cousin Arthur Conly. It would hardly do for all three of us to absent ourselves from professional duties at the same time."

"But Frank can be spared from his, I suppose?" Robert said inquiringly, turning to Chester as he spoke.

"Yes; for a short time, I think," was Chester's reply.

"Come, let us all go out on the lawn and consult in regard to the best place for having the arch made under which our bridal party are to stand," Maud said, addressing the company in general as they left the table. The invitation was accepted and they spent some time in strolling about under the trees, chatting familiarly; the principal topic being the one proposed by Mrs. Percival, but considering also the question where it would be best to set the tables for the wedding guests.

"It is likely to be a large company," said Maud, "but I think we can accommodate them all comfortably."

"Yes; I should think so," said Grandma Elsie. "Your lawn is large and lovely. I am very glad, Dick, that you secured so beautiful a place."

"Thank you, cousin," he returned, "I think I was fortunate in getting it; as Maud does too. She likes it well."

"And you prefer it to Viamede?"

"Only because it is my own," he answered with a smile. "One could not find a lovelier place than Viamede."

"But you lost the housekeeping of your cousin Virginia by making the change," Harold observed with a humorous look.

"Hardly!" laughed Dick; "she was that but in name. And the change to Isa's housekeeping and companionship must be rather agreeable to her, I should think."

"She seems to me much the more agreeable of the two," said Harold.

"Yes; Isa is a lovely woman. And Virginia has her good qualities, too."

As Torriswood was but little farther from the bayou than Viamede, it was presently decided by the young people that they would return by boat, and upon starting they found it so pleasant that they took a much longer sail, reaching their destination barely in time for dinner.

"Does Sidney's evident happiness in the near approach of her marriage make my little girl unhappy and discontented with her father's decision in regard to hers?" asked Captain Raymond, when Lucilla came to him for the usual bit of good-night chat.

"Oh, no, papa; no indeed!" she exclaimed with a low, happy laugh. "Have you forgotten, or don't you know yet, how dearly that same little girl loves to be with you?"

"Really, I believe she does," he said, caressing her with tenderness, "and though it is undeniably partly for his own--her father's--sake, that he insists upon delay, it is still more for yours--believing as he does that you are yet much too young for the cares and duties of married life. I want you to have a good play-day before going into them," he added, with another caress.

"You dear, kind father!" she said in response. "I could wish to be always a child if so I might be always with you."

"Well, daughter, we may hope for many years together in this world and a blessed eternity together in heaven."

"Yes, papa, there is great happiness in that thought. Oh, I am glad and thankful that God gave me a Christian father."

"And I that I have every reason to believe that my dear eldest daughter has learned to know and love him. To belong to Christ is better than to have the wealth of the world. Riches take to themselves wings and fly away; but he has said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.'"

"Such a sweet, precious promise, father!"

"Yes; it may well relieve us from care and anxiety about the future; especially as taken in connection with that other precious promise, 'As thy days, so shall thy strength be.'"

"Don't you think, papa, that if we always remembered and fully believed the promises of God's word we might--we should be happy under all circumstances?"

"I do indeed," he said emphatically. "We all need to pray as the disciples did, 'Lord increase our faith,' for 'without faith it is impossible to please him.'"

CHAPTER XIII.

The next three weeks passed very delightfully to our friends at Vamede. There were rides, drives, boating, and fishing excursions, not to speak of rambles through the woods and fields and quiet home pleasures. Also the approaching wedding and the preparations for it greatly interested them all, especially the young girls. It was pleasantly exciting to watch the making of the bride's dresses and of their own, intended to be worn on that important occasion. Besides, after a little there were various arrivals of relations and friends to whom invitations had been sent: the whole families from Riverside, Ion, Fairview, the Oaks, the Laurels, Beechwood, and Roselands.

Herbert Travilla would have denied himself the pleasure of the trip in order that Dr. Arthur Conly might take a much-needed rest, but it was finally decided that both might venture to absent themselves from their practice for a short season.

All Grandma Elsie's children and grandchildren were taken in at Vamede, making the house very full, and the rest were accommodated with the other relatives at the Parsonage, Magnolia Hall, and Torriswood; in which last-named place the family from the Oaks were domiciled. It was not until a very few days before that appointed for the wedding that the last of the relatives from a distance arrived.

To the extreme satisfaction of all concerned the wedding day dawned bright and beautiful--not a cloud in the sky. The ceremony was to be at noon, and the guests came pouring in shortly before that hour.

The grounds were looking their loveliest--the grass like emerald velvet bespangled with fragrant flowers of every hue, the trees laden with foliage, some of them--the oranges and magnolias in particular--bearing blossoms; the former their green and golden fruit also. Under these an arch, covered with smilax, had been erected, and from its centre hung a large bell formed of the lovely and fragrant orange blossoms; the clapper made of crimson roses. Under that the bridal party presently took their stand.

First came the three little flower girls--Elsie Dinsmore, Elsie Raymond, and Elsie Embury--dressed in white silk mull, and each carrying a basket of white roses; then the bridesmaids and groomsman--Frank Dinsmore with Corinne Embury, Harold Travilla with Grace Raymond, Herbert Travilla and Mary Embury--the girls all dressed in white and carrying bouquets of smilax and white flowers.

Max had declined to serve on hearing that Eva could not serve with him on account of being still in mourning for her mother.

Lastly came the bride and groom, Sidney looking very charming in a white silk trimmed with abundance of costly lace, wearing a beautiful bridal veil and wreath of fresh and fragrant orange blossoms, and carrying a bouquet of the same in her hand.

The party stood underneath the arch, the bride and groom directly beneath the bell in its centre, while the guests gathered about them, the nearest relatives taking the nearest stations.

Mr. Cyril Keith was the officiating minister. It was a pretty ceremony, but short, and then the congratulations and good wishes began.

Those over, the guests were invited to seat themselves about a number of tables scattered here and there under the trees and loaded with tempting viands. The minister craved a blessing upon the food and the feast began.

An effort had been made to some extent so to seat the guests that relatives and friends would be near each other. The entire bridal party was at one table, the other young people of the connection were pretty close at hand--the older ones and their children not much farther off.

Everybody had been helped and cheery chat, mingled with some mirth, was going on, when suddenly a shrill voice, that seemed to come from the branches overhead, cried out, "What you 'bout, all you folks? Polly wants some breakfast."

Everybody started and looked up into the tree from which the sounds had seemed to come; but no parrot was visible there.

"Why, where is the bird?" asked several voices in tones of surprise. But hardly had the question been asked when another parrot seemed to speak from a table near that at which the bridal party sat. "Polly's hungry. Poor old Polly-- poor old soul!"

"Is that so, Polly? Then just help yourself," said Dr. Percival.

"Polly wants her coffee. Poor old Polly, poor old soul!" came in reply, sounding as if the bird had gone farther down the table.

Then a whistle was heard that seemed to come from some distance among the trees, and hardly had it ceased when there was a loud call, "Come on, my merry men, and let us get our share of this grand wedding feast."

"Tramps about! and bold ones they must be!" exclaimed one of the neighborhood guests.

"Really I hope they are not going to make any trouble!" cried another. "I fear we have no weapons of defence among us; and if we had I for one would be loath to turn a wedding feast into a fight."

"Hark! hark!" cried another as the notes of a bugle came floating on the breeze, the next minute accompanied by what seemed to be the sound of a drum and fife playing a national air, "what, what can it mean? I have heard of no troops in this neighborhood. But that's martial music, and now," as another sound met the ear, "don't you hear the tramp, tramp?"

"Yes, yes, it certainly must be troops. But who or what can have called them out?" asked a third guest, starting to his feet as if contemplating rushing away to try to catch a glimpse of the approaching soldiers.

"Oh, sit down and let us go on with our breakfast," expostulated still another. "Of course they are American troops on some trifling errand in the neighborhood and not going to interfere with us. There! the music has stopped and I don't hear their tramp either. Dr. Percival," turning in his host's direction and raising his voice, "can you account for that martial music playing a moment since?"

"I haven't heard of any troops about, but am quite sure they will not interfere with us," returned the doctor. "Please, friends, don't let it disturb you at all." Little Ned Raymond was looking and listening in an ecstasy of delight.

"Oh, Cousin Ronald and brother Max, do some more!" he entreated in a subdued, but urgent tone. "Folks do believe it's real soldiers and it's such fun to see how they look and talk about it."

The martial music and the tramp, tramp began again and seemed to draw nearer and nearer, and several dogs belonging on the place rushed away in that direction, barking furiously.

It seemed to excite and disturb many of the guests, and Violet said, "There, my little son, I think that ought to satisfy you for the present. Let our gentlemen and everybody else have their breakfast in peace."

"Good advice, Cousin Vi," said Mr. Lilburn, "and the bit laddie may get his fill of such fun at another time."

"Really I don't understand this at all," remarked a lady seated at the same table with the gentleman who had called to Dr. Percival; "that martial music has ceased with great suddenness, and I no longer hear the tramp, tramp of the troops."

"I begin to have a very strong suspicion that ventriloquism is responsible for it all," returned the gentleman with a smile. "Did you not hear at the time of the marriage of Dr. Johnson's sister that a ventriloquist was present and made rare sport for the guests?"

"Oh, yes, I think I did and that he was one of the relatives. I presume he is here now and responsible for these strange sounds. But," she added thoughtfully, "there are several sounds going on at once; could he make them all, do you think?"

"Perhaps the talent runs in the family and there is more than one here possessing it."

"Ah, yes, that must be it," remarked another guest, nodding wisely. "I presume it is in the family, and what sport it must make for them."

"But what has become of those tramps--the merry men who were going to claim a share of this feast?" queried a young girl seated at the same table.

"Perhaps they have joined the troops," laughed another. "But hark! they are at it again," as a shrill whistle once more came floating on the breeze from the same direction as before, followed by the words, "Come on, my merry men; let us make haste ere all the best of the viands have disappeared down the throats of the fellows already there."

Mr. Hugh Lilburn had overheard the chat about the neighboring table and thought best to gratify the desire to hear further from the merry men of the wood.

A good many eyes were turned in the direction of the sounds, but none could see even one of the merry men so loudly summoned to make a raid upon the feasting company.

Then another voice seemed to reply from the same quarter as the first.

"The days of Robin Hood and his merry men are over lang syne; and this is no' the country for ony sic doin's. If we want a share o' the grand feast we maun ask it like decent, honest folk, tendering payment if that wad no' be considered an insult by the host an' hostess."

At that Dr. Percival laughed and called out in a tone of amusement, "Come on, friends, and let me help you to a share of the eatables; we have enough and to spare, and you will be heartily welcome."

"Thanks, sir," said the voice; "perhaps we may accept when your invited guests have eaten their fill and departed."

"Very well; manage it to suit yourselves," laughed the doctor.

Then another voice from the wood said, "Well, comrades, let us sit down here under the trees and wait for our turn."

All this had caused quite an excitement and a great buzz of talk among the comparatively stranger guests; yet they seemed to enjoy the dainty fare provided and ate heartily of it as they talked, listening, too, for a renewal of the efforts of the ventriloquists.

But the latter refrained from any further exercise of their skill, as the time was drawing near when the bride and groom were to set out upon their bridal trip. They and their principal attendants repaired to the house, where the bride exchanged her wedding gown for a very pretty and becoming travelling dress, her bridesmaids and intimate girl friends assisting her. Her toilet finished, they all ran down into the lower hall--already almost crowded with other guests--and, laughing and excited, stood awaiting her appearance at the head of the stairway. She was there in a moment--her bouquet of orange blossoms in her hand.

The hands of the laughing young girls were instantly extended toward her and she threw the bouquet, saying merrily:

"Catch it who can, and you will be the first to follow me into wedded happiness."

It so happened that Evelyn Leland and Lucilla Raymond stood so near together that their hands almost touched and that the bouquet fell to both--each catching it with one hand. Their success was hailed by a peal of laughter from all present, Chester Dinsmore and Max Raymond particularly seeming to enjoy the sport.

The bride came tripping down the stairway, closely followed by her groom, and the adieus began; not especially sad ones, as so many of the near and dear relatives left behind expected to see them again ere many weeks should pass--and quite a goodly number followed them down to the edge of the bayou, where lay the boat that was to carry them over the first part of their wedding journey. They stepped aboard amid showers of rice, accompanied by an old shoe or two, merry laughter, and many good wishes for a happy and prosperous trip; and as they seated themselves, a beautiful horseshoe formed of lovely orange blossoms fell into the bride's lap.

The little vessel was bountifully adorned with flags of various sizes--by the previous arrangement of Dr. Percival, who knew them both to be devoted admirers of the flag of our Union--and as the vessel moved away there came again from among the trees at a little distance, the sound of a bugle, the drum and the fife playing the "Star-Spangled Banner," than which nothing could have been more appropriate.

