

FICTION

Susan Warner

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

The Letter of Credit

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FICTION

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ROBERT CARTER AND BROTHERS,

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THE

LETTER OF CREDIT.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE WIDE, WIDE WORLD."

.... "The bewildering masquerade of life,
Where strangers walk as friends, and friends as strangers."
LONGFELLOW.

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NOTE.

The following story, like its predecessors, "The End of a Coil," "My Desire," and "Diana," is a record of facts. For the characters and the coloring, of course, I am responsible; but the turns of the story, even in detail, are almost all utterly true.

S. W.

Martlaer's Rock,
Sept. 12, 1881_

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THE LETTER OF CREDIT.

CHAPTER I.

THE LETTER.

"Mother, I wonder how people do, when they are going to write a book?"

"Do?" repeated her mother.

"Yes. I wonder how they begin."

"I suppose they have something to tell; and then they tell it," said simple Mrs. Carpenter.

"No, no, but I mean a story."

"What story have you got there?"

The mother was shelling peas; the daughter, a girl of twelve years old perhaps, was sitting on the floor at her feet, with an octavo volume in her lap. The floor was clean enough to sit upon; clean enough almost to eat off; it was the floor of the kitchen of a country farmhouse.

"This is the 'Talisman,'" the girl answered her mother's question. "O mother, when I am old enough, I should like to write stories!"

"Why?"

"I should think it would be so nice. Why, mother, one could imagine oneself anything."

"Could you?" said her mother. "I never imagined myself anything but what I was."

"Ah, but perhaps you and I are different."

Which was undoubtedly the fact, as any stander by might have seen with half an eye. Good types both of them, too. The mother fair, delicate featured, with sweet womanly eyes, must have been exceedingly pretty in her young days; she was pretty now; but the face shewed traces of care and was worn with life-work. While she talked and now and then looked at her daughter, her fingers were untiringly busy with the peas and peas pods and never paused for a minute. The girl on the floor did not look like her mother. She was dark eyed and dark haired; with a dark complexion too, which at present was not fine; and the eyes, large and handsome eyes, revealed a fire and intensity and mobility of nature which was very diverse from the woman's gentle strength. Mrs. Carpenter might be intense too, after her fashion; but it was the fashion of the proverbial still waters that run deep. And I do not mean that there was any shallowness about the girl's nature; though assuredly the placidity would be wanting.

"I wish your father would forbid you to read stories," Mrs. Carpenter went on.

"Why, mother?"

"I don't believe they are good for you."

"But what harm should they do me?"

"Life is not a story. I don't want you to think it is."

"Why shouldn't it be? Perhaps my life will be a story, mother. I think it will," said the girl slowly. "I shouldn't want my life to be always like this."

"Are you not happy?"

"O yes, mother! But then, by and by, I should like to be a princess, or to have adventures, and see things; like the people in stories."

"You will never be a princess, my child. You are a poor farmer's daughter. You had better make up your mind to it, and try to be the best thing you can in the circumstances."

"You mean, do my duty and shell peas?" asked the girl somewhat doubtfully, looking at her mother's fingers and the quick stripped pea pods passing through them. "Is father poor, mother?"

"Yes."

"He has a good farm, he says."

"Yes, but it is encumbered heavily." And Mrs. Carpenter sighed. Rotha had often heard her mother sigh so. It was a breath with a burden.

"I don't know what you mean by 'encumbered.'"

"It is not needful you should know, just yet."

"But I should like to know, mother. Won't you tell me?"

"It is heavily mortgaged. And *that* you do not understand. Never mind. He has a great deal of money to pay out for it every year the interest on the mortgages and that keeps us poor."

"Why must he pay it?"

"Because the farm is pledged for the debt; and if the interest, this yearly money, were not paid, the farm itself would go."

"Go? How?"

"Be sold. For the money due on it."

There was silence awhile, during which only the pea pods rustled and fell; then the girl asked,

"What should we do then, mother, if the farm was sold?"

"I do not know." The words came faint.

"Does it trouble you, mother?"

"It need not trouble you, Rotha. It cannot happen unless the Lord will; and that is enough. Now you may carry these pea pods out and give them to the pigs."

"Mother," said Rotha as she slowly rose and laid away her book, "all you say makes me wish more than ever that I were a princess, or something."

"You may be *something*," said Mrs. Carpenter laughing slightly, but with a very sweet merriment. "Now take away this basket."

Rotha stooped for the basket, and then stood still, looking out of the window. Across the intervening piece of kitchen garden, rows of peas and tufts of asparagus greenery, her eye went to the road, where a buggy had just stopped.

"Maybe something is going to happen now," she said. "Who is that, mother? There is somebody getting out of a wagon and tying his horse;--now he is coming in. It is 'Siah Barker, mother."

Mrs. Carpenter paused to look out of the window, and then hastily throwing her peas into the pot of boiling water, went herself to the door. A young countryman met her there, with a whip in his hand.

"Mornin', Mis' Carpenter. Kin you help the distressed?"

"What's the matter, 'Siah?"

"Shot if I know; but he's took pretty bad."

"Who, pray?"

"Wall, I skurce can tell that. He's an Englisher--come to our place this mornin' and axed fur a horse and wagon to carry him to Rochester; and he's got so fur,--that's two miles o' the way,--and he can't go no furder, I guess. He's took powerful bad."

"Ill, is he?"

"Says so. And he looks it."

"Cannot go on to Rochester?

"It's fifteen mile, Mis' Carpenter. I wouldn't like to be the man to drive him. He can't go another foot, he says. He was took quite sudden."

"Cannot you turn about and carry him back to Medwayville?"

"Now, Mis' Carpenter, you're a Christian, and a soft-hearted one, we all know. Can't you let him come in and rest a bit? Mebbe you could give him sunthin' that would set him up. You understand doctorin', fust-rate."

Mrs. Carpenter looked grave, considered.

"Is this your idea, or the stranger's, 'Siah?"

"It's his'n, ef it's anybody's in partickler. He told me to set him down some'eres, for he couldn't hold out to go on nohow; and then he seed this house, and he made me stop. He's a sick man, I tell you."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Wall, it's sunthin' in his insides, I guess. He don't say nothin', but he gits as white as a piece o' chalk, and then purple arter it."

Mrs. Carpenter made no more delay, but bade 'Siah fetch the sick man in; and herself hastily threw open the windows of the "spare room" and put sheets on the bed. She had time for all her preparations, for the bringing the stranger to the house was a work of some difficulty, and not accomplished without the help of one of the hired men about the farm. When he came, he was far too ill to give any account of himself; his dress proclaimed him a well-to-do man, and belonging to the better classes; that was all they knew.

As Mrs. Carpenter came out from seeing the stranger put to bed in the spare room, her husband came in from the field. An intellectual looking man, in spite of his farmer's dress, and handsome; but thin, worn, with an undue flush on his cheek, and a cough that sounded hollow. He was very like his little daughter, who instantly laid hold of him.

"Father, father! something has happened. Guess what. There's a sick man stopped here, and he is in the spare room, and we don't know the least bit who he is; only 'Siah Barker said he was English, or an 'Englisher,' he said. We don't know a bit who he is; and his clothes are very nice, like a gentleman, and his valise is a beautiful, handsome leather one."

"You use rather more adjectives than necessary, Ratha."

"But, father, that is something to happen, isn't it?"

"You speak as if you were glad of it."

"I am not glad the man is sick. I am just glad to have something happen. Things never do happen here."

"I am afraid your mother will hardly feel as much pleased as you do. Is the man very ill, Eunice?"

"I think so. He is too ill to tell how he feels."

"He may be on your hands then for a day or two."

"He may for more than that."

"How can you manage?" said Mr. Carpenter, looking anxiously at the sweet face which already bore such lines of care, and was so work-worn.

"I don't know. I shall find out," Mrs. Carpenter answered as she was dishing the dinner. "The Lord seems to have given me this to do; and he knows. I guess, what he gives me to do, I can do."

"I don't see how you can say that, mother," Rotha put in here.

"What?"

"This man was taken sick on the road, and happened to come in here. How can you say, the Lord gave him to you to take care of?"

"Nothing 'happens,' Rotha. Suppose his sickness had come on a little sooner, or a little later? why was it just here that he found he could go no further?"

"Do you suppose there was any 'why' about it?"

Father and mother both smiled; the father answered.

"Do you suppose I would plough a field, without meaning to get any fruit from it."

"No, father."

"Neither does the Lord, my child."

Rotha pondered the subject, and had occasion to ponder it more as the days went on. She found she had some share in the consequences of this "happening"; more dishes to wash, and more sweeping and dusting, and churning, and setting of tables, and cleaning of vegetables; and she quite ceased to be glad that something had come to them out of the common run of affairs. For several days her mother was much engaged in the care of the sick man, and put all she could of the housework upon Rotha's hands; the nursing kept herself very busy. The sickness was at first severe; and then the mending was gradual; so that it was full two weeks before the stranger could leave his room. Mrs. Carpenter had no servant in the house; she did everything for him with her own hands; and with as much care and tenderness and exactness it was done as if the sick man had been a dear friend. By day and by night; nothing failed him; and so, in about two weeks, he was healed and had only his weakness to recover from. Mrs. Carpenter often looked tired and pale during those weeks, but cheerfulness and courage never gave out.

"I have learned something," she said one day at dinner, as the two weeks were ended.

"What is that?" her husband asked.

"The name of our guest."

"Well who is he?"

"He is English; his name is Southwode. He came to America on business two months ago; to New York; then found it was needful for him to see some people in Rochester; and was on his way when he was taken ill at our door."

"That's all?"

"Pretty much all. He is not much of a talker. I never found out so much till to-day."

"It is quite enough. I suppose he will go on to Rochester now?"

"Not for two or three days yet, Liph; he is very weak; but I guess we will have him out to supper with us this evening. You may put a glass of roses on the table, Rotha, and make it look very nice. And set the table in the hall."

Unlike most of its kind, this farmhouse had a wide hall running through the middle of it. Probably it had been built originally for somewhat different occupation. At any rate, the hall served as a great comfort to Mrs. Carpenter in the summer season, enabling her to get out of the hot kitchen, without opening her best room, the "parlour."

It was a pretty enough view that greeted the stranger here, when he was called to supper and crept out of his sick room. Doors stood open at front and rear of the house, letting the breeze play through. It brought the odours of the new hay and the shorn grass, mingled with the breath of roses. Roses were on the table too; a great glass full of them; not skilfully arranged, certainly, but heavy with sweetness and lovely in various hues of red and blush white. A special comfortable chair was placed for him, and a supper served with which an epicure could have found no fault. Mrs. Carpenter's bread was of the lightest and whitest; the butter was as if the cows had been eating roses; the cold ham was cured after an old receipt, and tender and juicy and savoury to suit any fastidious appetite; and there were big golden raspberries, and cream almost as golden. Out of doors, the eye saw green fields, with an elm standing here and there; and on one side, a bit of the kitchen garden. Mr. Southwode was a silent man, at least he was certainly silent here; but he was observant; and his looks went quietly from one thing to another, taking it all in. Perhaps the combination was strange to him and gave him matter for study. There was conversation too, as the meal went on, which occupied his ears, though he could hardly be said to take an active part in it. His host made kind efforts for his entertainment; and Rotha and her father had always something to discuss. Mr. Southwode listened. It was not the sort of talk he expected to hear in a farmhouse. The girl was full of intelligence, the father quite able to meet her, and evidently doing it with delight; the questions they talked about were worthy the trouble; and while on the one hand there was keen inquisitiveness and natural acumen, on the other there was knowledge and the habit of thought and ease of expression. Mr. Southwode listened, and now and then let his eye go over to the fair, placid, matronly face at the head of the table. Mrs. Carpenter did not talk much; yet he saw that she understood. And more; he saw that in both father and mother there was culture and literary taste and literary knowledge. Yet she did her own work, and he came in to-day in his shirt sleeves from the mowing of his own fields. Mr. Southwode drew conclusions, partly false perhaps, but partly true. He thought these people had seen what are called better days; he was sure that they were going through more or less of a struggle now. Moreover, he saw that the farmer was not strong in body or sound in health, and he perceived that the farmer's wife knew it.

The supper ended, a new scene opened for his consideration. With quick and skilful hands the mother and daughter cleared the table, carrying the things into the kitchen. Rotha brought a Bible and laid it before her father; and mother and daughter resumed their seats. Mr. Carpenter read a chapter, like a man who both knew and loved it; and then, a book being given to the stranger, the other three set up a hymn. There was neither formality nor difficulty; as the one had read, so they all sang, as if they loved it. The voices were not remarkable; what was remarkable, to the guest, was the sweet intonations and the peculiar *appropriation* with which the song was sung. It was a very common hymn,

"Jesus, I love thy charming name,
'Tis music to my ear;"--

And Mr. Southwode noticed a thing which greatly stirred his curiosity. As the singing went on, the lines of those careworn faces relaxed; Mrs. Carpenter's brow lost its shadow, her husband's face wore an incipient smile; it was quite plain that both of them had laid down for the moment the burden which it was also quite plain they carried at other times. What had become of it? and what power had unloosed them from it? Not the abstract love of music, certainly; though the melody which they sang was sweet, and the notes floated out upon the evening air with a kind of grave joy. So as the summer breeze was wafted in. There was a harmony, somehow, between the outer world and this little inner world, for the time, which moved Mr. Southwode strangely, though he could not at all understand it. He made no remark when the service was over, either upon that or upon any other subject. Of course the service ended with a prayer. Not a long one; and as it was in the reading and singing, so in this; every word was simply said and meant. So evidently, that the stranger was singularly impressed with the reality of the whole thing, as contradistinguished from all formal or merely duty work, and as being a matter of enjoyment to those engaged in it.

He had several occasions for renewing his observations; for Mr. Southwode's condition of weakness detained him yet several days at the farm-house. He established for himself during this interval the character he had gained of a silent man; however, one afternoon he broke through his habit and spoke. It was the day before he intended to continue his journey. Rotha had gone to the field with her father, to have some fun in the hay; Mr. Southwode and Mrs. Carpenter sat together in the wide farmhouse hall. The day being very warm, they had come to the coolest place they could find. Mrs. Carpenter was busy with mending clothes; her guest for some time sat idly watching her; admiring, as he had done often already, the calm, sweet strength of this woman's face. What a beauty she must have been once, he thought; all the lines were finely drawn and delicate; and the soul that looked forth of them was refined by nature and purified by patience. Mr. Southwode had something to say to her this afternoon, and did not know how to begin.

"Your husband seems to have a fine farm here," he remarked.

"It is, I believe," Mrs. Carpenter answered, without lifting her eyes from her darning.

"He took me over some of his ground this morning. He knows what to do with it, too. It is in good order."

"It would be in good order, if my husband had his full strength."

"Yes. I am sorry to see he has not."

"Did he say anything to you about it?" the wife enquired presently, with a smothered apprehensiveness which touched her companion. He answered however indifferently in the negative.

"I don't like his cough, though," he went on after a little interval.

"Have you had advice for him?"

There was a startled look of pain in the eyes which again met him, and the lips closed upon one another a little more firmly. They always had a firm though soft set, and the corners of the mouth told of long and patient endurance. Now the face told of another stab of pain, met and borne.

"He would not call in anybody," she said faintly.

That was not what Mr. Southwode had meant to talk about, though closely connected with the subject of his thoughts. He would try again.

"I owe you a great debt of gratitude, Mrs. Carpenter," he said after a long enough pause had ensued, and beginning on another side. "I presume you have saved my life."

"I am very glad we have been able to do anything," she said quietly.

"There is no need of thanks."

"But I must speak them, or I should not deserve to live. It astonishes me, how you should be so kind to an entire stranger."

"That's why you needed it," she said with a pleasant smile.

"Yes, yes, my need is one thing; that was plain enough; but if everybody took care of other people's needs--Why, you have done everything for me, night and day, Mrs. Carpenter. You have not spared yourself in the least; and I have given a deal of trouble."

"I did not think it trouble," she said in the same way. "There is no need to say anything about it."

"Excuse me; I must say something, or earn my own contempt. But what made you do all that for a person who was nothing to you? I do not understand that sort of thing, in such a degree."

"Perhaps you do not put it the right way," she returned. "Anybody who is in trouble is something to me."

"What, pray?" said he quickly.

"My neighbour"--she said with that slight, pleasant smile again. "Don't you know the gospel rule is, to do to others what you would wish them to do to you?"

"I never saw anybody before who observed that rule."

"Didn't you? I am sorry for that. It is a pleasant rule to follow."

"Pleasant!" her guest echoed. "Excuse me; you cannot mean that?"

"I mean it, yes, certainly. And there is another thing, Mr. Southwode; I like to do whatever my Master gives me to do; and he gave you to me to take care of."

"Did he?"

"I think so."

"You did it," said the stranger slowly. "Mrs. Carpenter, I am under very great obligations to you."

"You are very welcome," she said simply.

"You have done more for me than you know. I never saw what religion can be--what religion is--until I saw it in your house."

She was silent now, and he was silent also, for some minutes; not knowing exactly how to go on. He felt instinctively that he must not offer money here. The people were poor unquestionably; at the same time they did not belong to the class that can take that sort of pay for service. He never thought of offering it. They were quite his equals.

"Mr. Carpenter was so good as to tell me something of his affairs as we walked this morning," he began again. "I am sorry to hear that his land is heavily encumbered."

"Yes!" Mrs. Carpenter said with a sigh, and a shadow crossing her face.

"That sort of thing cannot be helped sometimes, but it is a bother, and it leads to more bother. Well! I should like to be looked upon as a friend, by you and your husband; but I shall be a friend a good way off. Mrs. Carpenter, do not be offended at my plain speaking;--I would say, that if ever you find yourself in difficulties and need a friend's help, I would like you to remember me, and deliver that letter according to the address."

He handed her as he spoke a letter, sealed, and addressed to "Messrs. Bell & Buckingham, 46 Barclay St., New York." Mrs. Carpenter turned the letter over, in silent surprise; looked at the great red seal and read the direction.

"Keep it safe," Mr. Southwode went on, "and use it if ever you have' occasion. Do not open it; for I shall not be at the place where it is to be delivered, and an open letter would not carry the same credit. With the letter, if ever you have occasion to make use of it, enclose a card with your address; that my agent may know where to find you."

"You are very kind!" Mrs. Carpenter said in a little bewilderment; "but nothing of this kind is necessary."

"I hope it may not be needed; however, I shall feel better, if you will promise me to do as I have said, if ever you do need it."

Mrs. Carpenter gave the promise, and looked at the letter curiously as she put it away. Would the time ever come when she would be driven to use it? Such a time could not come, unless after the wreck of her home and her life happiness; never could come while her husband lived. If it came, what would matter then? But there was the letter; almost something uncanny; it looked like a messenger out of the unknown future.

CHAPTER II.

MOVING.

Mr. Southwode went away, his letter was locked up in a drawer, and both were soon forgotten. The little family he left had enough else to think of.

As the warm weather turned to cold, it became more and more evident that the head of the family was not to be with it long. Mr. Carpenter was ill. Nevertheless, with failing strength, he continued to carry the burden that had been too much for him when well. He would not spare himself. The work must be done, he said, or the interest on the mortgages could not be paid. He wrought early and late, and saw to it that his hired people did their part; he wore himself out the quicker; but the interest on the mortgages was not paid, even so. Mrs. Carpenter saw just how things were going, saw it step by step, and was powerless to hinder.

"They will foreclose!" Mr. Carpenter said with a half groan. It was late in the winter; towards spring; his health had failed rapidly of late; and it was no secret either to him or his wife that his weeks were numbered. They were sitting together one evening before the fire; he in his easy chair, and she beside him; but not holding each other's hands, not touching, nor looking at one another. Their blood was of a genuine New England course; and people of that kind, though they would die for one another, rarely exchange kisses. And besides, there are times when caresses cannot be borne; they mean too much. Perhaps this was such a time. Mrs. Carpenter sat staring into the fire, her brow drawn into fine wrinkles, which was with her a sign of uncommon perturbation. It was after a time of silence that her husband came out with that word about foreclosing.

"If I had been stronger," he went on, "I could have taken in that twenty acre lot and planted it with wheat; and that would have made some difference. Now I am behindhand--and I could not help it--and they will foreclose."

"They cannot do it till next fall," said Mrs. Carpenter; and her secret thought was, By that time, nothing will matter!

"No," said her husband,--"not until fall. But then they will. Eunice, what will you do?"

"I will find something to do."

"What? Tell me now, while I can counsel you."

"I don't know anything I could do, but take in sewing." She spoke calmly, all the while a tear started which she did not suffer to be seen.

"Sewing?" said Mr. Carpenter. "There are too many in the village already that do sewing--more than can live by it."

"If I cannot here," his wife said after a pause, overcoming herself,--"I might go to New York. Serena would help me to get some work."

"Would she?" asked her husband.

"I think she would."

"Your charity always goes ahead of mine, Eunice."

"You think she would not?"

"I wouldn't like to have you dependent on her.--This is what you get for marrying a poor man, Eunice!"

He smiled and stretched out his hand to take the hand of his wife.

"Hush!" she said. "I married a richer man than she did. And I have wanted for nothing. We have not been poor."

"No," he said. "Except in this world's goods--which are unimportant. Until one is leaving one's wife and child alone!"

I suppose she could not speak, for she answered nothing. The fingers clasped fingers fast and hard; wrung them a little. Yet both faces were steady. Mrs. Carpenter's eyes looked somewhat rigidly into the fire, and her husband's brow wore a shadow.

"I wish your father had left you at least the old place at Tanfield. It would have been no more than justice. Serena might have had all the rest, but that would have given you and Rotha a home."

"Never mind," said Mrs. Carpenter gently. "I am content with my share."

"Meaning me!" And he sighed.

"The best share of this world's goods any woman could have, Liph."

"We have been happy," he said, "in spite of all. We have had happy years; happier I could not wish for, but for this money trouble. And we shall have happy years again, Eunice; where the time is not counted by years, but flows on forever, and people are not poor, nor anxious, nor disappointed."

She struggled with tears again, and then answered, "I have not been disappointed. And you have no need to be anxious."

"No, I know," he said. "But at times it is hard for faith to get above sense. And I am not anxious; only I would like to know how you are going to do."

There was a silence then of some length.

"Things are pretty unequal in this world," Mr. Carpenter began again. "Look at Serena and you. One sister with more than she can use; the other talking of sewing for a livelihood! And all because you would marry a poor man. A poor

reason!"

"Liph, I had my choice," his wife said, with a shadow of a smile. "She is the one to be pitied."

"Well, I think so," he said. "For if her heart were as roomy as her purse, she would have shewn it before now. My dear, do not expect anything from Serena. Till next fall you will have the shelter of this house; and that will give you time to look about you."

"Liph, you must not talk so!" his wife cried; and her voice broke. She threw herself upon her husband's breast, and they held each other in a very long, still, close embrace.

Mr. Carpenter was quite right in some at least of his expectations. His own life was not prolonged to the summer. In one of the last days of a rough spring, the time came he had spoken of, when his wife and child were left alone.

She had till fall to look about her. But perhaps, in the bitterness of her loneliness, she had not heart to push her search after work with sufficient energy. Yet Mrs. Carpenter never lacked energy, and indulged herself selfishly no more in grief than she did in joy. More likely it is that in the simple region of country she inhabited there was not call enough for the work she could do. Work did not come, at any rate. The only real opening for her to earn her livelihood, was in the shape of a housekeeper's situation with an old bachelor farmer, who was well off and had nobody to take care of him. In her destitution, I do not know but Mrs. Carpenter might have put up with even this plan; but what was she to do with Rotha? So by degrees the thought forced itself upon her that she must take up her old notion and go to the great city, where there were always people enough to want everything. How to get there, and what to do on first arriving there, remained questions. Both were answered.

As Mr. Carpenter had foreseen, the mortgages came in the fall to foreclosure. The sale of the land, however, what he had not foreseen, brought in a trifle more than the mortgage amount. To this little sum the sale of household goods and furniture and stock, added another somewhat larger; so that altogether a few hundreds stood at Mrs. Carpenter's disposal. This precisely made her undertaking possible. It was a very doubtful undertaking; but what alternative was there? One relation she would find, at the least; and another Mrs. Carpenter had not in the wide world. She made her preparations very quietly, as she did everything; her own child never knew how much heart-break was in them.

"Shall we go first to aunt Serena's, mother?" Rotha asked one day.

"No."

The "no" was short and dry. Rotha's instinct told her she must not ask why, but she was disappointed. From a word now and then she had got the impression that this relation of theirs was a very rich woman and lived accordingly; and fancy had been busy with possibilities.

"Where then, mother?"

"Mr. Forbes," he was the storekeeper at the village, "has told me of the boarding house he goes to when he goes to New York. We can put up there for a night or two, and look out a quiet lodging."

"What is New York like, mother?"

"I have never been there, Rotha, and do not know. O it is a city, my child; of course; it is not like anything here."

"How different?"

"In every possible way."

"*Every* way, mother? Aren't the houses like?"

"Not at all. And the houses there stand close together."

"There must be room to get about, I suppose?"

"Those are the streets."

"No green grass, or trees?"

"Little patches of grass in the yards."

"No trees?"

"No. In some of the fine streets I believe there are shade trees."

"No *gardens*, mother?"

"No."

"But what do people do for vegetables and things?"

"They are brought out of the country, and sold in the markets. Don't you know Mr. Jones sends his potatoes and his fruit to the city?"

"Then if you want a potato, you must go to the market and buy it?"

"Yes."

"Or an apple, mother?"

"Yes, or anything."

"Well I suppose that will do," said Rotha slowly, "if you have money enough. I shouldn't think it was pleasant. Do the houses stand *close* together?"

"So close, that you cannot lay a pin between them."

"I should want to have very good neighbours, then."

Rotha was innocently touching point after point of doubt and dread in her mother's mind. Presently she touched another.

"I don't think it sounds pleasant, mother. Suppose we should not like it after we get there?"

Mrs. Carpenter did not answer.

"What then, mother? Would you come back again, if we did not like it there?"

"There would be no place to come to, here, any more, my child. I hope we shall find it comfortable where we are going."

"Then you don't know?" said Rotha. "And perhaps we shall not! But, mother, that would be dreadful, if we did not like it!"

"I hope you would help me to bear it."

"I!" said Rotha. "You don't want help to bear anything; do you, mother?"

An involuntary gush of tears came at this appeal; they were not suffered to overflow.

"I should not be able to bear much without help, Rotha. Want help? yes, I want it--and I have it. God sends nothing to his children but he sends help too; else," said Mrs. Carpenter, brushing her hand across her eyes, "they would not last long! But, Rotha, lie means that we should help each other too."

"I help you?"

"Yes, certainly. You can, a great deal."

"That seems very funny. Mother, what is wrong about aunt Serena?" said Rotha, following a very direct chain of ideas.

"I hope nothing is wrong about her."

And Mrs. Carpenter, in her gentle, unselfish charity, meant it honestly; her little daughter was less gentle and perhaps more logical.

"Why, mother, does she ever do anything to help you?"

"Her life is quite separate from mine," Mrs. Carpenter replied evasively.

"Well, it would be right in her to help you. And when people are not right, they are wrong."

"Let us take care of our own right and wrong, Rotha. We shall have enough to do with that."

"But, mother, what *is* the matter with aunt Serena? Why doesn't she help you? She can."

"Our lives went different ways, a long time ago, my child. We have never been near each other since."

"But now you are going to be where she is, mother?"

"Rotha, did you rip up your brown merino?"

"Not yet."

"Then go and do it now. I want it to make over for you."

"You'll never make much of that," said the girl discontentedly. But she obeyed. She saw a certain trait in the lines of her mother's lips; it might be reserve, it might be determination, or both; and she knew no more was to be got from her at that time.

The brown merino disappointed her expectation; for when cleaned and made over it proved to be a very respectable dress. Rotha was well satisfied with it. The rest of Mrs. Carpenter's preparations were soon accomplished; and one day in November she and her little daughter left what had been home, and set out upon their journey to seek another in the misty distance. The journey itself was full of wonder and delight to Rotha. It was a very remarkable thing, in the first place, to find the world so large; then another remarkable thing was the variety of the people in it. Rotha had known only one kind, speaking broadly; the plain, quiet, respectable, and generally comfortable in habitants of the village and of the farms around the village. They were not elegant specimens, but they were solid, and kindly. She saw many people now that astonished her by their elegance; few that awakened any feeling of confidence. Rotha's eyes were very busy, her tongue very silent. She was taking her first sips at the bitter-sweet cup of life knowledge.

The third-class hotel at which they put up in New York received her unqualified disapprobation. None of its arrangements or accommodations suited her; with the single exception of gas burners.

Close, stuffy, confined, gloomy, and dirty, she declared it to be.

"Mother," she said half crying, "I hope our house will not be like this!"

"We shall not have a house, Rotha; only a few rooms."

"They'll be rooms in a house, I suppose," said the girl petulantly; "and I hope it will be very different from this."

"We will have our part of it clean, at any rate," answered her mother.

"And the rest too, won't you? You would not have rooms in a house that was not all clean, would you, mother?"

"Not if I could help it."

"Cannot you help it?"

"I hope so. But you must not expect that things here in a big city can ever be bright and sweet like the fields at home. That can hardly be."

Rotha sighed. A vision of dandelions came up before her, and waving grass bent by summer wind. But there was hope that the morrow's search would unfold to her some less unpromising phases of city life, and she suspended judgment.

Next day, wonder and amusement for a time superseded everything else. The multitude of busy people coming and going, the laden carts and light passing carriages, the gay shops, and the shops that were not gay, filled Rotha's eye and mind. Even the vegetables exposed at a corner shop were a matter of lively interest.

"O mother," she cried, "is this a market?"

"No. It is a store for groceries."

"Well, they have got some other things here. Mother, the cabbages don't look nice." Then soon after coming to a small market store, Rotha must stand still to look.

"They are a little better here," she judged. "Mother, mother! they have got everything at this market. Do see! there are fish, and oysters, and clams; and eggs; and what are those queer things?"

"Lobsters."

"What are they good for?"

"To eat."

"They don't look as if they were good for anything. Mother, one could get a very good dinner here."

"With plenty of money."

"Does it take much?--to get one dinner?"

"Are you hungry?" said her mother, smiling faintly. "It takes a good deal of money to get anything in New York, Rotha."

"Then I am afraid we ought to have staid at Medwayville."

A conclusion which almost forced itself upon Mrs. Carpenter's mind. For the business of finding a lodging that would suit her and that she could pay for, soon turned out to be one of difficulty. She and Rotha grew weary of walking, and more weary of looking at rooms that would suit them which they could not pay for, and other rooms which they could pay for and that would not do. All the houses in New York seemed to come under one or the other category. From one house agency to another, and from these to countless places referred to, advertised for hire, the mother and daughter wandered; in vain. One or the other difficulty met them in every case.

"What will you do, mother, if you cannot find a place?" Rotha asked, the evening of the first day. "Go back to Medwayville?"

"We cannot go back."

"Then we must find a place," said Rotha.

And driven by this necessity, so they did. The third day, well tired in body and much more in mind, they did at last find what would do. It was a long walk from their hotel, and seemed endless. No doubt, in the country, with grass under their feet, or even the well beaten foot track beside the highway, neither mother nor daughter would have thought anything of the distance; but here the hard pavement wearied them, and the way measured off by so many turns and crossings and beset with houses and human beings, seemed a forlorn pilgrimage into remote regions. Besides, it left the pleasanter part of the city and went, as Rotha remarked, among poor folks. Down Bleecker St. till it turned, then following the new stretch of straight pavement across Carmine St., and on and on into the parts then called Chelsea. On till they came to an irregular open space.

"This must be Abingdon Square," said the mother.

"It isn't square at all," Rotha objected.

"But this must be it. Then it's only one street more, Rotha. Look for Jane Street."

Beyond Abingdon Square Jane Street was found to be the next crossing.
They turned the corner and were at the place they sought.

The region was not one of miserable poverty and tenant houses. Better than that; and the buildings being low and small did not darken the streets, as Mrs. Carpenter had found in some parts of the city. A decent woman, a mantua-maker, had the house and offered Mrs. Carpenter the second floor; two little rooms and a closet off them. The rooms

were furnished after a sort; but Mrs. Marble could give no board with them; only lodging. She was a bright, sharp little woman.

"Yes, I couldn't," she said. "It wouldn't pay. I couldn't mind my business. I take *my* meals in a corner; for I couldn't have grease and crumbs round; but where one person can stand, three can't sit. You'll have to manage that part yourself. It'll be cheaper for you, too."

"Is anything cheap here?" Mrs. Carpenter asked wearily. She had sat down to rest and consider.

"That's how you manage it," said the other, shewing a full and rather arch smile. She was a little woman, quick and alert in all her ways and looks. "My rooms aint dear, to begin with; and you needn't ruin yourself eating; if you know how."

"I knew how in the country," said Mrs. Carpenter. "Here it is different."

"Aint it! I guess it is. Rents, you see; and folks must live, landlords and all. Some of 'em do a good deal more; but that aint my lookout. I'd eat bread and salt sooner than I'd be in debt; and I never do be that. Is it only you two?"

"That is all."

"Then you needn't to worry. I guess you'll get along."

For Mrs. Marble noticed the quiet respectability of her caller, and honestly thought what she said. Mrs. Carpenter reflected. The rooms were not high; she could save a good deal by the extra trouble of providing herself; she would be more private, and probably have things better to her liking. Besides, her very soul sickened at the thought of looking for any more rooms. She decided, and took these. Then she asked about the possibilities of getting work. Mrs. Marble's countenance grew more doubtful.

"Plain sewing?" she said. "Well, there's a good many folks doing that, you see."

"I thought, perhaps, you could put me in the way of some."

"Well, perhaps I can. I'll see what I can think of. But there's a many doing that sort o' thing. They're in every other house, almost. Now, when will you come?"

"To-morrow. I suppose I cannot tell what I want to get till I do come."

"I can tell you some things right off. You'd better do part of it to-day, or you'll want everything at once. First of all, you'd better order in some coal. You can get that just a block or two off; Jones & Sanford; they have a coal yard. It is very convenient."

"Where can it be put?"

"In the cellar. There's room enough. And if I was you, I wouldn't get less than half a ton. They make awful profits when they sell by the basket. You will want a little kindling too. Hadn't you better get a little bit of a stove? one with two places for cooking; or one place. It will save itself six times over in the course of the winter."

"Where can I get it?"

"I guess you're pretty much of a stranger here, aint you?"

"Entirely a stranger."

"I thought so. Folks get a look according to the place they live. You aint bad enough for New York," she added with a merry and acute smile.

"I hope there are some good people here," said Mrs. Carpenter.

"I hope so. I haven't passed 'em all through my sieve; got something else to do; and it aint my business neither. Well--only don't you think there aint some bad ones in the lot, that's all. There's plenty of places where you can get your stove, if you want to. Elwall's in Abingdon Square, is a very good place. Some things goes with the stove. I guess you know what you want as well as I do," she said, breaking off and smiling again.

"I shall need bedding too," said Mrs. Carpenter, with a look at the empty bedstead.

"You can't do everything at once, if you're to come in to-morrow. I'll tell you--I've a bed you can have, that I aint using. It'll cost you less, and do just as well. I aint one of the bad ones," she said, again with a gleam of a smile. "I shan't cheat you."

The arrangement was made at last, and Mrs. Carpenter and Rotha set out on their way back. They stopped in Abingdon Square and bought a stove, a little tea-kettle, a saucepan and frying pan; half a dozen knives and forks, spoons, etc., a lamp, and sundry other little indispensable conveniences for people who would set up housekeeping. Rotha was glad to be quit of the hotel, and yet in a divided state of mind. Too tired to talk, however, that night; which was a happiness for her mother.

The next day was one of delightful bustle; all filled with efforts to get in order in the new quarters. And by evening a great deal was done. The bed was made; the washstand garnished; the little stove put up, fire made in it, and the kettle boiled; and at night mother and daughter sat down to supper together, taking breath for the first time that day. Mrs. Carpenter had been to a neighbouring grocery and bought a ham and bread; eggs were so dear that they scared her; she had cooked a slice and made tea, and Rotha declared that it tasted good.

"But this is funny bread, mother."

"It is baker's bread."

"It is nice, a little, but it isn't sweet."

"Let us be thankful we have got it, Rotha."

"Yes; but, mother, I think I should be *more* thankful for better bread."

"I will try and make you some better," Mrs. Carpenter said laughing.

"This is not economical, I am sure."

"Mother," said Rotha, "do you suppose aunt Serena takes in sewing?"

"She? no. She gives it out."

"You would not like to do *her* sewing?"