As the boat disappeared and the music died away something of a lonely feeling came over many of those left behind, and the guests not related began to make their adieus and depart to their homes. But the relatives tarried somewhat longer, chatting familiarly among themselves and re-examining the many handsome bridal gifts.

"They have fared well," said Mrs. Betty Norton, Dr. Robert's sister; "I am so glad for them both. I'm fond of my brother Bob, and well pleased with the match he has made. And not less so with Dick's," she added, turning with a smile to Maud, who stood at her side.

"Thank you, Betty," said Maud. "I was well pleased with the relationship we held to each other before, and am glad it has been made nearer. Though at first--when Dick proposed--I was afraid it--the relationship--ought to be a bar to our union. However, he said it was not near enough for that, and as he is a good physician I supposed he knew--so did not say him nay," she added, with a laughing look up into her husband's face as at that moment he drew near and stood at her side.

"Ah, don't you wish you had?" he returned, laying a hand lightly on her shoulder and giving her a very loverlike look and smile.

"I have serious objections to being questioned too closely," she said laughingly; "and please to remember, sir, that I did not promise never to have a secret from you even if you're my other--and perhaps better half."

"Oh, I always understood it was the woman's privilege to be that," he laughed; "and I certainly expect it of you, my dear."

"Why, how absurd in you!" she exclaimed. "With such a husband as mine it would be utterly impossible for me to be the better half."

"But it is quite the thing for each to think the other is," said Grandma Elsie, regarding them with an affectionate smile.

"A state of feeling that is certain to make both very happy," remarked Captain Raymond, who happened to be standing near.

"As you and I know by experience," said Violet with a bright look up into his face.

"Yes," said her cousin Betty, "and anybody who knows you two as well as I do may see the exemplification of that doctrine in your lives. I have always known that you were a decidedly happy couple."

"But needn't plume yourself very much on that discovery, Cousin Betty," laughed Lucilla, "I think everybody makes it who is with them for even a day or two."

"And his children are not much, if at all, behind his wife in love for him, or behind him in love for her," added Grace, smiling up into her father's face.

"All doing their best to fill him with conceit," he said, returning the smile, but with a warning shake of the head. "Where are Elsie and Ned?" he asked, adding, "It is about time we were returning home--to Viamede."

"Yes," said Violet, "we must hunt them up at once."

"I will find them, papa and mamma," Grace answered, hastening from the room.

The children were playing games on the lawn, but all ceased and came running to Grace as she stepped out upon the veranda and called in musical tones to her little sister and brother.

"What is it?" they asked as they drew near, "time to go home?"

"Yes; so papa and mamma think; and we must always do what they say, you know."

"Yes, indeed!" answered Elsie, "and it's just a pleasure because they always know best and are so kind and love us so dearly."

"We've been having an elegant time and it's just lovely here at Torriswood," said little Elsie Embury, "but as it is Uncle Dick's place we can come here often; and besides Viamede is quite as pretty, and we are to go there for the rest of the day."

"Oh, yes! aren't you glad?" responded several other young voices.

The carriages which had brought them were now seen to be in preparation to convey them to that desired destination, and presently one after another received its quota and departed.

One three-seated vehicle contained Mrs. Travilla, her father and his wife, Captain and Mrs. Raymond and their little boy and girl. Naturally the talk ran upon the scenes through which they had just been passing.

"It was right odd that Eva and Lu should have caught that bridal bouquet together," laughed Violet. "My dear, does it not make you tremble with apprehension lest those two weddings should take place somewhat sooner than you wish?"

"I cannot say that I am greatly alarmed," the captain returned pleasantly. "I have too much confidence in the affection and desire to please their father of my eldest son and daughter, to greatly fear that they will disregard my wishes and opinion in reference to that, or anything else indeed."

"And I feel very sure that your confidence is not misplaced," said Mrs. Travilla. "Also I think you are wise in wishing them--young as they are--to defer marriage for a few years."

Mr. and Mrs. Dinsmore expressed a hearty agreement in that opinion, and Violet said it was hers also. "But I could see," she added with playful look and tone, "that the lovers were both pleased and elated. However, it is not supposed to mean speedy matrimony, but merely that they will be the first of those engaged in the sport to enter into it."

"Yes," Captain Raymond said laughingly, "and I have known of one case in which the successful catcher--though the first of the competitors to enter into the bonds of matrimony--did not do so until six years afterward. So, naturally, I am not greatly alarmed."

A smaller vehicle, driving at some little distance in their rear, held the two young couples of whom they were speaking, and with them also the episode of the throwing and catching of the bouquet was the subject of conversation.

"It was capitally done, girls," laughed Max, "and possibly may encourage father to shorten our probation--somewhat at least."

"Yes, I am sure I wish it may," said Chester. "I hope you will not object, Lu?"

"I don't believe it would make a particle of difference in the result whether I did or not," she laughed. "If you knew father as well as I do you would know that he does not often retreat from a position that he has once taken. And he is not superstitious enough to pay any attention to such an omen as we have had to-day. Nor would I wish him to, as I have the greatest confidence in his wisdom and his love for his children."

"To all of which I add an unqualified assent," said Max heartily. "My father's opinion on almost any subject has far more weight with me than that of any other man."

CHAPTER XIV.

Vamede presently showed as beautiful and festive a scene as had Torriswood earlier in the day--the velvety grass bespangled with sweet-scented flowers of varied hues, the giant oaks and magnolias, the orange trees with their beautiful glossy leaves, green fruit and ripe, lovely blossoms; also many flags floating here and there from upper windows, verandas, and tree tops. There were not a few exclamations of admiration and delight from the young people and children as carriage after carriage drove up and deposited its living load.

A very gay and mirthful time followed; sports begun at Torriswood were renewed here with as much zest and spirit as had been shown there; the large company scattering about the extensive grounds and forming groups engaged in one or another game suited to the ages and capacity of its members. But some preferred strolling here and there through the alleys and groves, engaging in nothing more exciting or wearying than sprightly chat and laughter, while the older ladies and gentlemen--among them Mr. and Mrs. Dinsmore, Mr. and Mrs. Ronald and Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Lilburn, Mr. and Mrs. Embury, and Mr. and Mrs. Keith, Mrs. Travilla, and Mr. and Mrs. Leland, Dr. Arthur Conly and his Marian--gathered in groups on the verandas or the nearer parts of the lawn.

Edward Travilla and his Zoe were down among the little folks, overseeing the sports of their own twin boy and girl and their mates, as were also Captain Raymond and his Violet, with their Elsie and Ned. His older son and daughters, with Chester Dinsmore and his brother Frank, could be seen at some little distance, occupying rustic seats under a wide-spreading tree and seemingly enjoying an animated and amusing chat. Drs. Harold and Herbert Travilla, strolling along with the two older daughters of Mr. Embury, presently joined them, and Dr. and Mrs. Percival shortly followed, the mirth and jollity apparently increasing with every addition.

"They seem to be very merry over yonder," remarked Mrs. Embury, with a smiling glance at that particular group. "It does me good to see Dick take a little relaxation--he is usually so busy in the practice of his profession."

"Yes," said Grandma Elsie, "and the evidently strong affection between him and Maud is very delightful to see."

"As is that between the captain and Violet," added her cousin Annis. "I thought her young for him when they married, but I never saw a more attached couple. They make no display of it before people, but no close observer could be with them long without becoming convinced of the fact."

"That is so, I think," said Mrs. Leland. "The captain is a fond father, but he has told Vi more than once that to lose her would be worse to him than being called to part with all his children."

"Ah, I hope neither trial may ever be appointed him," said Grandma Elsie, low and softly, ending with a slight sigh.

"And so Chester and Lucilla, Max and Eva are engaged," remarked Mrs. Embury in a reflective tone; "and so far as I know the entire connection seems satisfied with the arrangement."

"I have yet to hear of objection from any quarter," Mrs. Leland said with a smile, "and I can say with certainty that Lester and I are well satisfied, so far as our niece Eva is concerned. I think the captain is right and wise though, in bidding them delay marriage for at least a year or two--all of them being so young."

"I think," said Mrs. Arthur Conly, joining in the talk, "that Frank Dinsmore is evidently very much in love with Grace."

"In which I sincerely hope he will get no encouragement from the captain," Dr. Conly added quickly and with strong emphasis. "Grace is much too young, and entirely too feeble to safely venture into wedlock for years to come."

"And I think you may safely trust her father to see that she does not," said Grandma Elsie. "I am sure he agrees in your opinion and that Grace is too good and obedient a daughter ever to go contrary to his wishes."

Gradually, as the sun drew near his setting, the participants in the sports gave them up and gathered in the parlors or upon the verandas, most of them just about weary enough with the pleasant exercise they had been taking to enjoy a

little quiet rest before being summoned to partake of the grand dinner in process of preparation by Viamede's famous cooks.

Lucilla and her sister Grace, wishing to make some slight change in the arrangement of hair or dress, hastened up the broad stairway together on their way to the room now occupied by Grace and Elsie. In the upper hall they met their father, coming from a similar errand to his own apartment.

"Ah, daughters," he said in his usual kindly tones, "we have had much less than usual to say to each other to-day, but I hope you have been enjoying yourselves?" and as he spoke he put an arm around each and drew them closer to him.

"Oh, yes, yes, indeed, papa!" both replied, smilingly and in mirthful tones, Lucilla adding, "Everything seems to have gone swimmingly to-day."

"Even to the catching of the bride's bouquet, I suppose," returned her father, giving her an amused yet searching and half-inquiring look.

At that Lucilla laughed.

"Yes, papa; wasn't it odd that Eva and I happened to catch it together?"

"And were both highly elated over the happy augury?" he queried, still gazing searchingly into her eyes.

"Hardly, I think, papa; though Chester and Max seemed rather elated by it. But really," she added with a mirthful look, "I depend far more upon my father's decision than upon dozens of such auguries; and besides am in no haste to leave his care and protection or go from under his authority."

"Spoken like my own dear eldest daughter," he returned with a gratified look, and giving her a slight caress.

"It would be strange indeed, if any one of your children did want to get from under it, papa," said Grace, with a look of ardent affection up into his eyes.

"I am glad to hear you say that, daughter," he returned with a smile, and softly smoothing the shining, golden hair, "because it will be years before I can feel willing to resign the care of my still rather feeble little Grace to another, or let her take up the burdens and anxieties of married life."

"You may be perfectly sure I don't want to, papa," she returned with a gleeful, happy laugh. "It is just a joy and delight to me to feel that I belong to you and always shall as long as you want to keep me."

"Which will be just as long as you enjoy it--and we both live," he added a little more gravely.

Then releasing them with an injunction not to waste too much time over their toilet, he passed on down the stairway while they went on into their tiring-room.

"Oh, Lu," said Grace as she pulled down her hair before the glass, "haven't we the best and dearest father in the world? I like Chester ever so much, but I sometimes wonder how you can bear the very thought of leaving papa for him."

"It does not seem an easy thing to do," sighed Lucilla, "and yet----"
But she paused, leaving her sentence unfinished.

"Yet what?" asked Grace, turning an inquiring look upon her sister.

"Well, I believe I'll tell you," returned Lucilla in a half-hesitating way. "I have always valued father's love oh, so highly, and once when I happened accidentally to overhear something he said to Mamma Vi, it nearly broke my heart--for a while." Her voice quivered with the last words, and she seemed unable to go on for emotion.

"Why, Lu, what could it have been?" exclaimed Grace in surprise, and giving her sister a look of mingled love and compassion.

With an evident effort Lucilla went on: "It was that she was dearer to him than all his children put together--that he would lose every one of them rather than part with her. It made me feel for a while as if I had lost everything worth having--papa's love for me must be so very slight. But after a long and bitter cry over it I was comforted by remembering what the Bible says, 'Let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself.' And the words of Jesus, 'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh.' So I

could see it was right for my father to love his wife best of all earthly creatures--she being but a part of himself--and besides I could not doubt that he loved me and each one of his children very, very dearly."

"Yes, I am sure he does," said Grace, vainly trying to speak in her usual cheery, light-hearted tones. "Oh, Lu, I don't wonder you cried over it. It would just kill me to think papa didn't care very much about me."

"Oh, Gracie, he does! I know he does! I am sure he would not hesitate a moment to risk his life for any one of us."

"Yes, I am sure of it! and what but his love for you makes him so unwilling to give you up to Chester? I can see that Ches feels it hard to wait, but father certainly has the best of rights to keep his daughters to himself as long as they are under age."

"And as much longer as he chooses, so far as I am concerned. I am only too glad that he seems so loath to give me up. My dear, dear father! Words cannot express my love for him or the regret I feel for the rebellious conduct which gave him so much pain and trouble in days long gone by."