"I shall not ask for it," said the mother calmly.

"Does she do her own cooking, as you do?"

"No, my child. She has no need."

"Do you think she is a better woman than you are, mother?"

"That's not a wise question, I should say," Mrs. Carpenter returned. But something about it flushed her cheek and even brought an odd moisture to her eyes.

"Because," said Rotha, wholly disregarding the animadversion, "*if she isn't*, I should say that things are queer."

"That's what Job thought, when his troubles came on him."

"And weren't they?" asked Rotha.

"No. He did not understand; that was all."

"I should like to understand, though, mother. Not understanding makes me uneasy."

"You may be uneasy then all your life, for there will be a great many things you cannot understand. The better way is to trust and be easy."

"Trust what?" Rotha asked quickly.

"Trust God. He knows."

"Trust him for what?" Rotha insisted.

"For everything. Trust him that he will take care of you, if you are his child; and let no harm come to you; and do all things right for you, and in the best way."

"Mother, that is trusting a good deal."

"The Lord likes to have us trust him."

"But you are his child, and he has let harm come to you?"

"You think so, because you know nothing about it. No harm can come to his children."

"I don't know what you call harm, then," said Rotha half sullenly.

"Harm is what would hurt me. You know very well that pain does not always do that."

"And can you trust him, mother, so as to be easy? Now?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Carpenter. "Most days."

Rotha knew from the external signs that this must be true.

"Are you going to see aunt Serena, mother?"

"Not now."

"When?"

"I do not know."

"Where does she live?"

"Rotha, you may wash up these dishes, while I put things a little to rights in the other room."

The next day Mrs. Carpenter set about finding some work. Alas, if there were many that had it to give, there seemed to be many more that wanted it. It was worse than looking for rooms. At last some tailoring was procured from a master tailor; and Mrs. Carpenter sat all day over her sewing, giving directions to Rotha about the affairs of the small housekeeping. Rotha swept and dusted and washed dishes and set the table, and prepared vegetables. Not much of that, for their meals were simple and small; however, with one thing and another the time was partly filled up. Mrs. Carpenter stitched. It was a new thing, and disagreeable to the one looker-on, to see her mother from morning to night bent over work which was not for herself. At home, though life was busy it was not slaving. There were intervals, and often, of rest and pleasure taking. She and Rotha used to go into the garden to gather vegetables and to pick fruit; and at other times to weed and dress the beds and sow flower seeds. And at evening the whole little family were wont to enjoy the air and the sunsets and the roses from the hall door; and to have sweet and various discourse together about a great variety of subjects. Those delights, it is true, ceased a good while ago; the talks especially. Mrs. Carpenter was not much of a talker even then, though her words were good when they came. Now she said little indeed; and Rotha missed her father. An uneasy feeling of want and longing took possession of the child's mind. I suppose she felt mentally what people feel physically when they are slowly starving to death. It had not come to that yet with Rotha; but the initial fret and irritation began to be strong. Her mother seemed to be turned into a sewing machine; a thinking one, she had no doubt, nevertheless the thoughts that were never spoken did not practically exist for her. She was left to her own; and Rotha's thoughts began to seethe and boil. Another child would have found food enough and amusement enough in the varied sights and experiences of life in the great city. They made Rotha draw in to herself.

CHAPTER III.

JANE STREET.

Mrs. Carpenter's patient face, as she sat by the window from morning till night, and her restless busy hands, by degrees became a burden to Rotha.

"Mother," she said one day, when her own work for the time was done up and she had leisure to make trouble,—"I do not like to see you doing other people's sewing."

"It is my sewing," Mrs. Carpenter said.

"It oughtn't to be."

"I am very thankful to have it."

"It takes very little to make you thankful, seems to me. It makes *me* feel angry."

"I am sorry for that."

"Well, if you would be angry, I wouldn't be; but you take it so quietly.
Mother, it's wrong!"

"What?"

"For you to be doing that work, which somebody else ought to do."

"If somebody else did it, somebody else would get the pay; and what would become of us then?"

"I don't see what's to become of us now. Mother, you said I was to go to school."

"Yes,"--and Mrs. Carpenter sighed here. "I have not had time yet to find the right school for you."

"When will you find time? Mother, I think it was a great deal better at
Medwayville."

Mrs. Carpenter sighed again, her patient sigh, which aggravated Rotha.

"I don't like New York!" the latter went on, emphasizing every word.

"There is not one single thing here I do like."

"I am sorry, my child. It is not our choice that has brought us here."

"Couldn't our choice take us away again, mother?"

"I am afraid not."

Rotha looked on at the busy needle for a few minutes, and then burst out again.

"I think things are queer! That you should be working so, and other people have nothing to do."

"Hush, Rotha. Nobody in this world has nothing to do."

"Nothing they need do, then. You are better than they are."

"You speak foolishly. God gives everybody something to do, and his hands full; and the work that God gives we need to do, Rotha. He has given me this; and as long as he gives me his love with it, I think it is good. He has given you your work too; and complaining is not a part of it. I hope to send you to school, as soon as ever I can."

Before Rotha had got up her ammunition for another attack, there was a tap at the door, and Mrs. Marble came in. She always seemed to bring life with her.

"What do you get for that?" she asked, after she had chatted awhile, watching her lodger. Mrs. Carpenter was making buttonholes.

"A shilling a dozen."

Mrs. Marble inspected the work.

"And how many can you make in that style in a day? I should like to know."

"I cannot do this all day," said Mrs. Carpenter. "I get blind, and I get nervous. I can make about two dozen and a half in five hours."

"Twenty five cents' worth: I declare!" said the little woman. "I wonder if such folks will get to heaven?"

"What folks, Mrs. Marble?" enquired Rotha, to whom this saying sounded doubtful.

"The folks that want to get so much for so little. They wouldn't be satisfied with any heaven where they couldn't get a hundred per cent."

"The Lord gives more than that," said Mrs. Carpenter quietly. "A hundredfold in this present world; and in the world to come, eternal life."

"I never could get right hold of that doctrine," said Mrs. Marble. "Folks talk about it,--but I never could find out it was much more than talk."

"Try it," said Mrs. Carpenter. "Then you'll know."

"Maybe I shall, if you stay with me long enough. I wisht I was rich, and I'd do better for you than those buttonholes. I think I can do better anyhow," said the little woman, brimming over with good will. "Ha' you got no friends at all here?"

Mrs. Carpenter hesitated; and then said "no." "What schools are there in this neighbourhood?" she asked then immediately.

"Schools? There's the public school, not far off."

"The public school? That is where everybody goes?"

"Everybody that aint rich, and some that be. I don't think they had ought to. There's enough without 'em. Twelve hundred and fifty in this school."

"Twelve hundred and fifty children!"

"All that. Enough, aint it? But they say the teaching's first rate. You want to send Rotha? You can't get along without her at home, can you? Not unless you can get somethin' better than them buttonholes."

"Mother," said Rotha when Mrs. Marble had gone, "you wouldn't send me to that school, would you? That's where all the poor children go. I don't think anybody but poor people live all about here."

"Then it is a proper place for us. What are we but poor people, Rotha?"

"But mother, we were not poor people at Medwayville? And losing our farm and our home and all, don't make any difference."

"Don't it?"

"No, mother, not in us. We are not that sort of people. You wouldn't send me to such a school?"

"Take care, my child. 'The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich;' and one is not better than the other."

"One is better off than the other," said Rotha. "Mother, how comes aunt Serena to be rich and you to be poor?"

Mrs. Carpenter hesitated and seemed to choose her words.

"It was because of the way she married," she answered at last. "I married a poor man, and her marriage brought her into riches. I would not exchange with her for all the world, Rotha. I have had much the best of it. You see your judgment is not worth much."

Rotha was not satisfied by this statement, and as time wore on she thought she had less and less reason. Mrs. Marble did succeed in finding some different work with better pay for her lodger; that is, she got her the private sewing of a family that paid her at the rate of seventy five cents for a gentleman's shirt, with stitched linen bosom and cuffs. It was better than the buttonhole making; yet even so, Mrs. Carpenter found that very close and diligent application was

necessary, if she would pay her rent and pay her way. She could hardly do without Rotha's assistance. If she tried, with natural motherly feeling, to spare her child, she made her fingers rough and unfit for delicate work. It would not do. Rotha's hands must go into the hot water, and handle the saucepan, and the broom, and the box-iron. Ironing made Mrs. Carpenter's hands tremble; and she must not be hindered in her work or made to do it slowly, if she and her child were to live. And by degrees Rotha came thus to be very busy and her days well filled up. All errands were done by her; purchases at the market and the grocery shop and the thread and needle store. The care of the two little rooms was hers; the preparation of meals, the clearing of tables. It was better than to be idle, but Rotha sighed over it and Mrs. Carpenter sometimes did the same. If she had known just what a public school is, at all hazards she would not have kept her child at home; Rotha should have had so much education as she could get there. But Mrs. Carpenter had a vague horror of evil contact for her daughter, who had lived until now in so pure an atmosphere bodily and mentally. Better anything than such contact, she thought; and she had no time to examine or make inquiries.

So days slipped by, as days do where people are overwhelmingly busy; the hope and intention of making a change kept in the background and virtually nullified by the daily and instant pressure. Rotha became accustomed to the new part she was playing in life; and to her turn of mind, there was a certain satisfaction in the activity of it. Mrs. Carpenter sat by the window and sewed, from morning to night. Both of them began to grow pale over their confined life; but they were caught in the machinery of this great, restless, evil world, and must needs go on with it; no extrication was possible. One needleful of thread after another, one seam after another, one garment finished and another begun; that was the routine of Mrs. Carpenter's life, as of so many others; and Rotha found an incessant recurrence of meal-times, and of the necessary arrangements before and after. The only break and change was on Sunday.

Mrs. Carpenter suddenly awoke to the conviction, that Rotha's going to any sort of school was not a thing at present within the range of vision. What was to be done? She thought a great deal about it.

On their way to and from church she had noticed a small bookstall, closed then of course, which from its general appearance and its situation promised a tariff of prices fitted for very shallow pockets. One afternoon she resolutely laid down her work and took time to go and inspect it. The stock was small enough, and poor; in the whole she found nothing that could serve her purpose, save two volumes of a broken set of Rollin's Ancient History. Being a broken set, the volumes were prized at a mere trifle, and Mrs. Carpenter bought them. Rotha had been with her, and as soon as they reached home subjected the purchase to a narrow and thorough inspection.

"Mother, these are only Vol. I. and Vol. V."

"Yes, I know it."

"And they are not very clean."

"I know that too. I will cover them."

"And then, what are you going to do with them? Read them? You have no time."

"I am going to make you read them."

"Well, I would like to read anything new," said Rotha; "but what shall we do for all that goes between No. I. and No. V?"

"We will see. Perhaps we can pick them up too, some time."

The reading, Rotha found, she was to do aloud, while her mother sewed. It became a regular thing every afternoon, all the time there was to give to it; and Rotha was not aware what schooling her mother managed to get out of the reading. Mrs. Carpenter herself had been well educated; and so was able to do for Rotha what was possible in the circumstances. It is astonishing how much may be accomplished with small means, if there is sufficient power of will at work. Not a fact and not a name in their reading, but it was made the nucleus of a discussion, of which Rotha only knew that it was very interesting; Mrs. Carpenter knew that she was teaching her daughter history and chronology. Not the history merely of the people immediately in question, but the history of the world and of humanity. For without being a scholar or having dead languages at her command, Mrs. Carpenter had another knowledge, which gives the very best key to the solution of many human questions, leads to the most clear and comprehensive view of the whole human drama of life and gives the only one clue to guide one amidst the confusions of history and to its ultimate goal and termination. Namely, the knowledge of the Bible. It is marvellous, how that knowledge supplies and supplements other sorts. So Rotha and her mother, at every step they made in their reading, stopped to study the ground; looked back and forward, traced connections of things, and without any parade of learning got deep into the philosophy of them.

History was only one branch of the studies for which Rollin was made a text-book. Mrs. Carpenter had an atlas in her possession; and she and Rotha studied geography. Studied it thoroughly, too; traced and fixed the relations of ancient and modern; learned by heart and not by head, which is always the best way. And Mrs. Carpenter taxed her memory to enable her as far as practicable to indoctrinate Rotha in the mysteries and delights of physical geography, which the girl took as she would the details of a story. Culture and the arts and industries came in for a share of attention; but here Mrs. Carpenter's knowledge reached not far. Far enough to excite Rotha's curiosity very much, which of itself was one good thing. That indeed may be said to have been one general result and fruit of this peculiar method of instruction.

A grammar was not among Mrs. Carpenter's few possessions, nor found on the shelves of the book-stall above-mentioned. Here too she sought to make memory supply the place of printed words. Rollin served as a text-book again. Rotha learned the parts of speech, and their distinctions and inflexions; also, as far as her mother could recollect them, the rules of syntax. Against all this branch of study she revolted, as unintelligible. Writing compositions went better; but for the mechanical part of this exercise Mrs. Carpenter had no leisure. She did set Rotha a copy now and then; but writing and arithmetic for the most part got the go-by. What Mrs. Carpenter did she must do with her fingers plying the needle and her eyes on her work.

It helped them both, all this learning and teaching; reading and talking. It saved their life from being a dead monotony, and their minds from vegetating; and diverted them from sorrowful regrets and recollections. Life was quite active and stirring in the little rooms where they lived. Nevertheless, their physical nature did not thrive so well as the mental. Rotha was growing fast, and shooting up slender and pale, living too housed a life; and her mother began to lose freshness and to grow thin with too constant application. As the winter passed away, and warm weather opened the buds of the trees which in some places graced the city, these human plants seemed to wither more and more.

"O mother," said Rotha, standing at the window one day in the late spring, "I think the city is just horrid!"

"Never mind, my child. We have a comfortable home, and a great deal to be thankful for."

"If I could only see the butterflies in the fields again!" sighed Rotha.

Her mother echoed the sigh, but this time said nothing.

"And I would like a good big tumbler of real milk, and some strawberries, and some of your bread and butter, mother."

"Yes, my child."

"Mother, how comes it that aunt Serena is rich, and you and I are so poor?"

"You have asked me that before."

"But you didn't tell me."

"I told you, it was in consequence of the different marriages we made."

"Yes, I know. But you were not poor before you married father, were you?"

"No."

"Then that is what I mean. What is become of it? Where is your part?"

"Nowhere, dear."

"What became of it then, mother?"

"I never had it, Rotha. You had better get your book and read. That would be wiser than asking useless questions."

"But why didn't you have it, mother? Did aunt Serena--did your sister--get it all?"

"Get your book, Rotha."

"Mother, please tell me. I shall know the answer if you do not tell me."

"Your aunt had it all," Mrs. Carpenter said very quietly.

"Why?"

"Your grandfather thought there were good reasons."

"Were there, mother?"

"I do not think so. But let it be, Rotha, and never mention this subject to me again. Different people have different ways of looking at the same thing; and people are often very honestly mistaken. You must not judge others by yourself."

"Mother, I think that was very unjust," said Rotha, in immediate disregard of this precept.

"You must not think it was meant so."

"But, mother, if a wrong thing is honestly meant, does that make it right?"

"There is but one rule of right and wrong; it is God's rule."

"Then what difference does it make, whether it was 'honestly meant' or no?"

"A good deal, I should say. Don't you think it does?"

"I do not believe aunt Serena means it honestly, though. If she was a good woman, she wouldn't keep what belongs to you. She must *know* it is wrong!"

"Rotha, you are paining me," said Mrs. Carpenter, the tears springing to her eyes. "This is very foolish talk, and very improper. Get your book."

"I don't wonder you don't want to go and see her!" said Rotha indignantly as she obeyed the order. "O mother! if I could just once roll in the grass again!"

At this moment came a cry from the street--

"Straw--berr_ees!_"

"What's that?" exclaimed Rotha springing to the window. "Mother, it's a woman with a basket full of something red. Strawberries! it's strawberries!"

The accent of this word went to the mother's heart.

"It's early yet," she said. "They will be very dear. By and by they will be plenty and cheaper."

"Strawberries!" repeated Rotha, following the woman with her eyes. "Mother, I think I do hate New York. The sight of those strawberries makes me wild. I want Carlo, and the ducks, and my old pussy cat, and the garden; and--Oh, I want father!"

The natural conclusion to this burst was a passion of weeping. Mrs. Carpenter was fain to lay down her work, and put her arms round the child, and shed some tears with her; though even as they fell she was trying to soothe Rotha into patience and self-command. Two virtues of which as yet the girl knew nothing, except that her mother was a very lovely and constant exemplification of them. Nobody ever expected either from Rotha; although this was the first violent expression of grief and longing that her mother had seen since their removal to New York, and it took her by surprise. Rotha had seemed to acquiesce with tolerable ease in the new conditions of things; and this was Mrs. Carpenter's first notification that under all the outside calm there lay a power of wish and pain. They wept together for a while, the mother and child, which was a sort of relief to both of them.

"Mother," said Rotha, as she dried her tears and struggled to prevent more coming,--"I could bear it, only that I don't see any end to it."

"Well, my child? what then?" said the mother tenderly.

"I don't feel as if I could bear this always."

"There might be much worse, Rotha."

"That don't make this one bit better, mother. It makes it harder."

"We must trust God."

"For what? I don't see."

"Trust him, that he will keep his promises. I do."

"What promises?"

"He has said, that none of them that trust in him shall be desolate."

"But 'not desolate'! That is not enough," said. Rotha. "I want more than that. I want to be happy; and I want to be comfortable."

"Are you not comfortable, my child?"

"No, mother," Rotha said with a sob.

"What do you want?" Mrs. Carpenter spoke with a gentle soft accent, which half soothed, half reproached Rotha, though she did not mean any reproach. Rotha, nevertheless went on.

"I want nearly everything, mother! everything that we haven't got."

"It would not make you happy, if you had it."

"Why not? Why wouldn't it?"

"Because nothing of that sort can. There is only one thing that makes people happy."

"I know; you mean religion. But I am not religious. And if I *was* happy, mother, I should want those other things too."

"If you were happy--you would be happy," Mrs. Carpenter said with a slight smile.

"That would not hinder my wanting other things. I should want, as I do now, nice dresses, and a nice house, and books, and not to have to cook and wash dishes, and to take a ride sometimes and a walk sometimes--not a walk to market--I want all that, mother."

"I would give it you if I could, Rotha. If I had it and did not give it to you, you would know that I had some very good reason."

"I might think you were mistaken," said Rotha.

"We cannot think that of the only wise God," Mrs. Carpenter said with that same faint, sweet smile again; "so we must fall back upon the other alternative."

Rotha was silenced.

"We know that he loves us, dear; and 'they that trust in the Lord shall not want any good thing.' As soon as it would be good for us, if that time ever comes, we shall have it. As for me, if you were only one of those that trust in him, I should hardly have a wish left."

Rotha dried her tears and went at her work. But the summer, as the days passed, was a trial to both of them. Accustomed to sweet country air and free motion about the farm, the closeness, the heat, the impurities, and the confinement of the city were extremely hard to bear. They made it also very difficult to work. Often it seemed to Mrs. Carpenter, unused to such a sedentary life and close bending over her needle, that she must stop and wait till it grew cooler, or till she herself felt a little refreshed. But the necessities of living drove her on, as they drive so many, pitilessly. She could not intermit her work. Rents were due just the same in summer as in winter, and meat and bread were no cheaper. She grew very thin and pale; and Rotha too, though in a far less degree, shewed the wilting and withering effect of the life they led. Rarely a walk could be had; the streets were hot and disagreeable; and Mrs. Carpenter could but now and then dare to spend twenty cents for car hire to take her and Rotha to the Park and back again. The heats of July were very hard to bear; the heats of August were more oppressive still; and when September came with its enervating moist, muggy, warm days, Mrs. Carpenter could scarcely keep her place and her work at her

window. All day she could not. She was obliged to stop and lie by. Appetite failed, meals were not enticing; and on the whole, Mrs. Marble was not at all satisfied with the condition of either of her lodgers.

The cooler weather and then the frosts wrought some amendment. Yet all the autumn did not put them back where the spring had found them; and late in November Mrs. Carpenter took a cold which she could not immediately get rid of. A bad cough set in; strength rather failed than grew; and the thin hands which were so unceasingly busy with their work, became more and more transparently thin. Mrs. Carpenter needed rest; she knew it; and the thought came to her that it might be duty, and even it might be necessity, to apply to her sister for help. Surely it could not be refused?

She was often busy with this thought.

One day she had undertaken a longer walk than usual, to carry home some articles of fine sewing that she had finished. She would not send Rotha so far alone, but she took her along for company and for the air and exercise. Her way led her into the finer built part of the city. Coming down Broadway, she was stopped a minute by a little crowd on the sidewalk, just as a carriage drew up and a lady with a young girl stepped out of it and went into Tiffany's; crossing the path of Mrs. Carpenter and Rotha. The lady she recognized as her own sister.

"Mother," said Rotha, as they presently went on their way again, "isn't that a handsome carriage?"

"Very."

"What is the coachman dressed so for?"

"That is what they call a livery."

"Well, what *is* it? He has top boots and a gold band round his hat. What for? I see a great many coachmen and footmen dressed up so or some other way. What is the use of it?"

"No use, that I know."

"Then what is it for?"

"I suppose they think it looks well."

"So it does. But how rich people must be, mother, when their servants can dress handsomer than we ever could. And their own dresses! Did you see the train of that lady's dress?"

"Yes."

"Beautiful black silk, ever so much of it, sweeping over the sidewalk. She did not even lift it up, as if she cared whether it went into the dirt or not."

"I suppose she did not care," said Mrs. Carpenter mechanically, like a person who is not giving much thought to her answers.

"Then she must be *very* rich indeed. I suppose, mother, her train would make you a whole nice dress."

"Hardly so much of it as that," said Mrs. Carpenter.

"No, no; I mean the cost of it. Mother, I wonder if it is *right*, for that woman to trail so much silk on the ground, and you not to be able to get yourself one good dress?"

"It makes no difference in my finances, whether she trails it or not."

"No, but it ought."

"How should it?"

Rotha worked awhile at this problem in silence.

"Mother, if nobody used what he didn't want, don't you think there would be enough for the people who do want? You know what I mean?"

"I know what you mean. But how should the surplus get to the people who want it?"

"Why!--that's very simple."

"Not so simple as you think."

"Mother, that is the way people did in the second chapter of Acts, that we were reading yesterday. Nobody said that anything he had was his own."

"That was when everybody was full of the love of Christ. I grant you, Rotha, that makes things easy. My child, let us take care we act on that principle."

"We have nothing to give," said Rotha. "Mother, how that girl was dressed too, that came out of that same carriage. Did you see her?"

"Hardly."

"She was about as old as I am, I guess. Mother, she had a feather in her hat and a beautiful little muff, and a silk frock too, though there was no train to it. Her silk was red--dark red," Rotha added with a sigh.

Mrs. Carpenter had been struck and moved, as well as her daughter, by the appearance of the figures in question, though, as she said, she had scarce seen more than one of them. But her thoughts were in a different channel.

When she got home, contrary to all her wont, Mrs. Carpenter sat down and put her head in her hands, instead of going to work. She said she was a little tired, which was very true; but the real reason was a depression and at the same time a perturbation of mind which would not let her work. She had been several times lately engaged with the thought, that it might be better, that it might be her duty, to make herself known to her sister. She felt that her strength lately had been decreasing; it had been with much difficulty that she accomplished her full tale of work; help, even a little, would be very grateful, and a friend for Rotha might be of the greatest importance. It was over with those thoughts. That one glimpse of her sister as she swept past, had shewn her the utter futility of such an appeal as she had thought of making. There was something in the whole air and style of the rich woman which convinced Mrs. Carpenter that she would not patiently hear of poor relations in her neighbourhood; and that help given, even if she gave it, would be so given that it would be easier to do without it than to accept it. She was thrown back upon herself; and the check and the disappointment shewed how much, secretly she had been staying herself upon this hope which had failed her.

She said nothing to her daughter, and Rotha never knew what that encounter had been. But a few days later, finding herself still not gaining strength, and catching at any thread of hope or help, Mrs. Carpenter took another long walk and delivered at its place of address the letter which her English guest had left her. She hardly expected ever to hear anything from it again; and in fact it was long before she did hear either of the letter or of its writer.

The months of winter went somewhat painfully along. Mrs. Carpenter's health did not mend, and the constant sewing became more and more difficult to bear. Mrs. Carpenter now more frequently went out with her work herself, leaving Rotha to make up the lost time by doing some of the plainer seams, for which she was quite competent.

CHAPTER IV.

A VISITER.

One cold afternoon in the latter part of January, a stranger came to Mrs. Marble's door and begged for a few minutes' interview. He did not make it longer; but after a very brief conversation on religious matters, and giving her a tract or two, inquired if there was anybody else in the house?

"Lodgers," said Mrs. Marble. "They've got the second floor. A woman and a girl."

"What sort of people?"

"Well, I should say they were an uncommon sort. Your sort, I guess. Religious. I mean the mother is. I reckon the little one haint anything o' that kind about her."

"Then they pay their rent, I suppose?"

"As regular as clockwork. 'Taint always easy, I know; but it comes up to the day. I don't believe much in the sort o' religion that don't pay debts."

"Nor I; but sometimes, you know, the paying is not only difficult but impossible. Why is it difficult in this case?"

"Don't ask *me!* Because another sort of religious folk, that go to church regular enough and say their prayers, won't pay honest wages for honest work. How is a woman to live, that can't get more than a third or a quarter the value o' what she does? So they *don't* live; they die; and that's how it's goin' to be here."

A tear was glittering in Mrs. Marble's honest eyes, while at the same time she bit off her words as if they had been snap gingerbread.

"Is it so bad as that?" asked the visiter.

"Well, I don' know if you ought to call it, 'bad,'" said Mrs. Marble with a compound expression. "When livin' aint livin' no longer, then dyin' aint exactly dyin'. 'Taint the worst thing, anyhow; if it warnt for the folk left behind. If I was as ready as she is, I wouldn't mind goin', I guess. I s'pose she thinks of her child some."

"Would they receive a visit from me?"

"I don' know; but they don't have many. So long as they've been here, and that's more'n a year now, there aint a livin' soul as has called to ask after 'em. I guess they'd receive most anybody that come with a friend's face. Shall I ask 'em?"

"Not *that*, but if they will see me. I shall be much obliged."

Mrs. Marble laid down her work and tripped up stairs.

"Rotha," she said putting her head inside the door, "here's somebody to see you."

The girl started up and a colour came into her face, as she eagerly asked, "Who?"

"I don't know him from Adam. He's a sort of a missionary; they come round once in a while; and he wants to see you."

"Mother's gone out," said Rotha, her colour fading as quick as it had risen.

"May he come and see you? He's a nice lookin' feller."

"I don't care," said Rotha. "I don't want to see any missionary."

"O well! it won't hurt you to see this one, I guess."

A few minutes after came a tap at the door, and Rotha with a mingling of unwillingness and curiosity, opened it. What she saw was not exactly what she had expected; curiosity grew and unwillingness abated. She asked the stranger in with tolerable civility. He *was* nice looking, she confessed to herself, and very nicely dressed! not at all the rubbishy exterior which Rotha somehow associated with her idea of missionaries. He came in and sat down, quite like an ordinary man; which was soothing.

"Mother is out," Rotha announced shortly.

"It is so much the kinder of you to let me come in."

"I was not thinking of kindness," said Rotha.

"No? Of what then?

"Nothing in particular. You do not want kindness."

"I beg your pardon. Everybody wants it."

"Not kindness *from* everybody then."

"I do."

"But some people can do without it."

"Can they? What sort of people?"

"Why, a great many people. Those that have all they want already."

"I never saw any of that sort of people," said the stranger gravely.

"Pray, did you?"

"I thought I had."

"And you thought I was one of them?"

"I believe so."

"You were mistaken in me. Probably you were mistaken also in the other instances. Perhaps you were thinking of the people who have all that money can buy?"

"Perhaps," Rotha assented.

"Do you think money can buy all things?"

"No," said Rotha, beginning to recover her usual composure; "but the people who have all that money can buy, can do without the other things."

"What do you mean by the 'other things'?"

Rotha did not answer.

"I suppose kindness is one of them, as we started from that."

Rotha was still silent.

"Do you think you could afford to do without kindness?"

"If I had money enough," Rotha said bluntly.

"And what would you buy with money, that would be better?"

"O plenty!" said Rotha. "Yes, indeed! I would stop mother's working; and I would buy our old home, and we would go away from this place and never come back to it. I would have somebody to do the work that I do, too; and I would have a garden, and plenty of flowers, and plenty of everything."

"And live without friends?"

"We always did," said Rotha. "We never had friends. O friends!--everybody in the village and in the country was a friend; but you know what I mean; nobody that we cared for."

"Then you have no friends here in New York?"

"No."

"I should think you would have stayed where, as you say, everybody was a friend."

"Yes, but we couldn't."

"You said, you would if you could stop your mother's working. Do you think she would like that?"

"O she's tired to death!" said Rotha; and her eyes reddened in a way that shewed there were at least two sides to her character. "She is not strong at all, and she wants rest. Of course she would like it. Not to have to do any more than she likes, I mean."

"Then perhaps she would not choose to take some work I was thinking to offer her. Or perhaps you would not take it?" he added smiling.

"We *must* take it," said Rotha, "if we can get it. What is it?"

"A set of shirts. A dozen."

"Mother gets seventy five cents a piece, if they are tucked and stitched."

"That is not my price, however. I like my work particularly done, and I give two dollars a piece."

"Two dollars for one shirt?" inquired Rotha.

"That is my meaning. Do you think your mother will take them?"

For all answer the girl clapped her two hands together.

"Then you are not a master tailor?" she asked.

"No."

"I thought maybe you were. I don't like them. What are you, please?"

"If I should propose myself as a friend, would you allow it?"

Is this a "kindness"? was the suspicion that instantly darted into Rotha's mind. The visiter saw it in her face, and could have smiled; took care to do no such thing.

"That is a question for mother to answer," she said coolly.

"When it is put to her. I put the question to you."

"Do you mean, that you are talking of being a friend to *me*?"

"Is that too bold a proposition?"

"No--but it cannot be true."

"Why not?"

"You cannot want me for a friend. You do not know me a bit."

"Pardon me. And my proposal was, that I should be a friend to *you*."

"I always thought there were two sides to a friendship."

"True; and in time, perhaps, when you come to know me as well as I know you, perhaps you will be my friend as well."

"How should you know me?" said Rotha quickly.

"People's thoughts and habits of feeling have a way of writing themselves somehow in their faces, and voices, and movements. Did you know that?"

"No--" Rotha said doubtfully.

"They do."

"But you don't know me."

"Will you put it to the proof? But do you like to hear the truth spoken about yourself?"

"I don't know. I never tried."

"Shall I try you? I think I see before me a person who likes to have her own way--and has it."

"You are wrong there," said Rotha. "If I had my own way, I should not be doing what I am doing; no indeed! I should be going to school."

"I did not mean that your will could get the better of all circumstances; only of the will of other people. How is that?"

"I suppose everybody likes to have his own way," said Rotha in defence.

"Probably; but not every one gets it. Then, when upon occasion your will is crossed, whether by persons or circumstances, you do not take it very patiently."

"Does anybody?"

"Some people. But on these occasions you are apt to shew your displeasure impatiently--sometimes violently."

"How do you know?" said Rotha wonderingly. "You cannot see that in my face *now*?"

And she began curiously to examine the face opposite to her, to see if it too had any disclosures to make. He smiled.

"Another thing,--" he went on. "You have never yet learned to care for others more than for yourself."

"Does anybody?" said Rotha.

"How is it with your mother?"

"Mother?-- But then, mother and I are very different"

"Did I not intimate that?"

"But I mean I am naturally different from her. It is not only because she is a Christian."

"Why are you not a Christian too?"

Rotha hesitated. Her interlocutor was certainly a great stranger; and as certainly she had not found it possible to read his face; notwithstanding, two effects had resulted from the interview thus far; she believed in him, and he was somewhat imposing to her. Dress and manner might have a little to do with this; poor Rotha had rarely in her short life spoken to any one who had the polish of manner that belongs to good breeding and the habit of society; but that was not the whole. She felt the security and the grace with which every word was said, and she trusted his face. At the same time she rebelled against the slight awe he inspired, and was a little afraid of some lurking "kindness" under all this extraordinary interest and affability. Her answer was delayed and then came somewhat defiantly.

"I never wanted to be a Christian."

"That answer has the merit of truth," said her visiter calmly. "You have mentioned the precise reason that keeps people out of the kingdom of heaven. 'Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life,' the Lord said to some of them when he was upon earth. 'When they shall see him, there is no beauty that they should desire him.'

"Well, I cannot help that," said Rotha.

"No,--" said her visiter slowly, "you cannot help that; but it does not excuse you."

"Why, how can I be a Christian, when I *don't want to?*"

"How can you do anything else that you do not want to do? Duty remains duty, does it not?"

"But religion is not outside work."

"No."

"Mother says, it is the love of God. How can I make myself love him?"

"Poor child!" said her visiter. "When you are in earnest about that question it will not be difficult to find the answer." He rose up. "Then I may send the shirts I spoke of?"

"Yes," said Rotha; "but I don't know about the price. Mother does not want anything but the proper pay; and she does all her work particularly."

"Are you afraid I shall give her too much?"

"She does not want too much."

"I will arrange that with her. Stay,--we have not been introduced to each other. You may call me Mr. Digby; what may I call you?"

"Rotha Carpenter."

"Good morning, Rotha," said the gentleman, offering his hand. Rotha shyly took it, and he went away.

Half an hour afterwards, Mrs. Carpenter came home. She came slowly up the short flight of stairs, and sat down by her fireside as if she was tired. She was pale, and she coughed now and then.

"Mother," began Rotha, full of the new event, "somebody has been here since you have been away."

"A messenger from Mr. Farquharson? I shall have the things done to-morrow, I hope."

"No messenger at all, and no tailor, nor any such horrid person. Mother, what is a 'gentleman'?"

"What makes you ask?"

"Because Mrs. Marble said this man was a gentleman. He's a missionary. Do you know what a 'city missionary' means, mother?"

"Yes, in general."

"The same as a foreign missionary, only he does not go out of the country?"

"He does his work in the city."

"But there are no heathen in New York."

"There are worse."

"Worse? what can be worse?"

"It is worse to see the light and refuse it, than never to have had the choice."

"Then I should think it would be better not to send missionaries to the heathen."

"Rotha, take my bonnet and cloak, dear, and put them away; and make me some tea, will you?"

"Why mother, it is not tea-time yet."

"No matter; I am tired, and cold."

"But you didn't tell me what a gentleman is?" pursued Rotha, beginning now to bustle about and do as she was told.

"Wait till I have had some tea. How much tea is left, Rotha?"

"Well, I guess, enough to last almost a week," said the girl, peering into the box which did duty for a tea-caddy.

"I must manage to get some more," said the mother. "I could hardly get along without my cup of tea."

"Mother, here has been somebody who wants you to make shirts for him at two dollars a piece."

"Two dollars a piece!" Mrs. Carpenter echoed. "I could afford to get tea then. Who was that, Rotha? and what sort of shirts does he want made for such a price?"

"I don't know! he said he wanted them very particularly made, and I told him that was the way you did everything. Now mother dear, the kettle will boil in two minutes."

"Who is this person?"

"I told you, he is a city missionary. His name is Mr. Digby."

"Digby,"--said Mrs. Carpenter. "I do not know him."

"Of course you don't. But you will be glad of the shirts, won't you?"

"Very glad, and thankful."

"But is two dollars a proper price?" inquired Rotha a little jealously.

"It is an uncommon price."

"What could make him offer an uncommon price?"

"I don't know. It is not the way of the world, so perhaps he is not one of the world."

"He's a Christian, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Do Christians always do the right thing?"

"Real Christians do, when they know what the right thing is. I am too tired to talk, Rotha."

Rotha bestirred herself and set the little table. Not very much went on it, besides the cups and plates; but there was a loaf of bread, and Rotha made a slice of toast; and Mrs. Carpenter sipped her tea as if she found it refreshing.

"I wish I had a good tumbler of milk," sighed Rotha; "real milk, not like this. And I wish you had some Medwayville cream, mother. I think, if I ever get back into the country again, I shall go wild."

"I sometimes think you are a little of that here," said Mrs. Carpenter.

"Not wild with joy, mother."

Mrs. Carpenter sipped her tea, and stretched out her feet towards the small stove, and seemed to be taking some comfort. But her face was thin and worn, the hands were very thin; a person with more experience than her young daughter would have been ill content with her appearance.