"Dear Lu," said Grace, "I am perfectly sure our dear father forgave all that long ago."

"Yes, but I can never forget or forgive it myself. Nor can I forget how glad and thankful he was that I was not the one killed by the bear out at Minersville, or his saving me that time when I was so nearly swept into Lake Erie by the wind; how closely he hugged me to his breast--a tear falling on my head--when he got me safely into the cabin, and the low-breathed words, 'Thank God, my darling, precious child is safe in my arms.' Oh, Gracie, I have seemed to hear the very words and tones many a time since. So I cannot doubt that he does love me very much; even if I am not so dear to him as his wife is."

"And you love mamma, too?"

"Yes, indeed! she is just like a dear older sister. I may well love her since she is so dear to papa, and was so kind and forbearing with me in those early years of her married life when I certainly was very far from being the good and lovable child I ought to have been. She was very forbearing, and never gave papa the slightest hint of my badness."

"She has always been very good and kind to us," said Grace, "and I love her very dearly."

"And papa showed his love for me in allowing Chester to offer himself because he had saved my life--for otherwise he would have forbidden it for at least another year or two."

"Yes, I know," said Grace. "We certainly have plenty of proofs that father does love us very much."

"But we must not delay at this business, as he bade us hasten down again," Lucilla said, quickening her movements as she spoke.

"No; I'm afraid he is beginning to wonder what is keeping us so long," said Grace, following her example.

They had no idea how their father was engaged at that moment. As he reached the lower hall Frank Dinsmore stepped forward and accosted him. "Can I have a moment's chat with you, captain?" he asked in an undertone, and with a slightly embarrassed air.

"Certainly, Frank. It is a very modest request," was the kindly-toned response, "What can I do for you?"

"Very nearly the same thing that you have so kindly done for my brother, sir," replied the young man, coloring and hesitating somewhat in his speech. "I--I am deeply, desperately in love with your daughter, Miss Grace, and----"

"Go no farther, my young friend," interrupted the captain in a grave though still kindly tone. "I have no objection to you personally, but Grace is entirely too young and too delicate for her father to consider for a moment the idea of allowing her to think of such a thing as marriage. Understand distinctly that I should be not a whit more ready to listen to such a request from any other man--older or younger, richer or poorer."

"But she is well worth waiting for, sir, and if you would only let me speak and try to win her affections, I----"

"That must be waited for, Frank. I cannot and will not have her approached upon the subject," was the almost stern rejoinder. "Promise me that you will not do or say anything to give her the idea that you want to be more to her than a friend."

"That is a hard thing you are requiring, sir," sighed Frank.

"But quite necessary if you would be permitted to see much of Grace," returned the captain with great decision. "And, seeing that you feel toward her as you have just told me you do, I think the less you see of each other--or hold intercourse together--the better. Should she be in good, firm health some six or eight years hence, and you and she then have a fancy for each other, her father will not, probably, raise any objection to your suit; but until then I positively forbid anything and everything of the kind."

"I must say I find that a hard sentence, captain," sighed the would-be suitor. "It strikes me that most fathers would be a trifle more ready to make an eligible match for a daughter of Miss Grace's age. She is very young, I acknowledge, but I have known some girls to marry even younger. And you will not even allow her to enter into an engagement?"

"No; I have no desire to rid myself of my daughter; very far from it. For my first set of children I have a peculiarly tender feeling because--excepting each other--they have no very near relative but myself. They were quite young when they lost their mother, and for years I have felt that I must fill to them the place of both parents as far as possible, and have tried to do so. As one result," he added with his pleasant smile, "I find that I am exceedingly loath to give them up into any other care and keeping."

"But since we are neighbors and distant connections, and my brother engaged to Miss Lu, you do not absolutely forbid me your house, captain?"

"No; you may see Grace in my presence--perhaps occasionally out of it--provided you carefully obey my injunction to refrain from anything like love-making."

"Thank you, sir; I accept the conditions," was Frank's response, and the two separated just as Lucilla and Grace appeared at the top of the stairway near which they had been standing, Frank passing out to the veranda, the captain moving slowly in the opposite direction.

"There's father now!" exclaimed Grace, tripping down the stairs.
"Papa," as he turned at the sound of her voice and glanced up at her,
"I've been re-arranging my hair. Please tell me if you like it in this style."

"Certainly, daughter; I like it in any style in which I have ever seen it arranged," he returned, regarding it critically, but with an evidently admiring gaze. "I am glad and thankful that you have an abundance of it--such as it is," he added sportively, taking her hand in his as she reached his side. Then turning to Lucilla, "And yours, too, Lulu, seems to be in well-cared-for condition."

"Thank you, papa dear; I like occasionally to hear you call me by that name so constantly used in the happy days of my childhood."

"Ah! I hope that does not mean that these are not happy days?" he said, giving her a look of kind and fatherly scrutiny.

"Oh, no, indeed, father! I don't believe there is a happier girl than I in all this broad land."

"I am thankful for that," he said with a tenderly affectionate look into her eyes as she stood at his side gazing up into his; "for there is nothing I desire more than the happiness of these two dear daughters of mine."

"Yes, father dear, we both know you would take any amount of trouble for our pleasure or profit," said Grace gayly; "but just to know that we belong to you is enough for us. Isn't it, Lu?"

"And are so dear to him," added Lucilla. "I couldn't be the happy girl I am if I didn't know that."

"Never doubt it, my darlings; never for a moment," he said in a moved tone.

"Oh, so here you are, girls!" exclaimed a familiar voice just in their rear. "I have been all round the verandas, looking for you, but you seemed to be lost in the crowd or to have vanished into thin air."

"Certainly not that last, sister Rose," laughed the captain. "I am happy to say there is something a good deal more

substantial than that about them."

"Yes, I see there is; they are both looking remarkably well. And now I hope we can have a good chat. There has hardly been an opportunity for it yet--there being such a crowd of relations and friends, and such a commotion over the wedding--and you know I want to hear all about what you did and saw in Florida. Also to tell you of the improvements we are talking of making at Riverside."

"You will have hardly time for a very long talk, Rosie," said her mother, joining them at that moment. "The call to dinner will come soon. But here are comfortable chairs and a sofa in which you can rest and chat until then."

"Yes, mamma, and you will join us, will you not? And you too, brother Levis?" as the captain turned toward the outer door.

"I shall be pleased to do so if my company is desired," he replied, taking a chair near the little group already seated.

"Of course it is, sir. I always enjoyed your company even when you were my respected and revered instructor with the right and power to punish me if I failed in conduct or recitation," returned Rosie in the bantering tone she had so often adopted in days gone by.

"I am rejoiced to hear it," he laughed.

"And you may as well make yourself useful as story-teller of all you folks saw and did in Florida," she continued.

"Much too long a tale for the few minutes we are likely to be able to give to it at present," he said. "Let us reserve that for another time and now hear the story of your own prospective doings at Riverside."

"Or talk about this morning's wedding. It was a pretty one; wasn't it? I never saw Sidney look so charming as she did in that wedding gown and veil. I hope they will have as pleasant a wedding trip as my Will and I had; and be as happy afterward as we are."

"I hope so, indeed," said her mother, "and that their after life may be a happy and prosperous one."

"Yes, mamma, I join you in that. And, Lu, how soon do you expect to follow suit and give her the right to call you sister?"

"When my father bids me; not a moment sooner," replied Lucilla, turning an affectionately smiling look upon him.

He returned it, saying, "Which will not be for many months to come. He is far from feeling ready yet to resign even one of his heart's best treasures."

"Oh, it is a joy to have you call me that, papa!" she exclaimed low and feelingly.

They chatted on for a few minutes longer, when they were interrupted by the call to the dinner table. A very welcome one, for the sports had given good appetites and the viands were toothsome and delicious. The meal was not eaten in haste or silence, but amid cheerful, mirthful chat and low-toned, musical laughter, and with its numerous courses occupied more than an hour.

On leaving the banqueting room they again scattered about the parlors, verandas, and grounds, resuming the intimate and friendly intercourse held there before the summons to their feast.

Captain Raymond had kept a watchful eye upon his daughters--Grace in especial--and now took pains to seat her near himself on the veranda, saying, "I want you to rest here a while, daughter, for I see you are looking weary; which is not strange, considering how much more than your usual amount of exercise you have already taken to-day."

"Yes, I am a little tired, papa," she answered, with a loving smile up into his eyes as she sank somewhat wearily into the chair, "and it is very, very pleasant to have you so kindly careful of me."

"Ah!" he returned, patting her cheek and smiling affectionately upon her, "it behooves everyone to be careful of his own particular treasures."

"And our dear Gracie is certainly one of those," said Violet, coming to the other side of the young girl and looking down a little anxiously into the sweet, fair face. "Are you very weary, dearest?"

"Oh, not so very, mamma dear," she answered blithely. "This is a delightful chair papa has put me into, and a little rest in it, while digesting the good hearty meal I have just eaten, will make me all right again, I think."

"Won't you take this other one by her side, my love? I think you too need a little rest," said the captain gallantly.

"Thank you, I will if you will occupy that one on her other side, so that we will have her between us. And here come Lu and Rosie, so that we can perhaps finish the chat she tells me she was holding with you and the girls before the call to dinner."

"I don't believe we can, mamma," laughed Grace, "for here come Will Croly and Chester to take possession of them; Eva and Max too, and Frank."

"Then we will just defer it until another time," said Violet. "Those who have children will soon be leaving for their homes and those left behind will form a smaller, quieter party."

Violet's surmises proved correct, those with young children presently taking their departure in order that the little ones might seek their nests for the night.

The air began to grow cool and the family and remaining guests found it now pleasanter within doors than upon the verandas. Music and conversation made the time pass rapidly, a light tea was served, Mr. Dinsmore--Mrs. Travilla's father--read a portion of Scripture and led in a short prayer, a little chat followed, and the remaining guests bade adieu for the present and went their ways; Maud's two brothers and the Dinsmores from the Oaks among them.

"Now, Grace, my child, linger not a moment longer, but get to bed as fast as you can," said Captain Raymond to his second daughter as they stood upon the veranda, looking after the departing guests. His tone was tenderly affectionate and he gave her a good-night caress as he spoke.

"I will, father dear," she answered cheerfully and made haste to do his bidding.

"She is looking very weary. I fear I have let her exert herself to-day far more than was for her good," he remarked somewhat anxiously to his wife and Lucilla standing near.

"But I hope a good night's rest will make it all right with her," Violet returned in a cheery tone, adding playfully, "and we certainly have plenty of doctors at hand, if anything should go wrong with her or any of us."

"Excellent ones, too," said Lucilla; "but I hope and really expect that a good night's rest will quite restore her to her usual health and strength. So, father, don't feel anxious and troubled."

"I shall endeavor not to, my wise young mentor," he returned with a slight laugh, laying a hand lightly upon her shoulder as he spoke.

"Oh, papa, please excuse me if I seemed to be trying to teach you!" she exclaimed in a tone of penitence. "I'm afraid it sounded very conceited and disrespectful."

"If it did it was not, I am sure, so intended, so I shall not punish you this time," he replied in a tone which puzzled her with the question whether he were jesting or in earnest.

"I hope you will if you think I deserve it, father," she said low and humbly, Violet having left them and gone within doors, and no one else being near enough to overhear her words.

At that he put his arm about her and drew her closer. "I but jested, daughter," he said in tender tones, "and am not in the least displeased with you. So your only punishment shall be an order presently to go directly to your room and prepare for bed. But first let us have our usual bit of bedtime chat, which I believe I enjoy as fully as does my little girl herself."

"Oh, father, how kind in you to say that!" she exclaimed in low, but joyous tones. "I do dearly love to make you my confidant--you are so wise and kind and I am so sure that you love me dearly, as your very own God-given property. Am I not that still as truly as I ever was?"

"Indeed you are! as truly now as when you were a babe in arms," he said, with a happy laugh and drawing her closer to his heart. "A treasure that no amount of money could buy from me. Your price is above rubies, my own darling."

"What sweet words, papa!" she exclaimed with a happy sigh. "But sometimes when I think of all my past naughtiness--giving you so much pain and trouble--I wonder that you can love me half so well as you do."

"Dear child, I think I never loved you the less because of all that, nor you me less because of the severity of my discipline."

"Papa, I believe I always loved you better for your strictness and severity. You made it so clear to me that it was done for my best good and that it hurt you when you felt it your duty to give me pain."

"It did indeed!" he said; "but for a long time now my eldest daughter has been to me only a joy, a comfort, a delight--so that I can ill bear the thought of resigning her to another."

"Ah, father, what sweet, sweet words to hear from your lips! they make me so glad, so happy."