"Mother, now can you tell me my question? What do you mean by a 'gentleman'?"

"Perhaps not just what Mrs. Marble means by it."

"Well, I'll tell you. This person was very well dressed, but clothes do not make it, do they, mother?"

"Certainly not."

"He has got a nice face, and he seemed to know always just what to do and to say; I can't tell you what I mean exactly; but I should think, to look at him and hear him, that he knew everything and had seen all the world. Of course he hasn't and doesn't; but that is the sort of feeling I have when I look at him."

Mrs. Carpenter smiled.

"Did you never see anybody before of whom you thought so?"

"Never. I never did," said Rotha. "The people who come here on business, don't know the least bit how to behave; and the people at dear old Medwayville did not. O they were kind and good as they could be, some of them; but mother, they could not make a bow to save their lives, and they would stand and sit all sorts of ways; and they wouldn't know when they had done talking, nor how to do anything nicely."

"Perhaps this man was stiff," said Mrs. Carpenter amused.

"He was not stiff in the least; but mother, what is a gentleman?"

"I do not know how to tell you, Rotha. Your description sounds very much like one."

A day or two after, Mr. Digby came again, and had an interview with Mrs. Carpenter. This time he paid no attention to

Rotha, and I think the little girl was somewhat disappointed. The next day he came again and brought with him the bundle of shirts. He inquired now very kindly into Mrs. Carpenter's state of health, and offered to send his own physician to see her. But she refused; and the manner of her refusal persuaded Mr. Digby that she was aware of her own condition and believed no medicine would be of avail. He was much of the same opinion himself; and indeed was inclined to suspect that there was more need of good food than of drugs in this case. More difficult at the same time to administer.

A few days passed, and Mr. Digby again came.

He found Mrs. Carpenter steady at her work, but looking very worn and pale. Rotha was just putting on the small tea kettle. Mr. Digby sat down and made kind inquiries. The answers were with the sweet patient composure which he saw was habitual with Mrs. Carpenter.

"How is your appetite?" he asked.

"I suppose I am not enough in the open air and stirring about, to have it very good."

"Have you much strength for 'stirring about'?"

"Not much."

"People cannot have strength without eating. Rotha, what time do you give your mother her dinner?"

"Now," said Rotha. "I put the kettle on just as you came in."

"I saw you did. But what is the connection, may I ask, between dinner and the tea kettle?"

"Rotha makes me a cup of tea," said Mrs. Carpenter smiling. "I can hardly get along without that."

"Ah!--Mrs. Carpenter, I have had a busy morning and am--which I am sorry you are not--*hungry*. May I take a cup of tea with you?"

"Certainly!--I should be very glad. Rotha, set a cup for Mr. Digby, dear. But tea is not much to a hungry man," she went on; "and I am afraid there is little in the house but bread and butter."

"That will do capitally. If you'll furnish the bread and butter, I will see what I can get for my part. If you'll excuse the liberty, Mrs. Carpenter?"

Mrs. Carpenter would excuse, I think, whatever he might take a fancy to do. She had seen him now several times, and he had quite won her heart.

"Mother," said Rotha, as soon as their visiter had gone out, "what is he going to do?"

"I do not know. Get something for dinner, he said."

"Do you like him to do that?"

"Do what?"

"Bring us dinner."

"Don't be foolish, Rotha."

"Mother, I think he is doing what he calls a 'kindness.'"

"Have you any objection?"

"Not to his doing it for other people; but for you and me-- Mother, we have not come to receiving charity yet."

"Rotha!" exclaimed her mother. "My child, what are you thinking of?"

"Having kindnesses done to us, mother; and I don't like it. It is not Mr. Digby's business, what we have for dinner!"

"I told him we had not much but bread."

"Why did you tell him?"

"He would have found it out, Rotha, when he came to sit down to the table."

"He had no business to ask to do that."

"I think you are ungrateful."

"Mother, I don't want to be grateful. Not to him."

"Why not to him, or to anybody, my child, that deserves it of you?"

"He don't!"--said Rotha, as she finished setting the table, rather in dudgeon. "What do you suppose he is going to bring?"

"Rotha, what will ever become of you in this world, with that spirit?"

"What spirit?"

"Pride, I should say."

"Isn't pride a good thing?"

"Not that ever I heard of, or you either," Mrs. Carpenter said with a sigh.

"Mother, I don't think you have enough pride."

"A little is too much. It makes people fall into the condemnation of the devil. And you are mistaken in thinking there is anything fine in it. Don't shew that feeling to Mr. Digby, I beg of you."

Rotha did not exactly pout, for that was not her way; but she looked dissatisfied. Presently she heard a sound below, and opened the door.

"He's coming up stairs," she said softly, "and a boy with him bringing something. Mother!--"

She had no chance to say more. Mr. Digby came in, followed by a boy with a basket. The basket was set down and the boy disappeared.

"Mrs. Carpenter," said the gentleman, "I could not find anything in this neighbourhood better than oysters. Do you like them?"

"Oysters!" said Mrs. Carpenter. "It is very long since I have seen any.
Yes, I like them."

"Then the next question is, how do you like them? Saw? or roasted? We can roast them here, cannot we?"

"I have not seen a roast oyster since I was a girl," said Mrs. Carpenter. Her visiter could hear in the tone of her voice that the sight would be very welcome. As for Rotha, displeasure was lost in curiosity. The oysters were already nicely washed; that Mr. Digby had had done by the same boy that brought the basket; it only remained to put them on the fire and take them off, and both operations he was quite equal to. Rotha looked on in silent astonishment, seeing the oyster shells open, and the juice sputter on the hot iron, and perceiving the very acceptable fragrance that came from them. Mr. Digby admonished her presently to make the tea; and then they had a merry meal. Absolutely merry; for their visitor, he could hardly be called their guest, spiced his ministrations with so pleasant a manner that nothing but cheerfulness could keep its ground before him. At the first taste of the oysters, it is true, some associations seemed to come over Mrs. Carpenter which threatened to make a sudden stop to her dinner. She sat back in her chair, and perhaps was swallowing old troubles and heartburnings over again, or perhaps recalling involuntarily a time before troubles began. The oysters seemed to choke her; and she said she wanted no more. But Mr. Digby guessed what was the matter; and was so tenderly kind and judiciously persuasive, that Mrs. Carpenter could not withstand him; and then, Rotha looked on in new amazement to see how the oysters went down and how manifestly they were enjoyed. She herself declined to touch them; they did not look attractive to her.

"Rotha," said Mr. Digby, as he opened a fine, fat oyster, "the only way to know things is, to submit to learn."

"I needn't learn to like oysters, I suppose, need I?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"It might be useful some day."

"I don't see how it should. We never had oysters before, and perhaps we never shall again."

"You might go a missionary to some South Sea island, and be obliged at times to live upon oysters."

"I am not going to be a missionary."

"That is more than you know."

"But I know what I like, and what I think."

"At present. Perhaps you do. You do not know whether you like oysters, however, for you have not tried."

"Your sphere of knowledge will be small, Rotha," said her mother, "if you refuse to enlarge it."

Stung a little, Rotha made up her mind to try an oyster, to which her objections were twofold. Nevertheless, she was obliged to confess, she liked it; and the meal, as I said, went merrily on; Rotha from that time doing her full share. Mrs. Carpenter was plainly refreshed and comforted, by the social as well as the material food she received.

"How good he is!" she exclaimed when their friend was gone.

"So are the oysters," said Rotha; "but I don't like him to bring them. I do not think I like Mr. Digby much, anyhow."

"You surprise me. And it is not a little ungrateful."

"I don't want to be grateful to him. And mother, I *don't* like him to bring oysters here!"

"Why shouldn't he, if he likes? I am sorry to see such pride in you, Rotha. It is *very* foolish, my child."

"Mother, it looks as if he knew we were poor."

"He knows it, of course. Am I not making his shirts?"

Rotha was silent, clearing away the dishes and oyster shells with a good deal of decision and dissatisfaction revealed in her movements.

"Everybody knows it, my child."

"I do not mind everybody. I just mind him. He is different. Why is he different, mother?"

"I suppose the difference you mean is, that he is a gentleman."

"And what are we?" said Rotha, suddenly standing still to put the question.

"We are respectable people," said her mother smiling.

"Not gentlemen, of course; but what do you call us?"

"If I could call you a Christian, Rotha, I should not care for anything else; at least I should not be concerned about it. Everything else would be right."

"Being a Christian would not make any difference in what I am talking about."

"I think it would; but I cannot talk to you about it. Ask Mr. Digby the next time he comes."

"Ask him!" cried Rotha. "I guess I will! What makes you think he is coming again, mother?"

"It would be like him."

CHAPTER V.

PRIVATE TUITION.

More days passed however, than either of them expected, before Mr. Digby came again. They were days of stern cold winter weather, in which it was sometimes difficult to keep their little rooms comfortable without burning more coal than Mrs. Carpenter thought she could afford. Rotha ran along the streets to the corner shop where she bought tea and sugar, not quite so well wrapped up but that she found a quick pace useful to protect her from the cold; and Mrs. Carpenter wrought at her sewing sometimes with stiffened fingers.

"Mother," said Rotha, one day, "I think it would be better to do without tea and have a little more fire."

"I do not know how to get along without tea," Mrs. Carpenter said with a sigh.

"But you are getting along without almost everything else."

"We do very well yet," answered the mother patiently.

"Do we?" said Rotha. "If this is what you call very well-- Mother, you cannot live upon tea."

"I feel as if I could not live without it."

"Has Mr. Digby given you any money yet?"

"The shirts are only just finished."

"And what are you going to do now? But he'll pay you a good many dollars, won't he, mother? Twenty four, for twelve shirts. But there is eight to be paid for rent, I know, and that leaves only sixteen. And he can afford to pay the whole twenty four, just for a dozen shirts! Mother, I don't think some people have a *right* to be so rich, while others are so poor."

"The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich,"--Mrs. Carpenter answered.

"Why does he?"

"Sometimes, I think, he wishes to teach his children to depend on him."

"Couldn't they do it if they were rich?"

"There is great danger they would not."

"You would, mother."

"Perhaps not. But I have always enough, Rotha."

"Enough!" echoed Rotha. "Enough! when you haven't had a good dinner since-- Mother, there he is again, I do believe!"

And she had hardly time to remove the empty tea cup and, alas! empty plates, which testified to their meagre fare, when the knock came and Mr. Digby shewed himself. He explained that he had been out of town; made careful inquiries as to Mrs. Carpenter's health; paid for the shirts; and finally turned to Rotha.

"How is my friend here doing?"

"We always go on just the same way," said Rotha. But he could see that the girl was thin, and pale; and that just at an age when she was growing fast and needing abundant food, she was not getting it.

"Ask Mr. Digby your question, Rotha," her mother said.

"I do not want to ask him any questions," the girl answered defiantly.
But Mrs. Carpenter went on.

"Rotha wants to know what a gentleman is; and I was not able to discuss the point satisfactorily with her. I told her to ask you."

Rotha did not ask, however, and there was silence.

"Rotha is fond of asking questions," Mr. Digby observed.

"What makes you think so?" she retorted.

He smiled. "It is a very good habit--provided of course that the questions are properly put."

"I like to ask mother questions," Rotha said, drawing in a little.

"I have no doubt you would like to ask me questions, if you once got into the way of it. Habit is everything."

"Not quite everything, in this," said Rotha. "There must be something before the habit."

"Yes. There must be a beginning."

"I meant something else."

"Did you? May I ask, what did you mean?"

"I mean a good deal," said Rotha. "Before one could get a habit like that, one must know that the person could answer the questions; and besides, that he would like to have them asked."

"In my case I will pledge myself for the second qualification; about the first you must learn by experience. Suppose you try."

His manner was so pleasant and well bred, and Rotha felt that she had gone so near the edge of politeness, she found it best for this time to comply.

"I asked mother one day what is the meaning of a 'gentleman'; and I suppose she was too tired to talk to me, for she said I had better ask you."

"O he did me honour."

"Well, what is it then, Mr. Digby."

"I should say, it is the counterpart to a 'lady'."

"But isn't everybody that is grown up, a 'lady'?--every woman, I mean?"

"No more than every grown up man is a gentleman."

Rotha stood looking at him, and the young man on his part regarded her with more attention than usual. He was suddenly touched with compassion for the girl. She stood, half doubtful, half proud, dimly conscious of her enormous ignorance, and with an inward monition of a whole world of knowledge to be acquired, yet beyond her reach; at the same time her look shewed capacity enough both to understand and to feel. Rotha was now nearly fourteen, with mental powers just opening and personal gifts just beginning to dawn. The child's complexion told of poor feeding and want of air and exercise; it was sallow, and her features were sharp; but her hair was beautiful in its lustrous, dark abundance; the eyes shewed the fire of native passion and intelligence; the mouth was finely cut and expressed half a dozen things in as many minutes. "Poor child!" thought the visiter; "what is to become of her, with all this latent power and possibility?"

"A gentleman, Rotha," he said aloud, "may be defined as a person who in all manner of little things keeps the golden rule--does to everybody as he would be done by; and knows how."

"In little things? Not in great things?"

"One may do it in great things, and not be a gentleman in manner; though certainly in heart."

"Then it is manner?"

"Very much."

"And a lady the same way?"

"Of course."

"What sort of little things?" said Rotha curiously.

"A lady in the first place will be always careful and delicate about her own person and dress; it does not depend upon what she wears, but how she wears it; a lady might wear patches, but never could be untidy. Then, in all her moving, speaking, and acting, she will be gentle, quiet, and polite. And in her behaviour to others, she will give everybody the respect that is due, and never put herself forward. 'In honour preferring one another' is the Bible rule, and it is the law of good breeding. And the Bible says, 'Honour all men;' and, 'Be courteous.'--Have I spoken according to your mind, Mrs. Carpenter?"

"Beautifully," said the silent, pale seamstress, never stopping her needle. "Better than I could have done it. Now you know, Rotha."

Rotha stood considering, uneasy.

"What is the next question?" said Mr. Digby smiling.

"I was thinking--" said Rotha. "Mustn't one know a good deal, to do all that?"

"To do what, for instance?"

"To give everybody the respect that is due; it is not the same to everybody, is it?"

"No, certainly."

"How can one know?"

"There *is* a good deal to be learned in this world, before one can hold the balance scales to weigh out to each one exactly what belongs to him," Mr. Digby admitted.

"That is one of my troubles," said Mrs. Carpenter looking up. "I cannot give my child an education. I do a little at home; it is better than nothing; but I feel that my power grows less and less; and Rotha's needs are more and more."

"What do you know, Rotha?" said Mr. Digby.

"I don't know much of anything!" said the girl, an eloquent flush coming into her pale face. It touched him.

"A little of what, then?" said their visitor kindly.

"You would not say it was anything."

"She knows a little history," Mrs. Carpenter put in.

"Have you any acquaintance with Alexander of Macedon, Rotha?"

"The Great?" asked Rotha.

"He is called so."

"Yes, I know about him."

"Think he deserved the title?"

"Yes, I suppose he did."

"What for?"

"He was such a clever man."

"Well, I have no doubt he was," Mr. Digby returned, keeping a perfectly grave face with some difficulty; "a clever man; but how did he shew it?"

Rotha paused, and a faint tinge, of excitement this time, rose again in her cheeks, and her eye waked up with the mental stir. "He had such grand plans," she answered.

"Ah? yes. Which do you mean?"

"For civilizing people; for bringing the different nations to know each other and be friends with each other; so that trade could be carried on, and knowledge and arts and civilization could spread to all; that his empire could be one great whole."

"On the whole you approve of Alexander. After all, what use was he to the world?"

"Why a good deal," said Rotha. "Don't you think so? His successors carried on his plans; at least some of them did; and the Greek language was spread through Asia, and the Jews encouraged to settle in Egyptian and Greek cities; and so the way was prepared for the spread of the gospel when it came."

"Mrs. Carpenter," said Mr. Digby, "your manner of teaching history is very satisfactory!"

"I have done what I could," said the mother, "but we had very few books to work with."

"We had none," said Rotha, "except Rollin's Ancient History, and Plutarch's Lives."

"One good book, well used, is worth a hundred under other circumstances.
Then you do not know much of modern history, Rotha?"

"Nothing at all; except what mother has told me."

"How about grammar?"

"I have taught her grammar," said Mrs. Carpenter; "and geography. She knows both pretty well. But I found, with my work, I could not teach her arithmetic; and I had not a good book for it. Rotha can do nothing with numbers."

Mr. Digby gave the girl a simple question in mental arithmetic; and then another, and another. Rotha's brow grew intent; the colour in her cheeks brightened; she was grappling, it was plain, with the difficulties suggested to her, wrestling with them, conquering them, with the sort of zeal which conquers all difficulties not insurmountable.

"May I give Rotha lessons in Latin?" Mr. Digby asked, turning quietly to Rotha's mother.

"Latin!" Mrs. Carpenter exclaimed, and her cheeks too flushed slightly.

"I should enjoy it. It is likely that important business will bring me frequently into this part of the city; so I could do it as well as not."

"But it would be so much trouble--unless you are fond of teaching--"

"I am fond of teaching--when I find somebody that can learn."

"You are very kind!--I should be very glad--Poor Rotha, I have been unable to do for her what I wished--"

"I think you have done admirably, from the slight specimen I have had.
How much time can she give to study?"

"O she has time enough. She is much more idle than I like to have her."

"Then that is arranged. I am going to send you a few raw oysters, Mrs. Carpenter; and I wish you would eat them at all times of day, whenever you feel like it. I knew a very slender lady once, who grew to very ample proportions by following such a regimen. Try what they will do for you."

A grateful, silent look thanked him, and he took his departure. Rotha, who had been standing silent and cloudy, now burst forth.

"Mother!--I do not want him to teach me!"

"Why not, my child? I think he is very kind.'

"Kind! I don't want to be taught out of kindness; and I *don't* want *him* to teach me, mother!"

"What's the matter?" for Rotha was flushed and fierce.

"I can learn without him. It is none of his business, whether I learn or not. And if I shouldn't say something just right, and he should find fault, I should be so angry I shouldn't know what to do!"

"You talk as if you were angry now."

"Well I am! Why did you say yes, mother?"

"Would you have had me say no?"

"Yes! I don't want to learn Latin anyhow. What's the use of my learning Latin? And of him--O mother, mother!"

And Rotha burst into impatient and impotent tears.

"Why not of Mr. Digby?" said her mother soothingly.