"Pleasant words those for me to hear, and a pleasant thought that my dear eldest daughter is not in haste to leave my protecting care for that of another. I trust Chester is inclined to wait patiently until the right time comes?"

"He has made it evident to me that he would much rather shorten the time of waiting if there were a possibility of gaining my father's consent."

"But that there is not," the captain replied with decision. "If I should consider only my own feeling and inclination and my belief as to what would be really best for you, I should certainly keep full possession of my eldest daughter for several years to come. I have had a talk with Dr. Conly on the subject, and he, as a physician, tells me it would be far better in most cases, for a girl to remain single until well on toward twenty-five."

"Which would make her quite an old maid, I should think, papa," laughed Lucilla. "Yet if you bid me wait that long and can make Chester content--I'll not be at all rebellious."

"No, I don't believe you would; but I have really no idea of trying you so far. By the way, Rosie and her Will, Maud and Dick seem two very happy couples."

"Yes, indeed, father; it is a pleasure to watch them. And do you know I think Frank Dinsmore is casting longing eyes at our Grace."

"But you don't think the dear child cares at all for him?"

"Oh, no, sir! no, indeed! Grace doesn't care in the least for beaux, and loves no other man half so well as she does her father and mine."

"Just as I thought; but I want you quietly to help me prevent any private interviews between them--lest she might learn to care for him."

"Thank you for trusting me, papa; I will do any best," she responded.

Then they bade good-night and Lucilla went to her room. She found Eva there and they chatted pleasantly together as they prepared for bed. Eva had noticed Frank's evident devotion to Grace and spoke of it, adding, "It is a pity, for of course your father--I had very nearly said father, for I begin to feel as if I belonged in his flock--considering us older ones too young to marry, will say she is very far from being old enough for loverlike attentions."

"Yes, he does," replied Lucilla, "and I want your help in a task he has set me--the endeavor to keep them from being alone together."

"I'll do so with pleasure," laughed Evelyn, "and I think probably it would be just as well to take Grace herself into the plot, for I'm very sure she doesn't care a pin for Frank, but dotes upon her father."

CHAPTER XV.

The ladies of the Torriswood party retired for the night almost immediately on their arrival there, but the gentlemen lingered a little in the room used by Dr. Percival as his office. There was some cheerful chat over the events of the day in which, however, Frank Dinsmore took no part. He sat in moody silence, seeming scarcely to hear what the others were saying.

"What's the matter with you, Frank?" queried the doctor at length.
"Didn't things go off to suit you to-day?"

"Well enough," grumbled Frank, "except that I don't seem to be considered as worthy as my brother is of being taken into--a certain family really no better than my own, unless as regards wealth."

"Oh, ho! so that's the way the land lies! It's Grace Raymond you're after, eh? And she won't consent?"

"Her father won't. I must not say a word to her on the subject."

"And he is right, Frank," returned the doctor gravely. "She is far too young and too delicate to begin with such things. Art would tell you that in a moment if you should ask him. My opinion as a physician is that marriage now would be likely to kill her within a year; or, if she lived, make her an invalid for life."

"I'd be willing to let marriage wait if I might only speak and win her promise; but no, I'm positively forbidden to say a word."

"You would gain nothing by it if you did," said Chester. "She is devoted to her father and hasn't the least idea of falling in love with any other man."

"Ridiculous!" growled Frank. "Well, things being as they are, I'll not tarry long in this part of the country. I'll go back and attend to the business of our clients, and you, Chester, can stay on here with your fiancée and her family, and perhaps gather up a larger amount of health and strength."

"Don't be in a hurry about leaving us, Frank," said Dick cordially. "Maud has been calculating on at least a few days more of your good company; and there's no telling when you may find it convenient to pay us another visit."

"Thanks, Dick; you are hospitality itself; and this is a lovely home you have secured, for yourself and Maud. I'll sleep on the question of the time of departure. And now good-night and pleasant dreams. I hope none of your patients will call you out before sunrise."

And with that they separated, each to seek his own sleeping apartment.

For some hours all was darkness and silence within and without the house. Then the doctor was awakened by the ringing of his night bell.

"What is wanted?" he asked, going to the open window.

"You, doctah, fast as you kin git dar, down to Lamont--ole Massa Gest's place. Leetle Miss Nellie she got a fit."

"Indeed! I am very sorry to hear it. I'll be there as soon as possible," and turning from the window the doctor rang for his servant, ordered horses saddled and brought to a side door, then hurried on his clothes, explaining matters to the now awakened Maud as he did so--gathered up the remedies likely to be needed, and hastened away.

Directing his servant to keep close in his rear he rode rapidly in the direction of the place named by the messenger. He found the child very ill and not fit to be left by him until early morning.

It was in the darkest hour, just before day, that he started for home again. All went well till he was within a few rods of home, but then his horse--a rather wild young animal--took fright at the hoot of an owl in a tree close at hand, reared

suddenly and threw him violently to the ground, then rushed away in the direction of his stable.

"Oh, doctah, sah, is you bad hurted?" queried the servant man, hastily alighting and coming to his master's side.

"Pretty badly, I'm afraid, Pete," groaned the doctor. "Help me to the house, and then you must ride over to Viamede as fast as you can, wake up Dr. Harold Travilla and ask him to come to me immediately to set some broken bones. Take one of the other horses with you for him to ride. Ah," as he attempted to rise, "I'm hardly able to walk, Pete; you will have to pretty nearly carry me to the house."

"I kin do dat, doctah; Ise a strong-built nigger; jes lemme tote you 'long like de mammies do de leetle darkies."

And with that Pete lifted Dr. Percival in his arms carried him to the house and on up to his own sleeping room, where he laid him gently down upon his bed in an almost fainting condition.

Maud was greatly alarmed, and bade Pete hasten with all speed for one or another of the doctor cousins.

"Harold, Harold!" groaned the sufferer, "he is older than Herbert and nearer than Art, who is at the Parsonage. And he can bring Herbert with him should he see fit."

Pete, alarmed at the condition of his master, to whom he had become strongly attached, made all the haste he could to bring the needed help; but the sun was already above the tree tops when he reached Viamede.

The first person he saw there was Captain Raymond, who had just stepped out upon the veranda.

"Morning, sah! is you uns one ob de doctahs?" he queried in anxious tones, as he reined in his horse at the foot of the veranda steps.

"No," replied the captain; "but there are doctors in the house. You are from Torriswood, I think. Is any one ill there?"

"Massa doctah, he's 'most killed! Horse frowed him. Please, sah, where de doctahs? I'se in pow'ful big hurry to git dem dere fore----"

"Here," called the voice of Harold from an upper window; "is it I that am wanted? I'll be down there in five minutes or less."

"Yes, I think it is you, and probably Herbert also, who are wanted in all haste at Torriswood," answered Captain Raymond, his voice betraying both anxiety and alarm. "It seems Dick has met with a serious accident and has sent for one or both of you."

"Yes," replied Herbert, speaking as Harold had from the window, "we will both go to him as speedily as possible and do what we can for his relief. Please, captain, order another horse saddled and brought round immediately."

The captain at once complied with the request, and in a very few minutes both doctors were riding briskly toward Torriswood. They found their patient in much pain from a dislocated shoulder and some broken bones; all of which they proceeded to set as promptly as possible. But there were symptoms of some internal injury which occasioned more alarm than the displacement and fracture of the bones. They held a consultation outside of the sick room.

"I think we should have Cousin Arthur here," said Harold. "'In multitude of counsellors is safety,' Solomon tells us, and Art excels us both in wisdom and experience."

"Certainly," responded Herbert; "let us summon him at once. I am glad indeed that he is still within reach."

"As I am. I will speak to Maud and have him sent for immediately."

A messenger was promptly despatched to the Parsonage and returned shortly, bringing Dr. Conly with him. Another examination and consultation followed and Dr. Percival, who had become slightly delirious, was pronounced in a critical condition; yet the physicians, though anxious, by no means despaired of his ultimate recovery.

The news of the accident had by this time reached all of the connection in that neighborhood, and silent petitions on his behalf were going up from many hearts. On behalf of his young wife also, for poor Maud seemed well-nigh distracted with grief and the fear of the bereavement that threatened her.

Mrs. Embury, too, was greatly distressed, for Dick and she had been all their lives a devotedly attached brother and

sister. No day now passed in which she did not visit Torriswood that she might catch a sight of his dear face and learn as far as possible his exact state; though neither her nursing nor that of other loving relatives was needed--the doctors and an old negress, skilled in that line of work, doing all that could be done for his relief and comfort.

Mrs. Betty Norton, his half-sister, was scarcely less pained and anxious; as indeed were Maud's brothers and all the relatives in that region.

It was from her father Lucilla first heard of the accident--when she joined him on the veranda at Viamede directly after the departure of the doctors and Pete for Torriswood.

"Oh, father," she exclaimed, "I do hope he is not seriously injured! Poor Maud! She must be sorely distressed, for he has proved such a good, kind husband, and she almost idolizes him."

"Yes, I feel deeply for her as well as for him. We will pray for them both, asking that if it be consistent with the will of God, he may be speedily restored to perfect health and strength."

"Yes, papa; what a comfort it is that we may cast upon the Lord all our care for ourselves and others!"

"It is indeed! I have found it so in many a sore trial sent to myself or to some one dear to me. I am glad for Maud that she has her brothers with her now."

"I too, papa, and I suppose Chester will stay with her to-day."

"Most likely; and my daughter must not feel hurt should he not show himself here at his usual early hour, or even at all to-day."

"I'll try not, papa. I am sure it would be very selfish in me to grudge poor dear Maud any show of sympathy or any comfort she might receive from him--her own dear eldest brother."

"Yes, so I think," said her father, "and I should not expect it of any one of my daughters."

Chester came at length, some hours later than his wont, and looking grave and troubled. In answer to inquiries, "Yes, poor Dick is certainly badly hurt," he said, "and Maud well-nigh distracted with grief and anxiety. She is a most devoted wife and considers him her all."

"But the case is not thought to be hopeless?" Mr. Dinsmore said inquiringly.

"No, not exactly that, but the doctors are not yet able to decide just what the internal injury may be."

"And while there is life there is hope," said Grandma Elsie in determinately cheerful tones. "It is certainly in his favor that he is a strong, healthy man, in the prime of life."

"And still more that he is a Christian man; therefore ready for any event," added her father.

"And so loved and useful a man that we may well unite in prayer for his recovery, if consistent with the will of God," said Captain Raymond.

"And so we will," said Cousin Ronald. "I feel assured that no one of us will refuse or neglect the performance of that duty."

"And we can plead the promise, 'If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven,'" said Mrs. Dinsmore. "So I have strong hope that dear Dick will be spared to us. He is certainly a much loved and very useful man."

"And Maud must be relieved as far as possible from other cares," remarked Mrs. Travilla. "I shall at once invite my brother and his family here. There is room enough, especially as my two sons are there and will be nearly, if not all, the time while Dick is so ill."

"No, cousin," said Chester, "thank you very much, but Cousin Sue is making herself very useful and could not well be spared. She has undertaken the housekeeping, leaving Maud to devote herself entirely to Dick."

"Oh, that is good and kind in her," was the quick response from several voices.

"And very fortunate it is that she happened to be there, ready for the undertaking," said Mrs. Rose Croly; "and if Dick had to have that accident he couldn't have found a better time for it than now, while there are three good doctors at hand to attend to him."

"True enough," assented Chester. "Things are never so bad but they might be worse."

Days of anxiety and suspense followed, during which Dr. Percival's life seemed trembling in the balance. Drs. Harold and Herbert scarcely left the house and spent much of their time in the sick room, while Dr. Conly made several visits every day, sometimes remaining for hours, and the rest of the relatives and near friends came and went with kind offers and inquiries, doing all in their power to show sympathy, and give help, while carefully avoiding unwelcome intrusion or disturbance of the quiet that brooded over Torriswood and seemed so essential under the circumstances. Nothing was neglected that could be done for the restoration of the loved sufferer, and no one of the many relatives and connections there felt willing to leave the neighborhood while his life hung in the balance.

Chester spent a part of each day with his distressed and anxious sister, and a part with his betrothed, from whom he felt very unwilling to absent himself for even one whole day.

The young people and some of the older ones made little excursions, as before, on the bayou and about the woods and fields, Captain Raymond and Violet usually forming a part of the company; especially if his daughter Grace and Frank Dinsmore were in it.

At other times they gathered upon the veranda or in the parlors and entertained each other with conversation, music, or games of the quiet and innocent kind.

In the meantime many earnest prayers were sent up on behalf of the injured one--the beloved physician--in the closet, in the family worship, and in the sanctuary when they assembled there on the Sabbath day; and many a silent petition as one and another thought of him on his bed of suffering. They prayed in faith, believing that if it were best in the sight of Him who is all-wise and all-powerful and with whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning, their petition would be granted.