"O he is so--I can't tell!--he's so uppish."

"He is not *uppish* at all. I am ashamed of you, Rotha."

"Well, nothing puts him out. He is just always the same; and he thinks everything must be as he says. I don't like him to come here teaching me."

"What folly is this? He is a gentleman, that's all. Do you dislike him for being a gentleman?"

"I'm not a lady"--sobbed Rotha.

"What has that to do with it?"

"Mother, I wish I could be a lady!"

"My child, Mr. Digby told you how."

"No, he didn't. He told me *what* it was; he didn't tell me how I could get all that."

"You can follow the Bible roles, at any rate, Rotha; and they go a good way."

"No, I can't, mother. I could if I were a Christian, I suppose; but I am not I can't 'honour all men'; I don't know how; and I can't prefer others before myself I prefer myself But if I could, that wouldn't make me a lady."

Mrs. Carpenter did not know what to do with this passion, the cause of which she was at a loss to understand. It was very real; Rotha sobbed; and her mother was at a loss how to comfort her. What dim, far-off recognition was this, of powers and possibilities in life--or in herself --of which the girl had hitherto no experience and no knowledge? It was quite just Mrs. Carpenter, herself refined and essentially lady-like, knew very well that her little girl was not growing up to be a lady; she had laid that off, along with several other subjects of care, as beyond her reach to deal with; but Rotha's appeal smote a tender spot in her heart, and she was puzzled how to answer her. Perhaps it was just as well that she took refuge in her usual silence and did not try any further.

As Mr. Digby was going through the little passage way to the front door, another door opened and Mrs. Marble's head was put out.

"Good morning!" she said. "You're a friend of those folks up stairs, aint you?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Well, what do you think of her?" she said, lowering her voice.

"I think you are a happy woman, to have such lodgers, Mrs. Marble."

"I guess I know as much as that," said the mantua-maker, with her pleasant, arch smile. "I meant something else. I think, she's a sick woman."

Mr. Digby did not commit himself.

"I'm worried to death about her," Mrs. Marble went on. "Her cough's bad, and it's growin' worse; and she aint fit to be workin' this minute. And what's goin' to become of her?"

"The Lord takes care of his children; and she is one."

"If there is such a thing!" said the mantua-maker, a quick tear dimming her eye. "But you see, I have my own work, and I can't leave it to do much for her; and she won't let me, neither; and I am thinkin' about it day and night. She aint fit to work, this minute. And there's the child; and they haven't a living soul to care for them, as I see, in all the world. They never have a letter, and they never get a visit, except your'n."

"Rent paid?" asked the gentleman low.

"Always! never miss. But I'm thinkin'--how do they live? That child's grown thin--she's like a piece o' wigglin'; she'll hold up when there's nothin' to her."

Mr. Digby could not help laughing.

"I thought, if you can't help, nobody can. What's to become of them if she gets worse? That child can't do for her."

"Thank you, Mrs. Marble; you are but touching what I have thought of myself. I will see what can be done."

"And don't be long about it," said the mantua-maker with a nod of her head as she closed the door.

Perhaps it was owing to Mrs. Marble's suggestions that Mr. Digby made his next visit the day but one next after; perhaps they were the cause that he did not come sooner! At any rate, in two days he came again; and brought with him not only a Latin grammar, but a paper of grapes for Mrs. Carpenter. At the grammar Rotha's soul rebelled; but what displeasure could stand against those beautiful grapes and the sight of her mother eating them? They were not very good, Mr. Digby said; he would bring better next time; though to the sick woman they were ambrosia, and to Rotha an unknown, most exquisite dainty. Seeing her delighted, wondering eyes, Mr. Digby with a smile broke off part of a bunch and gave to her.

"It shall not rob your mother," he said observing that she hesitated. "I will bring her some more."

Rotha tasted.

"O mother!" she exclaimed in ecstasy,--"I should think these would make you well right off!"

Mr. Digby opened the Latin grammar. I think he wanted an excuse for veiling his eyes just then. And Rotha, mollified, when she had finished her grapes, submitted patiently to receive her first lesson and to be told what her teacher expected her to do before he came again.

"By the way," said he as he was about going,--"have you any more room than you need, Mrs. Carpenter?"

"Room? no. We have this floor--" said Mrs. Carpenter bewilderedly.

"You have not one room that you could let? I know a very respectable person, an elderly woman, who I think would be comfortable here, if you would allow her to come. She could pay well for the accommodation."

"What would be 'well'?" said Mrs. Carpenter, looking up.

"According to the arrangement, of course. For a room without a fire, she would pay four dollars a month; with fire, I should say, twelve."

"That would be a great help to me," said Mrs. Carpenter, considering.

"I know the person, I have known her a great while. I think I can promise that she would not in any way annoy you."

"She brings her own furniture?"

"Of course."

After a little more turning the matter over in her mind, Mrs. Carpenter gave an unqualified assent to the proposal; and her visiter took his leave.

"Mother," said Rotha, "what room are you going to give her?"

"There is but one; our bed-room."

"Then where shall we sleep?"

"Here."

"Here! Where we do everything!--"

"It is not so pleasant; but it will pay our rent, Rotha. And I should like a little more warmth at night, now the weather is so severe."

"O mother, mother! We have got down to two rooms, and now we are come down to one!"

"Hush, my child. I am thankful."

"Thankful!"

"Yes, for the means to pay my rent."

"You might have had means to pay your rent, and kept your two rooms," said Rotha; thinking, like a great many other people, that she could improve upon Providence.

"How do you like Latin?"

"If you mean, how I like *Sermo Sermonis*, I don't like it at all. And it is just ridiculous for Mr. Digby to be giving me lessons."

The new lodger moved in the very next week. She was a portly, comfortable-looking, kindly-natured woman, whom Mrs. Carpenter liked from the first. She established herself quietly in her quarters and almost as soon began to shew herself neighbourly and helpful. One day Mrs. Carpenter's cough was particularly troublesome. Mrs. Cord came in and suggested a palliative which she had known often to work comfortingly. She procured it and prepared it herself, and then administered it, and begged permission to cook Mrs. Carpenter's dinner; and shook up the pillow at her back, and set the rocking chair at an inclined angle which gave support and relief. When she had done all she could, she went away; but she came in again as soon as there was fresh occasion for her services, and rendered them with a hearty good will which made them doubly acceptable, and with a ready skill and power of resources which would have roused in any sophisticated mind the suspicion that Mrs. Cord was a trained nurse. Mrs. Carpenter suspected no such thing; she only felt the blessed benefit, and told Mr. Digby what a boon the new lodger had become to her.

So the winter, the latter part of it, passed in rather more comfort to the invalid. She did not work quite so steadily, and in good truth she would have been unable; she was free of anxieties about debt, for the rent was sure; and of other things they bought only what they could pay for. The fare might so have been meagre sometimes; were it not that supplies seemed to come in, irregularly but opportunely, in such very pertinent and apt ways that all sorts of gaps in the housekeeping were filled up. Mr. Digby kept their larder stocked with oysters, for one thing. Then he would bring a bit of particularly nice salmon he had found; or fresh eggs that he got from an old woman down town near one of the ferries, whom he said he could trust. Or he brought some new tea for Mrs. Carpenter to try; sometimes a sweetbread, or

a fresh lobster, from the market. Then it was remarkable how often Mr. Digby was tempted by the sight of game; and came with prairie chickens, quails, partridges and ducks, to tempt, as he said, Mrs. Carpenter's appetite. And at last he brought her wine. There had grown up between the two, by this time, a relation of great kindness and even affection. Ever since one day Mrs. Carpenter had been attacked by a terrible fit of coughing when he was there; and the young man had waited upon her and ministered to her in a way that Rotha had neither strength nor skill, and also with a tenderness which she could not have surpassed. And Rotha could be tender where her mother was concerned. Ever since that day Mr. Digby had assumed, and been allowed, something like a son's place in the little family; and Mrs. Carpenter only smiled at him when he appeared with new tokens of his thoughtfulness and care.

Rotha did not accept him quite so easily. She was somewhat jealous of his favour and of the authority he exercised; for without making the fact in any way obtrusive, a fact it was, that Mr. Digby did what he pleased. It pleased Mrs. Carpenter too; it did not quite please Rotha.

Yet in the matter of the lessons it was as much a fact as anywhere else. Mr. Digby had it quite his own way. To Mrs. Carpenter this 'way' seemed a marvel of kindness, and her gratitude was unbounded. A feeling which Rotha's heart did not at all share. She got her lessons, it is true; she did what was required of her; it soon amused Mrs. Carpenter to see with what punctilious care she did it; for in the abstract Rotha was not fond of application. She was one of those who love to walk in at the doors of knowledge, but do not at all enjoy forging the keys with which the locks must be opened. And forging keys was the work at which she was now kept busy. Rotha always knew her tasks, but she came to her recitations with a sort of reserved coldness, as if inwardly resenting or rebelling, which there is no doubt she did.

"Mr. Digby, what is the good of my knowing Latin?" she ventured to ask one day.

"You know a little about farming, do you not, Rotha?" was the counter question.

"More than a little bit, I guess."

"Do you? Then you know perhaps what is the use of ploughing the ground?"

"To make it soft. What ground are you ploughing with Latin, Mr. Digby?"

"The ground of your mind; to get it into working order."

This intimation incensed Rotha. She was too vexed to speak. All this trouble just to get her mind into working order?

"Is that all Latin is good for?" she asked at length.

"By no means. But if it were--that is no small benefit. Not only to get the ground in working order, but to develope the good qualities of it; as for instance, the power of concentration, the power of attention, the power of discernment."

"I can concentrate my attention when I have a mind to," said Rotha.

"That is well. I am going to give you something else to do which will practise you in that."

"What, Mr. Digby?" With all her impatience Rotha was careful to observe the forms of politeness with her teacher. He silently handed her an arithmetic.

"Oh!--" said the girl, drawing out the word"--I have done sums, Mr. Digby."

"How far?"

It turned out that Rotha's progress in that walk of learning had been limited to a very few steps. And even in those few steps, Mr. Digby's tests and questions gave her a half hour of sharp work; so sharp as to bar other thoughts for the time. Rotha shewed in this half hour unmistakeable capacity for the science of numbers; nevertheless, when her teacher went away leaving her a good lesson in arithmetic to study along with her Latin grammar, Rotha spoke herself dissatisfied.

"Am I to learn just whatever Mr. Digby chooses to give me?" she asked.

"I thought you liked learning, Rotha?"

"Yes, mother; so I do. I like learning well enough; I don't like him to say what I shall learn."

"Why not? Mr. Digby is very kind, Rotha!"

"He may mean it for kindness. I don't know what he means it for."

"It is nothing but pure goodness," said the mother with a grateful sigh.

"Well, is he to give me everything to learn that he takes into his head?"

"Rotha, a teacher could not be kinder or more patient than Mr. Digby is with you."

"I don't try his patience, mother."

It was true enough; she did not. She had often tried her mother's; with Mr. Digby Rotha was punctual, thorough, prompt and docile. Whether it were pride or a mingling of something better,—and Rotha did love learning,—she never gave occasion for a point of blame. It was not certainly that Mr. Digby was harsh or stern, or used a manner calculated to make anybody fear him; unless indeed it were the perfectness of good breeding which he always shewed, here in the poor sempstress's room, and in his lessons to the sempstress's child. Rotha had never seen the like in anybody before; and that more than ought else probably wrought in her such a practical awe of him. Mrs. Carpenter was even half amused to observe how Rotha unconsciously in his presence was adopting certain points of his manner; she was quiet; she moved with moderate steps; she spoke in low tones; she did not fly out in impatient or angular words or gestures, as was her way often enough at other times. Yet her mother knew, and wondered why, Rotha rebelled in secret against the whole thing. For herself, she was growing into a love for Mr. Digby which was almost like that of a mother for a son; as indeed his manner towards her was much like that of a son towards his mother. It was not the benefits conferred and received; it was a closer bond which drew them together, and a deeper relation. They looked into each other's faces, and saw there, each in the other, what each recognized as the signature of a handwriting that they loved; the stamp of a likeness that was to them both the fairest of all earthly things. Then came the good offices rendered and accepted; the frequent familiar intercourse; the purely human conditions of acquaintanceship and friendship; and it was no matter of surprise if by and by the care on the one part and the dependence on the other grew to be a thing most natural and most sweet.

So it came about, that by degrees the look of things changed in Mrs. Carpenter's small dwelling place. As the cold of the winter began to give way to the harshness of spring, and March winds blew high, the gaseous fumes from the little anthracite coal stove provoked Mrs. Carpenter's cough sadly. "She was coughing all day," Mrs. Cord told their friend in private; "whenever the wind blew and the gas came into the room." Mr. Digby took his measures. The little cooking stove was removed; a little disused grate behind it was opened; and presently a gentle fire of Liverpool coal was burning there. The atmosphere of the room as well as the physiognomy of it was entirely changed; and Mrs. Carpenter hung over the fire and spread out her hands to it with an expression of delight on her wasted face which it was touching to see. Mr. Digby saw it, and perhaps to divert the feeling which rose in him, began to find fault with something else.

"That's a very uncomfortable chair you are sitting in!" he said with a strong expression of disapproval.

"O it does very well indeed," answered Mrs. Carpenter. "I want nothing, I think, having this delightful fire."

"How do you rest when you are tired?"

"I lean back. Or I lie down sometimes."

"Humph! Beds are very well at night. I do not think they are at all satisfactory by day."

"Why what would you have?" said Mrs. Carpenter, smiling at him.

"I'll see."

It was the next day only after this that Rotha, having finished her work for her teacher and nothing else at the moment calling for attention, was standing at the window looking out into the narrow street. The region was poor, but not squalid; nevertheless it greatly stirred Rotha's disgust. If New York is ever specially disagreeable, it finds the occasion in a certain description of March weather; and this was such an occasion. It was very cold; the fire in the grate was well made up and burning beautifully and the room was pleasant enough; but outside there were gusts that were almost little whirlwinds coursing up and down every street, carrying with them columns and clouds of dust. The dust accordingly lay piled up on one side of the way, swept off from the rest of the street; not lying there peacefully, but

caught up again from time to time, whirled through the air, shaken out upon everybody and everything in its way, and finally swept to one side and deposited again.

"It's the most horrid weather, mother, you can think of!" Rotha reported from her post of observation. "I shouldn't think anybody would be out; but I suppose they can't help it. A good many people are going about, anyhow. Some of them are so poorly dressed, mother! there was a woman went by just now, carrying a basket; I should say she had very little on indeed under her gown; the wind just took it and wrapped it round her, and she looked as slim as a post."

"Poor creature!" said Mrs. Carpenter.

"Mother, we never saw people like that in Medwayville."

"No."

"Why are they here, and not there?"

"You must ask Mr. Digby."

"I don't want to ask Mr. Digby!--There are two boys; ragged;--and barefooted. I don't know what they are out for; they have nothing to do; they are just playing round an ash-barrel. I should think they'd be at home."

"Such people's home is often worse than the streets."

"But you don't know how it blows to-day. I should think, mother," said Rotha slowly, "New York must want a great many good people in it."

"There are a great many good people in it."

"What are they doing, then?"

"Looking out for Number One, mostly," Mrs. Cord answered, who happened to be in the room.

"But it wants people rich enough to look out for Number One, and for Number Two as well."

Mrs. Carpenter sighed. She knew there were more sides to the problem than the simple "one and two" which appeared to Rotha.

"There comes a coal cart, mother; that has to go, I suppose, for somebody wants it. I should hate to drive a coal cart! Mother, who wants it here? It is backing down upon our sidewalk."

"Mrs. Marble, I suppose."

"No, she don't; she has got her coal all in; and this isn't her coal at all; it is in big lumps some of it, like what came for the grate, and it isn't shiny like the stove coal. It must be for you, I guess."

Rotha ran down to see, and came back with the receipt for her mother to sign. Mrs. Carpenter signed with a trembling hand, and Rotha flew away again.

"It is a whole cart-load, mother," she said coming back.

"There is one good rich man in New York," said Mrs. Carpenter tremulously.

"Do you think he is rich?"

"I fancy so."

"He hasn't spent so very much on us, has he?" asked Rotha consideringly.

"It seems much to me. More than our share, I am afraid."

"Our share of what?"

"His kindness."

"Who has the other shares?"

"I cannot tell. Other people he knows, that are in need of it."

"Mother, we are not in *need* of it, are we? We could get along without oysters, I suppose. But what I am thinking of is, if he gives other people as good a share of his time as he gives us, he cannot live at home much. Where *does* Mr. Digby live, Mrs. Cord?"

"I don't know as I can say, Rotha. It is a hotel somewhere, I believe."

"I should not think anybody would live in a hotel," said Rotha, remembering her own and her mother's experience of the "North River." "Now here comes another cart the carts have to go in all sorts of times; but O how the dust blows about! This cart is carrying something--I can't see what it's all wrapped up."

"My dear Rotha," said her mother, "I am not interested to know what the carts in the street are doing. Are you?"

"This one is stopping, mother. It is stopping *here*!"

"Well, my dear, what if it is. It is no business of ours."

"The other cart was our business, though; how do you know, mother? It has stopped here, and the man is taking the thing off."

Mrs. Cord came to the window to look, and then went down stairs. Rotha, seeing that the object of her interest, whatever it were, had disappeared within doors, presently followed her. In the little bit of a hall below stood a large something which completely filled it up; and on one side and on the other, Mrs. Marble and Mrs. Cord were taking off the wrappings in which it was enfolded.

"Well, I declare!" said the former, when they had done. "Aint that elegant!"

"Just like him," said Mrs. Cord. "I guessed this was coming, or something like it."

"What is it?" asked Rotha.

"How much does a thing like that cost, now?" Mrs. Marble went on. "Oh see the dust on it! There's a half bushel or less. Here--wait till I get my brush.--How is it ever to go up stairs? that's what I'm lookin' at."

Help had to be called in; and meantime Rotha rushed up stairs and informed her mother that a chair was come for her that was like nothing she had ever seen in her life; "soft all over," as Rotha expressed it; "back and sides and all soft as a pillow, and yet harder than a pillow; like as if it were on springs everywhere," which was no doubt the truth of the case. "It's like getting into a nest, mother; I sat down in it; there's no hard place anywhere; there's no wood to it, that you can see."

When a little later the chair made its appearance, and Mrs. Carpenter sank down into its springy depths, it is a pity that Mr. Digby could not have heard the low long-drawn 'Oh!--' of satisfaction and relief and wonder together, which came from her lips. Rotha stood and looked at her. Mrs. Carpenter was resting, in a very abandonment of rest; but in the abandonment of the moment shewing, as she did not use to shew it, the great enervation and prostration of her system. Her head, leaning back on the soft support it found, her hands laid exhaustedly on one side and on the other, the motionless pose of her whole person, struck Rotha with some strange new consciousness.

"Is it good?" she asked shortly.

"Very!" The word was almost a sigh.

"What makes you so weak to-day?"

"I am not weaker than usual."

"You don't always look like that."

"She's never had anything like that to rest in before," Mrs. Cord suggested. "A bed aint like one o' them chairs, for supportin' one everywhere alike. You let her rest, Rotha. Will you have an oyster, dear?"

Rotha sat down at the corner of the fireplace and stared at her mother; taking the oyster, and yet not relinquishing that air of helpless lassitude. She was not sewing either; and had not been sewing, Rotha remembered, except by snatches, for several days past. Rotha sat and gazed at her, an anxious shadow falling upon her features.

"You needn't look like that at her," said the good woman who was preparing Mrs. Carpenter's glass of wine; "she'll be rested now in a little, and feel nicely. She's been a wantin' this, or something o' this sort; but there aint nothing better than one o' them spring chairs, for resting your back and your head and every inch of you at once. Now she's got her oyster and somethin' else, and she'll pick up, you'll see."

"How good it is you came to live here," said the sick woman. "I do not know what we should do without you. You seem to understand just how everything ought to be done."

"Mother," said Rotha, "do you think I couldn't take care of you just as well? Didn't I, before Mrs. Cord came?"

"You haven't had quite so much experience, you see," put in the latter.

"Didn't I, mother?" the girl said passionately.

Mrs. Carpenter answered only by opening her arms; and Rotha coming into them, sat down lightly upon her mother's lap and hid her head on her bosom. A shadow of, she knew not what, had fallen across her, and she was very still. Mrs. Carpenter folded her arms close about her child; and so they sat for a good while. Mother and daughter, each had her own thoughts; but those of the one were dim and confused as ever thoughts could be. The other's were sharp and clear. Rotha had an uneasy sense that her mother's strength was not gaining but losing; an uneasy impatience of her lassitude and powerlessness, which yet she could not at all read. Mrs. Carpenter read it well.

She knew of a surety that her days were numbered; and not only so, but that the number of them was running out. Many cares she had not, in view of this fact; but one importunate, overwhelming, intolerable, were it not that the mother's faith was fixed where faith is never disappointed. Even so, she was human; and the question, what would be the fate of her little daughter when she herself was gone, pressed hard and pressed constantly, and found no solution. So the two were sitting, in each other's arms, mute and thoughtful, when Mr. Digby came in.

Rotha did not stir, and he came up to them, bent down by the side of the chair and took Mrs. Carpenter's hand. If he put the usual question, Mrs. Carpenter did not answer it; her eyes met his silently. There was a power of grateful love and also of grave foreboding in her quiet face; one of those looks which from an habitually self-contained spirit come with so much power on any one capable of understanding them. The young man's eyes fell from her to Rotha; the two faces were very near each other; and for the first time Rotha's defiance gave place to a little bit of liking. She had not seen her mother's look; but she had watched Mr. Digby's eyes as they answered it, in their ear nest, intent expression, and then as the eyes came to her she felt the warm ray of kindness and sympathy which beamed from them. A moment it was, but Rotha was Mr. Digby's opponent no more from that time.

"You seem to be having a pleasant rest," he remarked in his usual calm way. "I hope you have got all your work done for me?"

"I never do rest till my work is done," said the girl.

"That is a very good plan. Will you prove the fact on the present occasion?"

Rotha unwillingly left her place.

"Mr. Digby, what sort of a chair is this?"

"A spring chair."

"It is a very good thing."

"I am glad it meets your approbation."

"It meets mother's too. Do you see how she rests in it?"

"Does she rest?" asked the young man, rather of Mrs. Carpenter than of her daughter.

"All the body can," she answered with a faint smile.

"Underneath are the everlasting arms"-- he said.

But that word caused a sudden gush of tears on the sick woman's part; she hid her face; and Mr. Digby called off Rotha at once to her recitations. He kept her very busy at them for some time; Latin and arithmetic and grammar came under review; and then he proceeded to put a pen in her hand and give her a dictation lesson; criticised her handwriting, set her a copy, and fully engrossed Rotha's eyes and mind.

CHAPTER VI.

A LEGACY.

"Mother," said Rotha, when their visiter was again gone and her copy was done and she had returned to her mother's side, "I never knew before to-day that Mr. Digby has handsome eyes."

"How did you find it out to-day?"

"I had a good look at them, and they looked at me so."

"How?"

"I don't know--as if they meant a good deal, and good. Don't you think he has handsome eyes, mother?"

"I always knew that. He is a very fine-looking man altogether."

"Is he? I suppose he is. Only he likes to have his own way."

"I wonder if somebody else doesn't, that I know?"

"That's the very thing, mother. If I didn't, I suppose I shouldn't care. But when Mr. Digby says anything, he always looks as if he expected it to be just so, and everybody to mind him."

Mrs. Carpenter could not help laughing, albeit she was by no means in a laughing mood. Her laugh was followed by a sigh.

"What makes you draw a long breath, mother?"

"I wish you could govern that temper of yours, my child."

"Why, mother? Haven't I as good a right to my own way as Mr. Digby, or anybody?"

"Few people can have their own way in the world; and a woman least of all."

"Why?"

"She generally has to mind the will of somebody else."

"But that isn't fair."

"It is the way things are."

"Mother, it may be the way with some people; but I have got nobody to mind?"

"Your mother?--"

"O yes; but that isn't it. You are a woman. There is no man I must mind."

"If you ever grow up and marry somebody, there will be."

"I would *never* marry anybody I had to mind!" said the girl energetically.

"You are the very person that would do it," said the mother; putting her hand fondly upon Rotha's cheek. "My little

daughter!--If only I knew that you were willing to obey the Lord Jesus Christ, I could be easy about you."

"And aren't, you easy about me?"

"No," said the mother sadly.

"Would you be easy if I was a Christian?"

Mrs. Carpenter nodded. There was a pause.

"I would like to be a Christian, mother, if it would make you feel easy; but--somehow--I don't want to."

"I know that."

"How do you know that?"

"Because you hold off. If you were once willing, the thing would be done."

There was silence again; till Rotha suddenly broke it by asking,

"Mother, can I help my will?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why! If I don't want to be a Christian, can I make myself want to?"

"That seems to me a foolish question," said her mother. "Suppose you do not want to do something I tell you to do; need that hinder your obeying?"

"But this is different."

"I do not see how it is different."

"What is being a Christian, then?"

"You know, Rotha."

"But tell me, mother. I don't know if I know."

"You ought to know. A Christian is one who loves and serves the Lord Jesus."

"And then he can't do what he has a mind to," said Rotha.

"Yes, he can; unless it is something wrong."

"Well, he can't do *what he has a mind to*; he must always be asking."

"That is not hard, if one loves the Lord."

"But I don't love him, mother."

"No," said Mrs. Carpenter sadly.

"Can I make myself love him?"

"No; but that is foolish talk."

"I don't see why it is foolish, I am sure. I wish I did love him, if it would make you feel better."

"I should not have a care left!" said Mrs. Carpenter, with a sort of breath of longing.

"Why not, mother?"

"Get the Bible and read the 121st psalm,--slowly."

Rotha obeyed.

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth"--

"There! if you were one of the Lord's dear children, you would say that; that would be true of you. Now go on, and see what the Lord says to it; see what would follow."

Rotha went on.

"He will not suffer thy foot to be moved; he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.'--*Israel*, mother."

"The true Israel are the Lord's true children, of any nation."

"Are they? Well--'The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand; the sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil; he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore. Praise ye the Lord."

"Would anybody be well kept that was kept so?" Mrs. Carpenter broke forth, with the tears running down her face. "O my little Rotha! my little daughter! if I knew you in that care, how blessed I should be!"

The tears streamed, and Mrs. Carpenter in vain tried to wipe them dry.

Rotha looked on, troubled, and a little conscience-stricken.

"Mother," she began, "don't he take care of anybody except Christians?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Carpenter; "he takes care of the children of Christians; and so I have faith that he will take care of you; but it is not just so. If you will not come to him now, he may take painful ways to bring you; if you will not trust him now, he may cut away everything else you trust to, till you flee to him for help. But I wish you would take the easier way."

"But can I help my will?" said Rotha again, holding fast to that tough argument. "What can I do?"

"I cannot tell. You had better ask Mr. Digby. I am not able for any more questions just now."

"Mother. I'll bring you your milk," said Rotha, rather glad of a diversion. "Mother, do you think Mr. Digby can answer all sorts of questions?"

"Better than I can."

She brought her mother the glass of milk and the biscuit and sat watching her while she took them. She noticed the thin hands, the exhausted look, the weary attitude, the pale face. What state of things was this? Her mother eating biscuit and oysters got with another person's money; doing no work, or next to none; living in lodgings, but apparently without the prospect of earning the means to pay her rent; too feeble to do much but rest in that spring chair.

"Mother," Rotha began, with a lurking, unrecognized feeling of anxiety--
"I wish you would make haste and get well!"

Mrs. Carpenter was eating biscuit, and made no reply.

"Don't you think you *are* a little better?"

"Not exactly to-day."

"What *would* do you good?"

"Nothing that you could give me, darling. I am very comfortable. I wonder to see myself so supplied with everything I can possibly want. Look at this chair! It is almost better than all the rest."

"That and the fire."

"Yes; the blessed fire! It is so good!"

"But I wish you'd get well, mother!" Rotha said with a half sigh.

Mrs. Carpenter made no answer.

"I don't see how we are going to do, if you don't get well soon," Rotha went on with a kind of impatient uneasiness.
"What shall we do for money, mother? there's the rent and everything."

"You forget what you have just been reading, my child. Do you think the words mean nothing?--'The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.'"

"But that don't pay rent," said Rotha.

"You think the Lord can do great things, and cannot do little things. I can trust him for all."

"Then why cannot you trust him for me?"

"I do."

"Then why are you troubled?"

"Because here your self-will comes in; and you may have to go through hard times before it is broken."

"Broken? My self-will broken?"

"Yes."

"I do not want to be a creature without a will. I do not like such creatures."

"You must talk to Mr. Digby, Rotha. I am too tired."

"I won't tire you any more, mother dear! But I don't see why I should talk to Mr. Digby."

And for a few moments Rotha was silent. Then she broke out again.

"Mother, don't you think if you could get back to Medwayville you would be well again?"

"I shall never go back to Medwayville," the sick woman said faintly.

"But if you could get into the country somewhere? out of this horrid dust and these mean little streets. O mother, think of the great fields of grass, and the trees, and the flowers!"

"Darling, I am very well here. Suppose you take the poker and punch that lump of coal, so that it may blaze up a little."

Rotha punched the lump of coal, and sat watching the brilliant jets of flame that leapt from it, sending a gentle illumination all through the room; revolving in her mind whether it might be possible by and by to get her mother among the sights and sounds of the country again.

As the spring advanced however, though the desirableness of such a move might be more apparent, the difficulty of it as evidently increased. The close, stifling air of the city, when the warm days came, was hard to bear for the sick woman, and hard in two ways for Rotha. But Mrs. Carpenter's strength failed more and more. There was no question now of her sewing; she did not attempt it. She sat all day in her spring easy chair, by the window or before the fire as the day happened to be, now and then turning over the leaves of her Bible which always lay open before her. And now Mr. Digby when he came would often take the book and read to her; and even talks of some length would grow up out of the reading; talks that seemed delightful to both the parties concerned, though Rotha could not understand much of it. Little by little the room had entirely changed its character, and no longer seemed to be a part of Mrs. Marble's domain. A fluffy rug lay under Mrs. Carpenter's feet; a pretty lamp stood on the table; a screen of Japanese manufacture, endlessly interesting to Rotha, stood between the weary eyes and the fire, when there was a fire; and Mrs. Carpenter herself was enveloped in a warm, soft fleecy shawl. As the warm weather came on indeed, this had to give place to something lighter. Then Mr. Digby brought fruit; early fruit, and foreign fruit; then a little India tea caddy of very nice tea stood on the table; tea such as in all her life Mrs. Carpenter had never drunk till now. She had long ceased to make any objection to whatever Mr. Digby pleased to do; taking it all as simply and as graciously as a child. Much more than her own child. However, Rotha was mollified towards their benefactor from that day above mentioned; and if she looked on wonderingly, and even a little jealously, at his unresisted assuming of the direction of their affairs,

she no more openly rebelled.

Mr. Digby, it may be remarked, kept her so persistently busy, that she had small time to distract herself with any sort of speculations. Lessons were lively. History was added to Latin and arithmetic; Rotha had a good deal to read, and troublesome sums to manage; and finally every remnant of spare leisure was filled up by a demand for writing. Mr. Digby did not frighten her by talking of compositions, but he desired her to prepare now an abstract of the history of the crusades, now of the Stuart dynasty, now of the American revolution; and now again of the rise of the art of printing, or the use and manufacture of gunpowder.

Studying out these subjects, pondering them, writing and writing over her sketches, Rotha was both very busy and very happy; and then the handing over her papers to Mr. Digby, and his reading them, and his strictures upon them, were a matter of intense interest and delight; for though Rotha trembled with excitement she was still more thrilled with pleasure. For she was just at the age when the mind begins to open to a rapturous consciousness of its powers, and at the same time of the wonderful riches of the fields open to the exercise of them. In her happy ignorance, in her blessed inexperience, Rotha did not see what the days were doing with her mother; and if occasionally a flash of unwelcome perception would invade her mind, with the unbounded presumption of her young years she shut her eyes and refused to believe in it. But all the while Mrs. Carpenter was growing feebler and wasting to more of a shadow. Rotha still comforted herself that she had "a nice colour in her cheeks."

It came to be the latter end of June. Windows were open; what would have been delicious summer air came in laden with the mingled odours of street mud and street dust, garbage, the scents of butcher stalls and grocery shops, and far worse, the indefinable atmospheric tokens of poor living and uncleanness. Now and then a whiff of more energy brought a reminder not quite perverted of the places where flowers grow and cows pasture and birds sing. It only served to make the next breath more heavy and disappointing. Mrs. Carpenter sat by the window to get all the freshness she could; albeit with the air came also the sounds from without; the creak or the rattle of wheels on the pavement, the undistinguishable words of a rough voice here and there, the shrill cry of the strawberry seller, the confused, mixed, inarticulate din of the great city all around. A sultry heaviness seemed to rest upon everything, disheartening and depressing to anybody whose physical powers were not strong or his nerves not well strung for the work and struggle of life. There was a pump over the way; and from time to time the creak of its handle was to be heard, and then the helpless drip and splash of the last runnings of the water falling into the gutter, after the applicant had gone away with his or her pail. It mocked Mrs. Carpenter's ear with the recollection of running brooks, and of a certain cool deep well into which the bucket used to go down from the end of a long pole and come up sparkling with drops of the clear water.----

"Well, how do you do?" said the alert voice of Mrs. Marble by her side.

"Sort o' close, aint it?"

"Rather."

"The city aint a place for Christians to live in, when it gets to this time; anyhow, not for Christians that aint good and strong. I'd like to put you out to pasture somewhere."

"She won't go," said Rotha longingly.

"I am, very comfortable here," said the invalid faintly.

"Comfortable! well, I feel as if you ought to be top of a mountain somewhere; out o' this. *I'd* like to; but I guess I'm a fixtur. Mr. Digby I'd find ways and means, I'll engage," she said, eyeing the sick woman with kindly interest and concern, who however only shook her head.

"Could you eat your strawberries?" she asked presently.

"A few of them. They were very nice."

"I never see such berries. They must have been raised somewhere in Gulliver's Brobdignay; and Gulliver don't send 'em round in these parts. I thought, maybe you'd pay 'em the compliment to eat 'em; but when appetite's gone, it's no use to have big strawberries. That's what I thought a breath of hilly air somewhere would do for you."

And Mrs. Marble presently went away, shaking her head, just as Mr. Digby came in; exchanging a look with him as she passed. Mr. Digby came up to the window, and greeted Mrs. Carpenter with the gentle affectionate reverence he always shewed her.

"No stronger to-day?" said he.

"She won't go into the country, Mr. Digby," said Rotha.

"You may go and get a walk at least, my child," Mrs. Carpenter said. "Ask Mrs. Cord to be so kind as to take you. Now while Mr. Digby is here, I shall not be alone. Can you stay half an hour?" she asked him suddenly.

He gave ready assent; and Rotha, weary of her cooped-up life, eagerly sought Mrs. Cord and went off for her walk. Mrs. Carpenter and Mr. Digby were left alone.

"I am *not* stronger," the former began as the house door closed. "I am losing strength, I think, every day. I wanted to speak to you; and it had better be done at once."

She paused, and he waited. The trickle of the water from the pump came to her ear again, stirring memories oddly.

"You asked me the other day, whether I had no friends in the city. I told you I had not. I told you the truth, but not the whole truth. Before Rotha I could not say all I wished. I have a sister living in New York."

"A sister!" Mr. Digby echoed the word in great surprise. "She knows of your being here?"

"She does not."

"Surely she ought to know."

"No, I think not. I told you the truth the other day. I have not a friend, here or elsewhere. Not what you call a friend. Only you."

"But your *sister*? How is that possible?"

Mrs. Carpenter sighed. "I had better tell you all about it, and then you will know how to understand me. Perhaps. I can hardly understand it myself."

There was a pause again. The sick woman was evidently looking back in thought over days and years and the visions of what had been in them. Her gentle, quiet eyes had grown intent, and over her brows there was a fold in her forehead that Mr. Digby had never seen there before. But there was no trembling of the mouth. That was steady and grave and firm.

"There were two of us," she said at last. "My father had but us two, how long it is ago!--"

She was silent again with her thoughts, and Mr. Digby again waited. It was a patient face he was looking at; a gentle face; not a face that spoke of any experience that could be called bitter, yet the patient lines told of something endured or something resigned; it might be both. The last two years of experience, with a sister in the same city, must needs furnish occasion. But Mrs. Carpenter's brow was quiet, except for that one fold in it. Yet she seemed to have forgotten what she had meant to say, and only after a while pulled herself up, as it were, and began again.