And at length so it proved; the fever left him, consciousness and reason were restored, and presently the rejoicing physicians were able to declare the danger past, the recovery certain should nothing occur to cause a relapse.

Then there was great rejoicing among those who were of his kith and kin, and those to whom he was the beloved physician. Then such as were needed at their places of residence presently bade farewell and departed for their homes; Drs. Conly and Herbert Travilla among them, leaving Dr. Harold in sole charge of the invalid.

Those who had come on the *Dolphin* decided to return on it, though they would linger somewhat longer--no one feeling it a trial to have to delay for days or weeks where they were.

Frank Dinsmore was one of the earliest to leave, and Chester, finding that more Southern climate beneficial to him at that season of the year, was entirely willing to entrust the business of the firm to his brother for a time.

So, relieved of anxiety in regard to Dick and still numerous enough to make a very pleasant party, the time passed swiftly and most agreeably to them--especially to the two affianced pairs and the children; Cousin Ronald and Max now and then entertaining them by the exertion of their ventriloquial powers. The young people from Magnolia Hall were often with them and their presence added zest to the enjoyment of little Elsie and Ned in the fun made by their indulgent ventriloquists. That particular sport was apt to begin unexpectedly to the children, making it a little more difficult to recognize it as the doings of the ventriloquists.

One afternoon, after playing romping games upon the lawn until weary enough to enjoy a quiet rest on the veranda where the older people were, they had hardly seated themselves when they heard a sound of approaching footsteps, then a voice that seemed like that of a little girl, asking, "Dear little ladies and gentlemen, may I sit here with you for a while? I'm lonesome and would be glad of good company, such as I am sure yours must be."

Some of the children, hearing the voice but not able to see the speaker, seemed struck dumb with surprise.

It was Violet who answered, "Oh, yes, little girl. Take this empty chair by me and tell me who you are."

"Oh, madam, I really can't tell you my name," answered the voice, now seeming to come from the empty chair by Violet's side. "It seems an odd thing to happen, but there are folks who do sometimes forget their own name."

"And that is the case with you now, is it?" laughed Violet. "Your voice sounds like that of a girl, but I very much doubt if you belong to our sex."

"Isn't that rather insulting, madam?" asked the voice in an offended tone.

"Oh, I know you're not a girl or a woman either!" cried Ned Raymond gleefully, clapping his hands and laughing with delight. "You're a man, just pretending to be a little girl."

"That is insulting, you rude little chap, and I shall just go away," returned the voice in indignant tones, followed immediately by the sound of footsteps starting from the chair beside Violet and gradually dying away in the distance.

"Why, she went off in a hurry and I couldn't see her at all!" exclaimed one of the young visitors; then, as everybody laughed, "Oh, of course it was Cousin Ronald or Cousin Max!"

"Why, the voice sounded to me like that of a little girl," said Violet, "and Cousin Ronald and Max are men."

"Of course they are, and could not talk in the sweet tones of my little girl," said a rough masculine voice that seemed to come from the doorway into the hall.

Involuntarily nearly everybody turned to look for the speaker, but he was not to be seen.

"And who are you and your girl?" asked another voice, seeming to speak from the farther end of the veranda.

"People of consequence, whom you should treat with courtesy," answered the other, who seemed to stand in the doorway.

"As we will if you will come forward and show yourselves," laughed Lucilla, putting up her hand as she spoke to drive away a bee that seemed to buzz about her ears.

"Never mind, Lu; its sting won't damage you seriously," said Max, giving her a look of amusement.

"Oh, hark! here come the soldiers again!" exclaimed Elsie Embury, as the notes of a bugle, quickly followed by those of the drum and fife, seemed to come from a distant point on the farther side of the bayou.

"Don't be alarmed, miss; American soldiers don't harm ladies," said the voice from the farther end of the veranda.

"No, I am not at all alarmed," she returned with a look of amusement directed first at Cousin Ronald, then at Max; "not in the least afraid of them."

The music continued for a few minutes, all listening silently to it, then as the last strain died away a voice spoke in tones apparently trembling with affright, "Oh, please somebody hide me! hide me quick! quick! before those troops get here. I'm falsely accused and who knows but they may shoot me down on sight?"

The speaker was not visible, but from the sounds seemed to be on the lawn and very near at hand.

"Oh, run round the house and get the servants to hide you in the kitchen or one of the cellars," cried Ned, not quite able, in the excitement of the moment, to realize that there was not a stranger there who might be really in sore peril.

"Thanks!" returned the voice, and a sound as of some one running swiftly in the prescribed direction accompanied and followed the word.

Then the tramp, tramp, as of soldiers on the march, and the music of the drum and fife seemed to draw nearer and nearer.

"Why, it's real, isn't it?" exclaimed one of the children, jumping up and trying to get a nearer view of the approaching troop.

"Oh, don't be afraid," laughed Grace; "I'm sure they won't hurt us or that poor, frightened man either."

"No," chuckled Ned. "If he went to the kitchen, as I told him to, he'll have plenty of time to hide before they can get here."

"Sure enough, laddie," laughed Cousin Ronald, "they don't appear to be coming on very fast. I hear no more o' their music or their tramp, tramp. Do you?"

"No, sir; and I won't believe they are real live fellows till I see them."

"Well now, Ned," said Lucilla, "I really believe they are very much alive and kindly making a good deal of fun for us."

"Who, who, who?" came at that instant from among the branches of the tree near at hand--or at least seemed to come from there.

"Our two ventriloquist friends," replied Lucilla, gazing up into the tree as if expecting to see and recognize the bird.

"Oh, what was that?" exclaimed one of the little girls, jumping up in affright, as the squeak of a mouse seemed to come from among the folds of her dress.

"Nothing dangerous, my dear," said Mr. Dinsmore, drawing her into the shelter of his arms. "It was no mouse; only a little noise."

"Oh, yes, uncle, I might have known that," she said with a rather hysterical little laugh.

Just then the tramp, tramp was heard again apparently near at hand, at one side of the house, where the troops might be concealed by the trees and shrubs; the music of the drum and fife following the next moment.

"Oh," cried Ned, "won't they catch that fellow who just ran round to the kitchen as I told him to?"

"If they do I hope they won't hurt him," laughed Lucilla.

The music seemed to arouse the anger of several dogs belonging on the place and at that moment they set up a furious barking. The music continued and seemed to come nearer and nearer, the dogs barked more and more furiously; but presently the drum and fife became silent, the dogs ceased barking and all was quiet. But not for long; the voice that had asked for a hiding-place spoke again close at hand.

"Here I am, safe and sound, thanks to the little chap who told me where to hide. The fellows didn't find me and I'm off. But if they come here looking for me, please don't tell which way I've gone. Good-by."

"Wait a minute and tell us who you are before you go," called out Eric Leland, and from the tree came the owl's "Who, who, who?"

"Who I am?" returned the manlike voice, seeming to speak from a greater distance, "Well, sir, that's for me to know and you to find out."

"Now please tell us which of you it was--Cousin Ronald and Max," said Ned, looking from one to the other.

"That's for us to know and you to find out, little brother," laughed Max.

"Papa," said Ned, turning to their father, "I wish you'd order Max to tell."

"Max is of age now and not at present under my orders," replied Captain Raymond, with a humorous look and smile, and just then came the call to the tea table.

Ned was unusually quiet during the meal, gazing scrutinizingly every now and then at his father or Max. When they had returned to the veranda he watched his opportunity and seized upon a moment when he could speak to his brother without being overheard by anyone else.

"Brother Max," he queried, "won't you ever have to obey papa any more?"

"Yes, little brother," returned Max, looking slightly amused, "I consider it my duty to obey papa now whenever it pleases him to give me an order; and that it will be my duty as long as he and I both live."

"And you mean to do it?"

"Yes, indeed."

"So do I," returned Ned with great decision. "And I think all our sisters do too; because the Bible tells us to; and besides papa knows best about everything."

"Very true, Ned; and I hope none of us will ever forget that or fail to obey his orders or wishes or to follow his advice."

CHAPTER XVI.

Dr. Percival had so far recovered as to be considered able to lie in a hammock upon an upper veranda where he could look out upon the beauties of the lawn, the bayou, and the fields and woods beyond. Dr. Harold Travilla was still in attendance and seldom left him for any great length of time, never alone, seldom with only the nurse--Maud, one of Dick's sisters, or some other relative being always near at hand, ready to wait upon him, chat pleasantly for his entertainment, or remain silent as seemed best to suit his mood at the moment.

He was very patient, cheerful, and easily entertained, but did not usually talk very much himself.

One day he and Harold were alone for a time. Both had been silent for some moments when Dick, turning an affectionate look upon his cousin, said in grateful tones, "How very good, kind, and attentive you have been to me, Harold. I think that but for you and the other two doctors--Cousins Arthur and Herbert--I should now be lying under the sod; and I must acknowledge that you are a most excellent physician and surgeon," he added with an appreciative smile and holding out his hand.

Harold took the hand and, pressing it affectionately in both of his, said with feeling, "Thank you, Dick. I consider your opinion worth a great deal, and it is a joy to me that I have been permitted to aid in helping on your recovery; but I am no more deserving of thanks than the others. Indeed both Herbert and I felt it to be a very great help to be able to call Cousin Arthur in to give his opinion, advice, assistance; which he did freely and faithfully. He is an excellent physician and surgeon--as I know you to be also: knowledge which increases the delight of having been--by God's blessing upon our efforts--able to pull you through, thus saving a most useful life."

"Thank you," replied Dick in a moved tone. "By God's help I shall try to make it more useful in the future than it has been in the past--should he see fit to restore me to health and vigor. I feel at present as if I might never again be able to walk or ride."

"I think you need change of climate for a while," said Harold. "What do you say to going North with us, if Captain Raymond should give you and Maud an invitation to take passage in his yacht?"

"Why, that is a splendid idea, Harold!" exclaimed Dick, with such a look of animation and pleasure as had not been seen upon his features for many a day. "Should I get the invitation and Bob come back in time to attend to our practice, I--I really shall, I think, be strongly inclined to accept."

"I hope so indeed," Harold said with a smile, "and I haven't a doubt that you will get it; for I know of no one who loves better than the captain to do good or give pleasure. Ah! speak of angels! here he is with his wife and yours," as just at that moment the three stepped out from the open doorway upon the veranda.

"The three of us, Harold? Are we all angels to-day?" asked Violet, with a smile, stepping forward and taking Dick's hand in hers.

"Quite as welcome as if you were, cousin," said Dick. "Ah, captain! it was you we were speaking of at the moment of your arrival."

"Ah? a poor substitute for an angel, I fear," was the rejoinder in the captain's usual pleasant tones. "But I hope it was the thought of something which it may be in my power to do for you, Cousin Dick."

"Thanks, captain; you are always most kind," returned Dick, asking Harold by a look to give the desired explanation, which he did at once by repeating what had just passed between him and Dr. Percival in regard to a Northern trip to be taken by the latter upon his partner's return from his bridal trip.

Captain Raymond's countenance brightened as he listened and scarcely waiting for the conclusion, "Why, certainly," he said. "It will be an easy matter to make room for Cousins Dick and Maud, and a delight to have them with us on the voyage and after we reach home until the warm weather sends us all farther North for the summer."

"Oh, delightful!" cried Maud. "Oh, Dick, my dear, it will set you up as nothing else could; and you may hope to come

back in the fall as well and strong as ever."

Dr. Percival looked inquiringly at Violet.

"Yes, cousin," she said with a smile, "I think we can make you very comfortable; and that without inconveniencing anybody; especially as Grandpa and Grandma Dinsmore decline to return in the *Dolphin*. They go from here to Philadelphia by rail, to visit her relations there or in that region. So you need not hesitate about it for a moment, and," glancing at her brother, "you will have your doctor along to see that you are well taken care of and not allowed to expose yourself on deck when you should be down in the saloon or lying in your berth."

"Yes," laughed Harold, "I shall do my best to keep my patient within bounds and see that he does nothing to bring on a relapse and so do discredit to my medical and surgical knowledge and skill."

"Which I should certainly be most sorry to do," smiled Dick. "If I do not do credit to it all, it shall be no fault of mine. Never again, cousin, can I for a moment forget that you stand at about the head of your profession--or deserve to, certainly--as both physician and surgeon. Captain, I accept your kind offer with most hearty thanks. I feel already something like fifty per cent. better for the very thought of the rest and pleasure of the voyage, the visit to my old home and friends, and then a sojourn during the hot months in the cooler regions of the North."

From that time his improvement was far more rapid than it had been, and Maud was very happy over that and her preparations for the contemplated trip, in which Grandma Elsie and Cousins Annis and Violet gave her valuable assistance.

At length a letter was received telling that the newly-married pair might be expected two days later. Chester brought the news to Viamede shortly after breakfast and all heard it with pleasure, for they were beginning to feel a strong drawing toward their northern homes.

"It is good news," said Grandma Elsie; "and now I want to carry out a plan of which I have been thinking for some time."

"In regard to what?" asked her father.

"The reception to be given our bride and groom," she answered. "I want it to be given here; all the connection now in these parts to be invited, house and lawn to be decorated as they were for our large party just after the wedding, and such a feast of fat things as we had then to be provided."

"That is just like you, mother," said Captain Raymond; "always thinking how to give pleasure and save trouble to other people."

"Ah, it seems to me that I am the one to do it in this instance," she returned with a gratified smile, "having the most means, the most room of any of the connection about here, abundance of excellent help as regards all the work of preparation and the entertainment of the guests; indeed everything that the occasion calls for. Dick and Maud are in no case to do the entertaining, though I do certainly hope they may both be able to attend--he, poor fellow, lying in a hammock on the veranda or under the trees. If they like they may as well come fully prepared for their journey and start with us from here."

"A most excellent and kind plan, cousin, as yours always are," said Chester, giving Mrs. Travilla a pleased and grateful look. "I have no doubt it will be accepted if Dr. Harold approves."

"As he surely should, since it is his mother's," remarked Violet in her sprightly way. "Suppose you drive over at once, mamma, see the three, and have the whole thing settled."

"A very good idea I think, Vi," was the smiling rejoinder. "Captain, will you order a carriage brought round promptly, and you and Vi go with me?--taking Elsie and Ned also, if they would care for a drive," she added, giving the little folks a kindly inquiring look.

Both joyfully accepted the invitation, if papa and mamma were willing; Elsie adding:

"And if Cousin Dick is not well enough for us to go in, we can stay in the carriage or out in the grounds, till you and papa and mamma are ready to come back."

"Yes," said her father; "so there is no objection to your going."

"There will still be a vacant seat," said Grandma Elsie, "will you not go with us also, Grace? I have heard Harold say driving was good exercise for you."

"Oh, thank you, ma'am," said Grace. "I should like it very much, if papa approves," glancing with an inquiring smile at him.

"Certainly. I am quite sure that my daughter Grace's company will add to my enjoyment of the drive," was the captain's kindly response.

"And, Grandma Elsie, cannot you find some use for the stay-at-homes?" asked Max. "Chester and myself for instance. Would there be any objection to having 'Old Glory' set waving from the tree tops to-day?"

"None whatever," she returned with her sweet smile. "I, for one, never weary of seeing it 'wave o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.'"

"I think anyone who does isn't worthy to be called an American!" exclaimed Lucilla with warmth.

"Unless so unfortunate as to be only a South American," remarked Eva with a smile. "You would not expect such an one to care for our Old Glory."

"Oh, no, certainly not; it is no more to them than to the rest of the world."

"But I dare say it is a good deal to some of the rest of the world; judging from the way they flock to these shores," said Chester.

"Which I sincerely wish some of them wouldn't," said Lucilla; "the ignorant, idle, and vicious. To read of the great numbers constantly coming in often makes me tremble for our liberties."

"Honest and industrious ones we are always glad to welcome," said Chester, "but the idle and vicious ought to be kept out. And as our own native born boys must be twenty-one years old before being allowed to vote, I think every foreigner should be required to wait here that same length of time before receiving the right of suffrage."

"And I heartily agree with you in that," said Captain Raymond.

"But unfortunately we have too many selfish politicians--men who are selfishly set upon their own advancement to wealth and power and care little, if anything, for their country and their country's good--who, to gain votes for themselves, have managed to have the right of suffrage given those worthless, ignorant foreigners in order to get into place and power through them."

"I haven't a particle of respect for such men," exclaimed Lucilla hotly; "and not much, more for some others who are so engrossed in the management of their own affairs--the making of money by such close attention to business, that they can't, or won't look at all after the interests of their country."

"Very true, my dear sister," said Max, with a roguish look and smile, "so it is high time the ladies should be given the right of suffrage."

"The right! I think they have that already," she returned with rising color and an indignant look, "but domineering men won't allow them to use it."

"Why, daughter," laughed the captain, "I had no idea that you were such a woman's rights woman. Surely it is not the result of my training."

"No, indeed, papa; though you have tried to teach me to think for myself," she returned with a blush and smile, adding, "I am not wanting to vote--even if I were old enough, which I know I am not yet--but I do want the laws made and administered by my own countrymen, and that without any assistance from ignorant foreigners."

"Ah, and that is perhaps the result of my teachings. Are you not afraid, Chester," turning to him, "that one of these days she may prove too independent for you?"

"Ah, captain, if you are thinking of frightening me out of my bargain let me assure you at once that it is perfectly useless," laughed Chester in return.

"Ah, yes; I suppose so," sighed the captain in mock distress. "But I must go now and order the carriage," he added, rising and hastening away in the direction of the stables.

"And we to make our preparations for the drive and call at Torriswood," said Grandma Elsie, addressing Violet and the younger ones, expecting to be of the party. "Dick and Maud should have as early a report of our plans and purposes as we can well give them."

To that Violet and Grace gave a hearty assent, the little ones echoing it joyfully, and by the time the carriage could be brought to the door they were all ready to enter it.

They found Maud and Dick full of pleasurable excitement, the former already at work upon her packing. Grandma Elsie's plan and invitation were highly appreciated by both and joyfully accepted.

The arrangements were soon made. If all went well with Dr. and Mrs. Johnson they would reach Viamede the next afternoon, stay there in the enjoyment of its hospitality until toward bedtime of that evening, then come on to Torriswood, and a day or two later the others would start upon their northward journey; all going together to New Orleans, Grandpa and Grandma Dinsmore taking the cars there for Philadelphia, and the rest starting for home by water—along the Gulf of Mexico, around Florida, and up the Atlantic coast.

The whole plan met Dr. Harold's unqualified approval, while Dr. Percival was so charmed with it that he insisted that the very prospect of it all had nearly restored him to health and strength.

"Is that so, cousin?" exclaimed Violet with a pleased laugh, "why, you will be another Samson by the time we reach our homes."

"Ah, if I can only recover the amount of strength I had before my accident I shall be satisfied," said he, "and I shall know how to appreciate it as I never did in the past."

All the necessary arrangements having now been made, the Viamede party presently returned to their temporary home, which they found looking very gay and patriotic with flags fluttering from tree tops, gables, windows, and verandas; for the young folks left behind had been very busy in their work of adornment. The result of their labors met with warm approval from Grandma Elsie, the captain, and Violet. Grace and Elsie Raymond, too, expressed themselves as highly pleased, while Ned quite went into raptures at the sight of so fine a display of the "Star-spangled Banner."

"Now, Cousin Ronald," he exclaimed, turning to Mr. Lilburn, "don't you think it is the very prettiest flag that floats?"

"As bonny a one as ever I saw, laddie," responded the old gentleman with a genial smile. "And don't you know that having adopted this as my country, I now consider it as truly my ain banner as it is yours?"

"Oh, yes, sir, and I like you to," returned Ned with a pleased look.
"I like this to be your country as well as mine."

"It's a grand country, laddie," was the pleasant-toned response, "and the native land of my bonny young wife and the dear little bairns of my son Hugh; so I may well give it a share of my affection."

The weather continued fine, all the preparations were carried forward successfully, and by noon of the next day the Percivals were ready to enjoy a brief stay at Viamede and gaining strength, but carefully attended and watched over by his cousin Harold, and Maud full of life and gayety because of his improvement and the pleasant prospect before them. It would be so delightful, she thought and said, to see her old home and friends and acquaintances about there, Dick taking his ease among them all for a time; and then to spend some weeks or months, farther north, enjoying sea breezes and sea bathing.

All the cousins, older and younger, from Magnolia Hall and the Parsonage were gathered there before the hour when the boat bringing their bride and groom might be expected, and as it rounded to at the wharf quite a little crowd could be seen waiting to receive them.

The Johnsons had not been apprised of the reception awaiting them and were expecting to go on immediately to Torriswood, but the boat was hailed and stopped by Chester, and at the same time seeing the festive preparations and the assemblage of relatives, they understood what was going on and expected, and stepped quickly ashore, where glad greetings were exchanged; then all moved on to the house where Dr. Percival lay in a hammock on the front veranda.

"Oh, Dick, dear fellow, are you still unable to move about?" asked Dr. Johnson, grasping his hand and looking down into his thin, pale face with eyes that filled with tears in spite of himself.

"Oh, I'll soon be all right, Bob; though if it hadn't been for Harold here," giving the latter a warmly affectionate glance, "I doubt if you would have found a partner in your practice on your return."

"In that case I am certainly under great obligations to you, Harold," Robert said with feeling, as he and Harold grasped hands with cousinly warmth. "You could hardly have done me a greater service."

"Don't talk of obligations," said Harold with emotion. "Dick and you and I are not only all members of the same profession, but all near kinsmen; so that Dick had a double and strong claim upon me and my services."

"And we all think he needs a change," said Maud, standing near, "and so, by Cousin Elsie's kind invitation, we are going with her and the rest, in the captain's yacht, to visit them and our old homes; then on farther North to the seashore."

"The very best thing that could be done, I think," said Robert; "it certainly is Dick's turn to have a holiday while I stay and attend to our practice."

The mirth, jollity, and feasting that followed, filling up the rest of the day, were very similar to those of the day of the wedding, weeks before.

Dr. Percival was still feeble, and Mrs. Travilla had some arrangements to make in regard to the conduct of affairs at Viamede after her departure, which together made it best to delay for a few days. But at length all was ready, the good-byes were said, and the return journey to their northern homes was begun.

As had been planned Mr. and Mrs. Dinsmore took the cars at New Orleans, while the *Dolphin*, bearing the remaining members of their party, passed from west to east along the Gulf of Mexico, around the southern coast of Florida and up its eastern coast and that of the Carolinas. Quite a voyage, but neither tedious nor tiresome to the passengers, so pleasant did they find each other's society and the variety of books and sports provided for their entertainment.

During the greater part of the voyage the weather was pleasant enough to allow them to spend the most of their days upon deck, where they could walk about or sit and chat beneath an awning.

"Grandma," said little Elsie, coming to Mrs. Travilla's side one morning as she sat on deck busied with a bit of fancy work, "would it trouble you to talk to Ned and me a little while?"

"No, dear," was the smiling reply, "but what is it that you wish to hear from me?"

"Something about General Marion, grandma, if you please. I know a little about him and admire him very much indeed. He was a South Carolina man, I know, and when I heard papa say a while ago that we were on the South Carolina coast, it made me think of Marion and that I should be very glad to hear something more of what he did in the Revolution."

"And so would I, grandma; ever so much," added Ned, who was close at his sister's side.

"Then sit down, one on each side of me, and I will tell you some things that I have read about General Francis Marion, one of the boldest, most energetic, and faithful patriots of the Revolution. He was born in South Carolina in 1732, and it is said was so small a baby that he might have been easily put into a quart pot."

"He must have had to grow a good deal before he could be a soldier, grandma," laughed Ned.

"Yes, but he had forty-three years to do it in," said Elsie.

"That many years before the Revolutionary War began," said her grandma, "but he was only twenty-seven when he became a soldier by joining an expedition against the Cherokees and other hostile Indian tribes on the western frontier of his State. When the Revolution began he was made a captain in the second South Carolina regiment. He fought in the battle at Fort Sullivan, on Sullivan's Island, in the contest at Savannah, and many another. He organized a brigade and became brigadier of the militia of South Carolina. After the battle of Eutaw he became senator in the Legislature, but soon went back into the army and remained there till the close of the war."

"Grandma, didn't he and his soldiers camp in the swamps a good deal of the time?" asked Elsie.

"Yes; and often had but little to eat--sometimes sweet potatoes only, and but a scant supply of them. A story is told of a young British officer from Georgetown coming to treat with him respecting prisoners, when Marion was camping on Snow's Island--at the confluence of the Pedee River and Lynch's Creek. The Briton was led blindfolded to Marion's camp. There for the first time he saw that general--a small man--with groups of his men about him, lounging under the magnificent trees draped with moss. When they had concluded their business Marion invited the Englishman to dine with him. The invitation was accepted, and great was the astonishment of the guest when the dinner was served; only some roasted potatoes on a piece of bark. 'Surely, general,' he said, 'this cannot be your ordinary fare?' 'Indeed it is,' replied Marion, 'and we are fortunate on this occasion, entertaining company, to have more than our usual allowance.'

"It is said that the young officer gave up his commission on his return, saying that such a people could not, and ought not to be subdued."

"Marion and his men must have loved their country and liberty to be willing to live in swamps with nothing but potatoes to eat," said Elsie; "it makes me think of the stories I've read and heard about Robin Hood and his merry men."

"Yes," said her grandmother, "and Lossing tells us Marion's men were as devoted to him as those of Robin Hood were to their leader. Our poet Bryant has drawn a telling picture of that noble band in his

"SONG OF MARION'S MEN.

"Our band is few, but true and tried,
Our leader frank and bold;
The British soldier trembles
When Marion's name is told.
Our fortress is the good greenwood,
Our tent the cypress-tree;
We know the forest round us
As seamen know the sea.
We know its walls of thorny vines,
Its glades of reedy grass;
Its safe and silent islands
Within the dark morass.

"Woe to the English soldiery,
That little dread us near!
On them shall light at midnight
A strange and sudden fear;
When, waking to their tents on fire,
They grasp their arms in vain,
And they who stand to face us
Are beat to earth again;
And they who fly in terror deem
A mighty host behind,
And hear the tramp of thousands
Upon the hollow wind.

"Then sweet the hour that brings release
From danger and from toil;
We talk the battle over,
And share the battle's spoil.
The woodland rings with laugh and shout,
As if a hunt were up,
And woodland flowers are gather'd
To crown the soldier's cup.
With merry songs we mock the wind
That in the pine-top grieves,
And slumber long and sweetly

On beds of oaken leaves.

"Well knows the fair and friendly moon
The band that Marion leads--
The glitter of their rifles.
The scampering of their steeds.
'Tis life to guide the fiery barb
Across the moonlight plain;
'Tis life to feel the night wind
That lifts his tossing mane.
A moment in the British camp--
A moment--and away
Back to the pathless forest,
Before the peep of day.

"Grave men there are by broad Santee,
Grave men with hoary hairs,
Their hearts are all with Marion,
For Marion are their prayers.
And lovely ladies greet our band
With kindest welcoming,
With smiles like those of summer,
With tears like those of spring.
For them we wear these trusty arms,
And lay them down no more
Till we have driven the Briton
Forever from our shore."

"And we did drive the British away--or Marion and his men, and the rest of our brave soldiers did," exclaimed Ned when the recitation of the poem was finished, "didn't they, grandma?"

"Yes, Neddie boy, God helped us to get free and become the great nation which we are to-day; and to him let us give all the glory and the praise."

"Yes, grandma, I know that even those brave and good fighters couldn't have done it if God hadn't helped them. Did Marion live long after the war was over?"

"About a dozen years. He died on the 29th of February, 1795. We are told his last words were, 'Thank God, since I came to man's estate I have never intentionally done wrong to any man.'"

"And is that all the story about him?" asked Ned regretfully.

"Enough for the present, I think," replied his grandma; "when you are older you can read of him in history for yourself. However, some of his work will come in incidentally as I go on with some other historical sketches. I want to tell you something of Mrs. Rebecca Motte--one of the brave and patriotic women living in South Carolina at that time--and the doings of the British and Americans on her estate.

"Mrs. Motte was a rich widow. She had a fine large mansion occupying a commanding position on the road between Charleston and Camden. The British, knowing that she was a patriot, drove her and her family from their home to a farmhouse which she owned, upon a hill north of her mansion, into which they put a garrison of one hundred and fifty men under Captain M'Pherson, a brave British officer.

"Early in May he was joined by a small detachment of dragoons sent from Charleston with despatches for Lord Rawdon. They were about to leave when Marion and Lee, with their troops, were seen upon the height at the farmhouse where Mrs. Motte was now living. So the dragoons remained to give their help in the defense of the fort.

"Lee took position at the farmhouse, and his men, with a fieldpiece which General Greene had sent them, were stationed on the eastern slope of the high plain on which Fort Motte stood. Marion at once threw up a mound and planted the fieldpiece upon it in a position to rake the northern face of the parapet of the fort against which Lee was about to move.

"M'Pherson was without artillery. Between Fort Motte and the height where Lee was posted was a narrow valley which

enabled his men to come within a few hundred yards of the fort. From that they began to advance by a parallel—a wide trench—and by the 10th of the month they were so far successful that they felt warranted in demanding a surrender. They sent a summons to M'Pherson, but he gallantly refused to comply.

"That evening our men heard that Lord Rawdon had retreated from Camden, was coming in that direction, and would relieve Fort Motte. The next morning beacon fires could be seen on the high hills of Santee, and that night the besieged were greatly rejoiced to see their gleam on the highest ground of the country opposite Fort Motte. They were delighted, but soon found that they had rejoiced too soon.

"Lee proposed a quicker plan for dislodging them than had been thought of before. Mrs. Motte's mansion, in the center of their works, was covered with a roof of shingles now very dry, as there had been no rain for several days and the heat of the sun had been great. Lee's idea was to set those shingles on fire and so drive the enemy out. He had been enjoying Mrs. Motte's hospitality and her only marriageable daughter was the wife of a friend of his, so he was very loath to destroy her property, but on telling her his plan, he was much relieved to find that she was not only willing, but desirous to serve her country by the sacrifice of her property.

"He then told his plan to Marion and they made haste to execute it. It was proposed to set the roof on fire with lighted torches attached to arrows which should be shot against it. Mrs. Motte, seeing that the arrows the men were preparing were not very good, brought out a fine bow and bundle of arrows which had come from the East Indies, and gave them to Lee.

"The next morning Lee again sent a flag of truce to M'Pherson, the bearer telling him that Rawdon had not yet crossed the Santee, and that immediate surrender would save many lives.

"But M'Pherson still refused, and at noon Nathan Savage, a private in Marion's brigade, shot toward the house several arrows with lighted torches attached. Two struck the dry shingles and instantly a bright flame was creeping along the roof. Soldiers were sent up to knock off the shingles and put out the fire, but a few shots from Marion's battery raked the loft and drove them below. Then M'Pherson hung out a white flag, the Americans ceased firing, the flames were put out, and at one o'clock the garrison surrendered themselves prisoners of war.

"Then Mrs. Motte invited both the American and the British officers to a sumptuous dinner which she had had made ready for them."

Grace Raymond had drawn near and was listening in a very interested way to the story as told by Mrs. Travilla.

"Grandma Elsie," she said as that lady paused in her narrative, "do you remember a little talk between the American and British officers at that dinner of Mrs. Motte's?"

"I am not sure that I do," was the reply. "Can you repeat it for us?"

"I think I can give at least the substance," said Grace. "One of the prisoners was an officer named Captain Ferguson. He was seated near Colonel Horry, one of our American officers. Addressing him, Ferguson said, 'You are Colonel Horry, I presume, sir?' Horry replied that he was and Ferguson went on, 'Well, I was with Colonel Watson when he fought your General Marion on Sampit. I think I saw you there with a party of horse, and also at Nelson's Ferry, when Marion surprised our party at the house. But I was hid in high grass and escaped. You were fortunate in your escape at Sampit, for Watson and Small had twelve hundred men.'

"'If so,' said Horry, 'I certainly was fortunate, for I did not suppose they had more than half that number;' Then Ferguson said, 'I consider myself equally fortunate in escaping at Nelson's Old Field.'

"'Truly you were,' Horry returned sarcastically, 'for Marion had but thirty militia on that occasion,' The other officers at the table could not refrain from laughing. General Greene afterward asked Horry how he came to affront Captain Ferguson, and Horry answered that he affronted himself by telling his own story."

"Ah, I think our soldiers were the bravest," was little Elsie's comment upon that anecdote.

"Yes," said her grandma, "probably because they were fighting for liberty and home."

"Please, grandma, tell us another Revolutionary story," pleaded Ned.

"Did you ever hear the story of what Emily Geiger did for the good cause?" asked Grandma Elsie in reply.

"No, ma'am; won't you please tell it?"

"Yes. Emily was the daughter of a German planter in Fairfield District. She was not more than eighteen years old, but very brave. General Greene had an important message to send to Sumter, but because of the danger from the numbers of Tories and British likely to be encountered on the way none of his men seemed willing to take it; therefore he was delighted when this young girl came forward and offered to carry his letter to Sumter. But fearing she might lose it on the way, he made her acquainted with its contents.

"She mounted a fleet horse, crossed the Wateree at the Camden Ferry, and hastened on toward Sumter's camp. On the second day of her journey, while passing through a dry swamp, she was stopped and made prisoner by some Tory scouts, who suspected her because she came from the direction of Greene's army. They took her to a house on the edge of the swamp and shut her up in a room, while they sent for a woman to search her person.

"Emily was by no means willing to have the letter found upon her person, so as soon as left alone she began tearing it up and swallowing it piece by piece. After a while the woman came and searched her carefully, but found nothing to criminate the girl, as the last piece of the letter had already gone down her throat.

"Her captors, now convinced of her innocence, made many apologies and allowed her to go on her way. She reached Sumter's camp, gave him Greene's message, and soon the British under Rawdon were flying before the Americans toward Orangeburg."

"Is that all, grandma?" asked Ned, as Mrs. Travilla paused and glanced up smilingly at Captain Raymond, who now drew near.

"All for the present, Neddie," she replied. "Some other time I may perhaps think of other incidents to give you."

"Ah, mother, so you have been kindly entertaining my children, who are great lovers of stories," remarked the captain. "I hope they have not been too exacting in their entreaties for such amusement?"

"Oh, no," she replied; "they wanted some episodes in the history of the State we are passing, and I have been giving them some account of the gallant deeds of General Marion and others."

"He was a brave, gallant man, was Francis Marion, thoroughly patriotic, and one of the finest characters of that time; a countryman of whom we may well be proud," remarked the captain, speaking with earnestness and enthusiasm; "and with it all he was most humane; a great contrast to some of the British officers who burnt houses, robbed and wronged women and children--rendering them shelterless, stripping them of all clothes except those they wore, not to speak of even worse acts of barbarity. Bancroft tells us that when the British were burning houses on the Little Pedee, Marion permitted his men of that district to go home and protect their wives and families; but that he would not suffer retaliation and wrote with truth, 'There is not one house burned by my orders or by any of my people. It is what I detest, to distress poor women and children.'"

"I am proud of him as one of my countrymen," said Grace. "He was sometimes called 'The swamp Fox,' was he not, papa?"

"Yes; the swamps were his usual place of refuge and camping ground."

"I admire him very much and like to hear about him and all he did for our country," said little Elsie; "but I am glad and thankful that I didn't live in those dreadful war times."

"As you well may be, my dear child," said her father. "We cannot be too thankful for the liberty we enjoy in these days and which was largely won for us by Marion and other brave and gallant patriots of those darker days. They, and our debt of gratitude to them, should never be forgotten or ignored."

CHAPTER XVII.

The *Dolphin's* passengers greatly enjoyed their voyage up the Atlantic coast, yet were not sorry when they reached their desired haven--the city within a few miles of their homes.

Dr. Percival had gained strength every day and now could go about very well with the help of a friend's arm or a cane, and spent but a part of his time lounging in an easy-chair or resting upon a couch.

A telegram had carried to their home friends the information that they expected to reach port on that day, and carriages were there in waiting to convey them to their several places of abode.

Dr. Conly had come for Dr. and Mrs. Percival, as had also Mr. Dinsmore from the Oaks; the one claiming that Roselands was Dick's old home, therefore undoubtedly the proper place for him at present--the other that Maud belonged at the Oaks and of course her husband with her. Grandma Elsie had already given them a warm invitation to Ion, and Captain Raymond and Violet the same to Woodburn. It seemed a little difficult to decide which had the prior claim. Dr. Harold said it should be Ion first in order that he might still have his patient where he could keep continued and careful watch over him; and as he grew better and stronger the others could have their turns at entertaining him and Maud.

To that Dick laughingly replied that he was now tolerably used to obeying Harold's orders, so should submit to his decision, still hoping that in time he and Maud might have the pleasure of accepting the other invitations in turn.

That seemed to give tolerable satisfaction as about as good an arrangement as could well be made.

The Beechwood and Woodburn family carriages and Max's pony were there, also the carriage from Fairview for Evelyn. Max helped her into it, then mounted his steed and rode alongside, the Woodburn carriage driving a little ahead of them, while the other vehicles were somewhat in their rear.

All reached their destinations in safety, each party receiving a joyful welcome on their arrival. Chester, after a brief but affectionate good-by, "for a short time," to Lucilla, had taken a seat in Mr. Dinsmore's carriage, as he and his brother still made their home at the Oaks. Both pairs of lovers had greatly enjoyed their daily intercourse upon the *Dolphin* and gave that up with some feeling of regret, but comforted themselves with the thought that twenty-four hours would seldom pass without allowing them at least a brief interview.

Bidding good-by to Eva at the gate into Fairview Avenue, Max rode rapidly onward and entered the Woodburn grounds just in the rear of his father's carriage, then dismounted at the veranda in time to take part in assisting the ladies and children to alight.

"Oh, how delightful it is to be at home again!" exclaimed Grace, dancing about and gazing this way and that into the beautifully kept grounds. "I am always glad to go, but still gladder to get back."

"And so am I," "And I," exclaimed the younger ones.

"And I am as glad as anybody else, I think," said Max, "though I should not be if I were here alone--without father, Mamma Vi, and the sisters and little brother."

"No, indeed! the dear ones make more than half of home," Lucilla said with a loving glance around upon the others, then one of ardent affection up into her father's face.

"Yes," said Grace, "father alone is more than half of home to each and every one of us."

An assertion which no one was in the least inclined to contradict.

"He certainly is to me--his wife," said Violet, giving him a look that spoke volumes of respect and love.

"And I certainly know of no man who has less reason to complain of the lack of appreciation by his nearest and dearest," responded the captain in tones slightly tremulous with feeling, and a look of fond, proud affection, first at his wife, then at his children, each in turn.

"This is certainly a happy home-coming to us all," said Max, "to me in especial, I think, as the one who has seen so little of it for years past. It is to me the dearest spot on earth; though it would not be without the dear ones it holds."

But housekeeper and servants had now come crowding about with glad greetings, which were warmly returned, and then the family scattered to their rooms to prepare for the dinner just ready to be served.

All our returned travellers were received with joyful greetings at their homes, not excepting Dr. Harold Travilla at Ion; and all there seemed to rejoice that they were to be the first to entertain the cousins--Dr. Percival and Maud. They were warmly welcomed and speedily installed in most comfortable quarters--a suite of beautifully furnished apartments--on the ground floor, that Dick might be spared the exertion of going up and down even the easiest flight of stairs. They were more than content.

"We seem to have come into a haven of rest, Maud, my love," Dick remarked as he lay back in his reclining chair, and gazed about with eyes that kindled with joy and admiration.

"Yes, my dear," laughed Maud, "it would seem almost appropriate to put another letter into that noun and call it a heaven--so beautiful and tasteful is everything around us."

"Yes; I wish everybody had as good, kind, capable, and helpful friends and relatives as ours, and as able to give them such royal entertainment."

"Cousin Elsie is the very person to have large means," said Maud, "for she seems to be always thinking of others and what she can do for their comfort and happiness. There is not a particle of selfishness or self-righteousness about her."

"I heartily agree with you there," said Dick. "I have known her since I was the merest child and she has always seemed to live to do good and show kindness to all around her. She evidently looks upon her wealth as simply a trust--something the Lord has put into her hands to be used for his glory and the good of her fellow creatures."

"I am sure you are right about that," said Maud. "And her children resemble her in it. What could have exceeded the kindness of Cousins Harold and Herbert--Cousin Arthur Conly, too--when you were so ill? Oh, Dick dear, I thought I was going to lose you! Oh, how could I ever have borne that?" she added with a sob; "and I am sure you and I owe your life to their skilful treatment, their untiring care and devotion."

"We do indeed," he said with emotion; "but for their untiring efforts and God's blessing upon them I should now be under the sod--and my darling a widow," he added tenderly and in quivering tones, drawing her down to give her a fond caress. "And how kind Vi and her husband have been," he went on. "The captain is a grand good man and quite as anxious to use all he has for the glory of God and the good of his fellow creatures as dear Cousin Elsie herself."

"Yes; I don't wonder his wife and children love him so dearly; and I could hardly love him better were he my own brother," said Maud. "I am so glad he and Cousin Violet fancied each other and married when they did."

"Yes, they are the most enjoyable of relatives to us and very happy in each other."

Here their bit of chat was interrupted by a tap on the door opening into the hall. Dr. Harold had come to say that dinner was on the table, and ask if his patient felt able, and if it would be enjoyable to join the family at their meal.

"Indeed I should like it," was Dick's prompt response, "and I think too that I am entirely equal to the exertion."

"Perhaps even with only your cane, if I give you the support of my arm," suggested Harold.

"Thank you, yes," returned Dick, with a pleased look, as Harold assisted him to rise and Maud handed him his cane.

So the little journey was made successfully and the social meal greatly enjoyed. At its conclusion Harold assisted Dr. Percival to his couch again, where he lay down, just weary enough to take a long, refreshing nap.

On leaving the table, Grandma Elsie went to the telephone and called to Woodburn. Violet answered, "What is it, mother?" and received the reply, "I expect the whole connection here to take tea and spend the evening, and I want you all to come."

The captain, standing near, heard the message also, and as Violet turned inquiringly to him, "Surely there is nothing to prevent any of us from going," he said, and she at once answered, "Thank you, mother, you may expect us all."

The same invitation had been already sent to, and accepted by, the others, and some time before the tea hour they were all there, glad to meet and exchange greetings, and chat about all that had occurred since they last saw each other. And Dr. Percival, refreshed and strengthened by his dinner and a long, sound sleep after it, was able to enjoy it all, perhaps as keenly as anyone else. They talked of whatever had occurred among them during the time that they had been separated, and of their plans for the coming heated term—who would pass it at home and who go North to find a cooler climate. But it was not necessary to decide fully upon their plans, as some weeks must elapse ere carrying them out and there would be a good deal of intercourse among them in the meantime.

They scattered to their homes early in the evening that Dr. Percival might not be kept up or awake, and that the little ones might be safely and in good season bestowed in their nests for the night.

Dr. Percival improved rapidly in the next few weeks; so rapidly that he was able to make a visit to Roselands, the Oaks, and Woodburn, each in turn, and felt that he should greatly enjoy the journey to the North and the sojourn by the seaside there which awaited him, his wife, and friends.

Our two pairs of lovers went quietly and happily on with their courting, considered plans for future house-building and housekeeping, and what should be done and enjoyed in the meantime, and it seemed but a little while till they were again on board the *Dolphin* and speeding on their northward course.

It was the same party that had come in her on that last voyage from the South. Max was still in the enjoyment of his furlough and by his father's request now took command of the vessel; but, the weather being fine throughout the voyage, his duties were not arduous and Evelyn had no reason to complain of want of attention from her fiancé. Nor had Lucilla; Chester being seldom absent from her side during the day or evening. So that Captain Raymond began to feel at times that he was already losing—to some extent—his eldest daughter. He sighed over it to himself, but made no complaint to either of them.

Lucilla's affection for him did not seem to have suffered any abatement; as had been her custom, she often came to him for a bit of private chat early in the morning or in the evening after the others had gone to their staterooms; and in these private interviews she was the same ardently affectionate daughter she had been for years; so that he felt he had no reason to fear that her lover had stolen all her heart.

But she was very keen-sighted as regarded him and his feelings toward her. One evening as, according to his custom, he paced the deck after all the passengers had retired for the night, he heard her light step at his side and then her voice asking in its sweetest tones, "Papa dear, mayn't I walk with you for at least a few minutes? I am neither sleepy nor tired, and it is so seldom now that I can have my own dear father all to myself."

"Yes, daughter dear," he said, putting an arm about her and caressing her with tenderness. "I am very glad to have your company if it is not going to weary you or rob you of needed sleep." Then he drew her hand within his arm and they paced slowly back and forth, conversing in subdued tones.

"It is so sweet to be alone with you once in a while, my own dear father," she said. "I think, papa, if my engagement has made any change in my feelings toward you it has been to make you seem to me nearer and dearer, if possible, than ever. Oh, I think it would break my heart if I should ever have to go so far away from you that I could not see and talk with you every day!"

"Dear child, those are sweet words to my ear," he said in moved tones, "and I am most thankful that, so far as we can see into the future, there seems little or no danger that we will ever be so separated in this world."

"Yes, papa; that assurance is one of my greatest joys. And I am so glad that my dear father is so strong and well, and not so very old," she added with a smile and a look of loving admiration up into his face.

"I am not very young, daughter," he returned pleasantly, "though I think my natural strength has not abated, and life seems as enjoyable to me as ever. But the happy thought is that God our heavenly Father rules and reigns and shall choose all our changes for us; for to his wisdom and love there is no limit. How sweet are the words, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love,' 'As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.' If we are his children we need not fear to trust our all in his hands. We need not desire to choose for ourselves as regards the things of this life, or the time when he shall call us to our heavenly home."

"That is a very sweet thought, father," she said. "What a care and anxiety it would be to us to have to choose all those changes for ourselves. How kind in the dear Lord Jesus to bid his disciples to take no thought—which you have explained to me means no care or anxiety—for the morrow—telling them that 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'"

"Yes; and when troubled with cares and fears for the future we may be sure that it is because we are lacking in that faith which trusts all in his hands."

"Oh, I want that faith!" she exclaimed earnestly, though her voice was low and sweet. "Papa, pray for me that I may have it."

"I will, daughter, I do," he said; "there is nothing I desire more strongly for you and all my dear children than that."

They were silent for a moment, then she asked, "Where are we now, papa? and to what port bound as the first?"

"We are nearing Delaware Bay," he replied, "and expect to pass up it and the river to Philadelphia, where we will add Grandpa and Grandma Dinsmore to our party, then come down and round the southern part of New Jersey and on up the eastern coast to Atlantic City. Rooms have been engaged for us at Haddon Hall and there we purpose staying for perhaps a fortnight, then we think of going on up the New England coast, perhaps as far as Bar Harbor in Maine."

"Oh, I like that plan," she said; "for we have never yet visited either of those places, and I have wanted to see them both."

"I shall be glad to give you that pleasure, daughter," he said. "Now it is high time you were in bed and asleep; so bid me good-night and go."

Our travellers reached Philadelphia the next day, took on board Mr. and Mrs. Dinsmore, passed down the river and bay again, and up the Atlantic coast to the city of that name, as the captain had planned.

They were charmed with their quarters; rooms near the sea--looking out directly upon it--with a private porch where they could sit and enjoy the breeze and an extended view of the ocean, watching the vessels pass and repass, outward bound or coming from distant ports to the harbors farther up the coast. Strolling along the broad plank walk, four miles in length and close to the sea, was another pleasure; as were also the driving down on the beach at low tide, and the little excursions out to Longport and other adjacent villages.

Most of the days were spent in making these little trips--sometimes in carriages, at others in the electric cars--and the evenings in wandering by moonlight along the board walk.

There were various places of innocent amusement too--such as the Japanese garden and the piers, where seals and other curiosities were on exhibition.

They found the table excellent and everything about the establishment homelike, neat, and refined, and their hostess so agreeable, so charming, that their only regret was that they saw so little of her--so many were the calls upon her time and attention.

"She certainly must need an occasional rest," said Grandma Elsie one day, talking with Violet and the captain, "and we must invite her to pay us a visit in our southern homes."

To that proposal both Captain Raymond and Violet gave an unqualified assent, saying that they would be pleased indeed to entertain her.

A fortnight was spent there most pleasantly, after which the *Dolphin* carried them up the coast to Bar Harbor, where we will leave them for the present.

A LIST OF THE ELSIE BOOKS AND OTHER POPULAR BOOKS BY MARTHA FINLEY

ELSIE DINSMORE. ELSIE'S HOLIDAYS AT ROSELANDS. ELSIE'S GIRLHOOD. ELSIE'S WOMANHOOD. ELSIE'S MOTHERHOOD. ELSIE'S CHILDREN. ELSIE'S WIDOWHOOD. GRANDMOTHER ELSIE. ELSIE'S NEW RELATIONS. ELSIE AT NANTUCKET. THE TWO ELSIES. ELSIE'S KITH AND KIN. ELSIE'S FRIENDS AT WOODBURN. CHRISTMAS WITH GRANDMA ELSIE. ELSIE AND THE RAYMONDS. ELSIE YACHTING WITH THE RAYMONDS. ELSIE'S VACATION. ELSIE AT VIAMEDE. ELSIE AT ION. ELSIE AT THE WORLD'S

FAIR. ELSIE'S JOURNEY ON INLAND WATERS. ELSIE AT HOME. ELSIE ON THE HUDSON. ELSIE IN THE SOUTH.

MILDRED KEITH. MILDRED AT ROSELANDS. MILDRED'S MARRIED LIFE. MILDRED AND ELSIE. MILDRED AT HOME. MILDRED'S BOYS AND GIRLS. MILDRED'S NEW DAUGHTER.

CASELLA. SIGNING THE CONTRACT AND WHAT IT COST. THE TRAGEDY OF WILD RIVER VALLEY. OUR FRED. AN OLD-FASHIONED BOY. WANTED, A PEDIGREE. THE THORN IN THE NEST.