"It is not so long as it seems, I suppose, for I am not very old; but it seems long. We two were girls together at home, and my father was living; and I knew nothing about the world."

"Was that here? in New York?" Mr. Digby asked, by way of helping her on.

"O no. I knew nothing about New York. I had never been here. No; our home was not far from Tanfield; up in this state, near the Connecticut border. We lived a little out of the town, and had a nice place. My father was very well off indeed. I wanted for nothing in those days." She sighed.

"The world is a strange place, Mr. Digby! I cannot comprehend, even now, how things should have gone as they did. We lived as happy as anybody; until a gentleman, a young lawyer of New York, began to make visits at our house. He paid particular attention to me at first; but it was of no use; I had learned to know Mr. Carpenter, and nobody else could be anything to me. He was a thriving lawyer; a rising young man, people said; and my father would have had me marry him; but I could not. So then he courted my sister. O the splash of that water from the pump over there! it keeps me thinking to-day of the well behind our house--where it stood on a smooth green plat of grass--and of the trickle of the water from the buckets as they were drawn up. Just because the day is so warm, I think of those buckets of well water. The well was sixty feet deep, and the water was clear and cold and beautiful--I never saw such water anywhere else;

and when the bucket came slowly up, with the moss on its sides glittering with the wet, there was refreshment in the very look of it. Tanfield seems to me a hundred thousand miles away from Jane Street; and those times about a thousand years ago. I wonder, how will all our life seem when we look back upon it from the other side?"

"Very much as objects seen under a microscope, I fancy."

"Do you? Why?"

"In the clear understanding of details, and in the new perception of the relative bearing and importance of parts."

"Yes, I suppose so. Things are very mixed and confused as we see them here. Take what I am telling you, for instance; it is incredible, only that it is true."

"You have not told me much yet," said her friend gently.

"No. The gentleman I spoke of, the lawyer, he married my sister. And then, when I would have married Mr. Carpenter, my sister set herself against it, and she talked over my father into her views, and they both opposed it all they could."

"Did they give any reasons for their opposition?"

"O yes. Mr. Carpenter was only a farmer, they said; not my equal, and not very well off. I am sure in all real qualities he was much my superior; but just in the matter of society it was more or less true. He did not mix in society much, and did not care for it; but he had education and cultivation a great deal more than many that do; he had read and he had thought, and he could talk too, and well, to one or two alone. But they wanted me to marry a rich man. I think half the trouble in the world comes about money."

"The love of money is the root of all evil,' the Bible says."

"I believe it. There was nothing else to be said against Mr. Carpenter, but that he had not money; if he had had it, nobody would have found out that he wanted cultivation, or anything else. But he was a poor man. And when I married him, my father cut me off from all share in the inheritance of his property."

"It all fell to your sister?"

"Yes. All. The place, the old place, and all. She had everything."

"And kept it."

"O yes. Of course. She is a rich woman. Her husband has prospered in his business; and they are *very* well off now. They have only one child, too."

Mrs. Carpenter was silent, and Mr. Digby paused a minute or two before he spoke again.

"Still, my dear friend, do you not think your sister would shew herself your sister, if she knew where you are and how you are? Do you not think it would be right and kind to let her know?"

Mrs. Carpenter shook her head. "No," she said, "it would be no comfort to me; and you are mistaken if you think it would be any satisfaction to her. She is a rich woman. She keeps her carriage, and she has her liveried servants, and she lives in style. She would not like to come here to see me."

"I cannot conceive it," said Mr. Digby. "I think you must unconsciously be doing her wrong."

"I tried her," said Mrs. Carpenter. "I will not try her again. When my husband got into difficulties, and his health was giving way, and he was driven a little too hard, I wrote to my sister in New York to ask her to give us some help; knowing that she was abundantly able to do it, without hurting herself. She sent me for answer--" Mrs. Carpenter stopped; the words seemed to choke her; her lip quivered; and when she began to speak again her voice was a little hoarse.

"She wrote me, that if my husband *died*, she would have no objection to my going back to the old place, and getting along there as well as I could; Rotha and I."

One or two sore, sorrowful tears forced their way out of the speaker's eyes; but she said no more. And Mr. Digby did not know what further to counsel, and was also silent. The silence lasted some little time, while a strawberry seller was

making the street ring with her cries of "Straw...berr_ees_," and the hot air wafted in the odours from near and far, and the water trickled from the pump nose again. At last Mrs. Carpenter began again, with some difficulty and effort; not bodily however, but mental.

"You have been so exceedingly kind to me, to us, Mr. Digby, I--"

"Hush," he said. "Do not speak of that. You have done far more for me than I ever can do for you?"

"I? No. I have done nothing."

"You saved my father's life."

"Your father's life? You are under some mistake. I never knew a Mr. Digby till I knew you I never even heard the name."

"You knew a Mr. Southwode," said he smiling.

"Southwode? Southwode! The English gentleman! But you are not his son?"

"I am his son. I am Digby-Southwode. I took my mother's name for certain business reasons."

"And you are his son! How wonderful! That strange gentleman's son!--But I did not do so much for your father, Mr. Southwode. You have done *everything* for me."

"I wish I could do more," said he shortly.

"I am ashamed to ask,--and yet, I was going to ask you to do something more--a last service--for me. It is too much to ask."

"I am sure it is not that," he said with great gentleness. "Let me know what you wish."

Mrs. Carpenter hesitated. "Rotha does not know,"--she said then. "She has no idea--"

"Of what?"

"She has no idea that I am going to leave her."

"I am afraid that is true."

"And it will be soon Mr. Digby."

"Perhaps not; but what is it you wish of me?"

"Tell her--" whispered Mrs. Carpenter.

The young man might feel startled, or possibly an inevitable strong objection to the service demanded of him. He made no answer; and Mrs. Carpenter soon went on.

"It is wrong to ask it, and yet whom shall I ask? I would not have her learn it from any of the people in the house; though they are kind, they are not discreet; and Rotha would in any case come straight to me; and I--cannot bear it. She is a passionate child; violent in her feelings and in the expression of them. I have been thinking about it day and night lately, and I *cannot* get my courage up to face the first storm of her distress. My poor child! she is not very fitted to go through the world alone."

"What are your plans for her?"

"I am unable to form any."

"But you must tell me what steps you wish me to take in her behalf--if there is no one whom you could better trust."

"There is no one whom I can trust at all. Except only my Father in heaven. I trust him, or I should die before my time. I thought my heart *would* break, a while ago; now I have got over that. Do you know He has said, 'Leave thy fatherless children to me'?"

Yet now the mother's tears were falling like rain.

"I will do the very best I can," said the young man at her side; "but I wish you would give me some hints, or directions, at least."

"How can I? There lie but two things before me;--that Mrs. Cord should bring her up and make a sempstress of her; or that Mrs. Marble should teach her to be a mantua-maker; and I am so foolish, I cannot bear the thought of either thing; even if they would do it, which I do not know."

"Make your mind easy. She shall be neither the one thing nor the other. Rotha has far too good abilities for that. I will not give her to Mrs. Cord's or Mrs. Marble's oversight. But what *would* you wish?"

"I do not know. I must leave you to judge. You can judge much better than I. I have no knowledge of the world, or of what is possible. Mrs. Marble tells me there are free schools here--"

"Of course she shall go to school. I will see that she does. And I will see that she is under some woman's care who can take proper care of her. Do not let yourself be troubled on that score. I promise you, you need not. I will take as good care of her as if she were a little sister of my own."

There was silence at first, the silence of a heart too full to find words. Mrs. Carpenter sat with her head a little bowed.

"You will lose nothing by it," she said huskily after a few minutes.
"There is a promise somewhere--"

But with that she broke down and cried.

"I don't know what you will do with her!" she said; "nor what anybody will do with her, except her mother. She is a wayward child; passionate; strong, and also weak, on the side of her affections. She has never learned yet to submit her will, though for love she is capable of great devotion. She has shewed it to me this past winter."

"Is there any other sort of devotion that is worth much?" asked the young man.

"Duty?--"

"Surely the devotion of love is better."

"Yes--. But duty ought to be recognized for what it is."

"Nay, I think it ought to be recognized for a pleasure. Here she comes.--
Well, Rotha, was the walk pleasant?"

"No."

"Indeed? Why not?"

"How could it be, Mr. Digby? Not a bit of good air, nor anything pleasant to see; just all hot and dirty."

"I thought you said there were some flowers in front of some of the shops?" her mother said.

"Yes, mother; but they looked melancholy."

"Did they?" said Mr. Digby smiling. "Suppose you go with me to-morrow, and I will take you to the Park."

"O! will you?" said Rotha with suddenly opening eyes. "Can you?"

"If Mrs. Carpenter permits."

CHAPTER VII.

MENTAL PHILOSOPHY.

The next day being again warm, Mr. Digby did not come for Rotha till the afternoon was far advanced. They took then one of the street cars, which would bring them to the Park entrance. The way was long and the drive slow. It was also silent, of necessity; and both parties had leisure for thoughts, as well as material enough.

Rotha was at first divided between the pleasure of seeing things, and a somewhat uneasy reflection upon her own appearance. She was not in general a self-conscious child; very much the reverse; but to-day she was with Mr. Digby, and she had an exalted idea of the requirements of everything even remotely connected with him. She was going in his company; under his charge; how did she look? She was not satisfied on that point. Mr. Digby himself was always so nice and perfect in his dress, she said to herself; she ought to be very nice to go with him. Truly she had put on the best she had; a white cambrick frock; it was clean and white; but Rotha had none but her everyday brown straw hat, and she knew *that* was not "smart"; and her dress, she pondered it as she went along, she was sure it was very old-fashioned indeed. Certainly it was not made like the dresses of other girls of her own age, whom she saw in the car or on the sidewalk. Theirs were ruffled; hers was plain; theirs generally stood out in an imposing manner, while her own clung in slim folds around her slim little person. She concluded that she could not be in any degree what Mrs. Marble called "stylish." The exact meaning of that word indeed Rotha could not define; undefinedly she felt it to be something vastly desirable. She decided in her own mind that Mr. Digby was *stylish*; which it is true proved that the young girl had a nice feeling for things; since the fact, which was undoubted, was entirely unaccompanied by anything in matter or manner of wearing which could take the vulgar eye. Would he dislike going in public, she wondered, with a little figure like herself? She hoped not, she thought not; but thought it with a curious independence, which I am afraid was really born of pride though it took the semblance of good sense.

Gradually the interest of other figures made Rotha forget her own. They came out from the poor part of the city where she dwelt; streets grew wide and shops lofty and imposing; equipages drove along, outstripping the slow-going car; and in them, what ladies, and what gentlemen, and what little girls now and then! This was the wonderful New York, at which she had now and then had a peep; this was something five hundred miles removed from Jane Street. What sort of human beings were these? and what sort of life did they live? and did money make all the difference, or was there some more intrinsic and essential distinction between them and their fellows in Abingdon Square? At any rate, how very, very much better off they were!

Mr. Digby's musings had much less to do with the surface of things. I doubt indeed if he saw ought that was before his eyes, all the way to the Park. Not even Rotha herself; and yet she was the main subject of his cogitations. He was feeling that his kindness to Mrs. Carpenter had brought him into difficulties. The very occasion for this journey to the Park was bad enough; so disagreeable in fact that he did not like to look at it, and hardly had looked at it until now; he was going as a man goes into battle; and a rain of bullets, he thought, would have been easier to face. How he should accomplish his task he had as yet no idea. But supposing it done; and supposing all the trouble past for which he had to prepare Rotha; what then? What was he to do with the charge he had assumed? He, a young man without a family, with no proper home in the country of his abode, what was he to do with the care of a girl like Rotha? how should he manage it? If she had been a little child it would have been a more simple affair; but fourteen years old is not at all far removed from seventeen, and eighteen. Where should *her* home be? and her future sphere of life? and where was the promised womanly protection under which he was to place her? He gave a glance at the girl. She was good material to work upon, that was one alleviation of his task; he had had some practical proof of it, and now, more carefully than ever before, he looked for the outward signs and tokens in feature and expression. And as Rotha had once declared that Mr. Digby's eyes were handsome, he now privately returned the compliment to hers. Yes, this child, who had an awkward appearance as to her figure--he did not know then that the effect was due to her dress--she had undoubtedly fine eyes. Poor complexion, he said to himself after a second glance, but good eyes. And not merely in shape and hue; they were full of speculation, full of thought, full of the possibilities of passion and feeling. There was character in them; and so there was in the well formed, well closed mouth. *There* was refinement too; the lines were not those of an uncultured, low-conditioned nature; they were fine and beautiful. It had never occurred to Mr. Digby before to think how Rotha promised to be in the matter of looks; although he had many a time caught the gleam of intelligent fire in the course of her recitations and his lesson giving, and once or twice had seen that passion of one kind or another was at work. He read now very plainly that his charge, to go back to the old philosophy of human nature which reckoned man to be composed of the four elements, had a great deal of the fire and the air in her composition, with little of the heaviness of the earth, and as little as possible of the lymphatic quality. It made his task the more interesting, and in so far lightened it; but it made it at the same time vastly more difficult. Here was a sensitive, quick, passionate, independent nature to deal with; how ever should he deal with it? And how ever was he to execute his purpose to-day? the purpose with which he had brought her, poor child, to this walk in the Park. Was it not rather cruel, to begin a time of great pain with a taste of exquisite pleasure? Mr. Digby hardly knew what he would do, when he left the car with his charge and entered the Park.

They went in at the great Fifth Avenue entrance; and for a few minutes he was engaged in piloting himself and her

through the crowd of coming and going carriages; but when they reached quiet going and a secure footpath, he looked at her. It smote him. Such an expression of awakened delight was in her face; such keen curiosity, such simplicity and fulness of enjoyment. Rotha was at a self-conscious age, but she had forgotten herself; two years old is not more free from self-recollection. They walked along slowly, the girl reviewing everything in the lively show before her; lips parting sometimes for a smile, but with no leisure for a word. Her companion watched her. They walked on and on; turned now hither and now thither; Rotha remained in a maze, only mechanically following where she was led.

It was a fine afternoon, and all the world was out. Carriages, riders, foot travellers; everywhere crowds of people. Where was Mr. Digby going to make the communication he had come here to make? He doubted about it now, but if he spoke, where should it be? Not in this crowd, where any minute some acquaintance might see him and speak to him. With some trouble he sought out a resting place for Rotha from whence she could have a good view of one angle of a much travelled drive, and at the same time both of them were in a sort hid away from observation. Here they sat down; but if Rotha's feet might rest, her companion's mind was further and further from any such point of comfort. They had exchanged hardly any words since they set out; and now the difficulty of beginning what he had to say seemed greater than ever. There was a long silence. Rotha broke it; she did not know that it had been long.

"Mr. Digby--there are a great many things I do not understand."

"My case too, Rotha."

"Yes, but you understand a great many things that I don't."

"What is troubling you now, with a sense of ignorance?"

"I see in a great many carriages two gentlemen dressed just alike, sitting together; they are on the back seat always, and they always have their arms folded, just alike; what are they?"

"Not gentlemen, Rotha; they are footmen, or grooms."

"What's the difference?"

"Between footmen and grooms?"

"No, no; between a gentleman and a man that isn't a gentleman?"

"You asked me that once before, didn't you?"

"Yes; but I don't make it out."

"Why do you try?"

"Why Mr. Digby, I like to understand things."

"Quite right, too, Rotha. Well--the difference is more in the feelings and manners than in anything else."

"Not in the dress?"

"Certainly not. Though it is not like a gentleman to be improperly dressed."

"What is 'improperly dressed'?"

"Not nice and neat."

"Nice and neat--*clean* and neat, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Then a gentleman may have poor clothes on?"

"Of course."

"Can anybody be *poor* and be a gentleman?"

"Not *anybody*, but a gentleman may be poor, certainly, without ceasing to be a gentleman."

"But if he was poor to begin with--could he be a gentleman then?"

"Yes, Ratha," said her friend smiling at her; "money has nothing to do with the matter. Except only, that without money it is difficult for a boy to be trained in the habits and education of a gentleman."

"Education?" said Ratha.

"Yes."

"You said, 'feeling and manners.'"

"Well, yes. But you can see for yourself, that without education it would be hardly possible that manners should be exactly what they ought to be. A gentleman should give to everybody just that sort of attention and respect which is due; just the right words and the right tone and the fitting manner; how can he, if he does not understand his own position in the world and that of other people? and why the one and the other are what they are."

"Then I don't see how poor people can be ladies and gentlemen," said Ratha discontentedly.

"Being poor has nothing to do with it, except so far."

"But that's far enough, Mr. Digby."

He heard the disappointed ambition in the tone of the girl's words.

"Ratha," he said kindly, "whoever will follow the Bible rules of good manners, will be sure to be right, as far as that goes."

"Can one follow them without being a Christian?"

"Well no, hardly. You see, the very root of them is love to one's neighbour; and one cannot have that, truly and universally, without loving Christ first."

"Then are all gentlemen Christians?"

The young man laughed a little at her pertinacity.

"What are you so much concerned about it, Ratha?"

"I was just thinking."--

And apparently she had a good deal of thinking to do; for she was quite silent for some time. And Mr. Digby on his part went back to his problem, how was he to tell Ratha what he had promised to tell her? From their somewhat elevated and withdrawn position, the moving scene before them was most bright and gay. An endless procession of equipages--beautiful carriages, stately horses, pompous attendants, luxurious pleasure-takers; one after another, and twos and threes following each other, a continuous stream; carriages of all sorts, landaus, Victorias, clarences, phaetons, barouches, close coaches, dog carts, carryalls, gigs, buggies. Now and then a country affair, with occupants to match; now a plain wagon with a family of children having a good time; now an old gentleman and his wife taking a sober airing; then a couple of ladies half lost in the depths of their cushions, and not having at all a good time, to judge by their looks; and then a young man with nobody but himself and a pair of fast trotting horses, which had, and needed, all his attention; and then a whirl of the general thing, fine carriages, fine ladies, fine gentlemen, fine servants and fine horses; in all varieties of combination. It was very pretty; it was very gay; the young foliage of early summer was not yet discouraged and dulled by the heat and the dust; the air was almost country sweet, and flowers were brilliant in one of the plantations within sight. How the world went by!--

Mr. Digby had half forgotten it and everything else, in his musings, when he was aroused, and well nigh startled, by a question from Ratha.

"Mr. Digby--can I help my will?"

He looked down at her. "What do you mean, Ratha?"

"I mean, can I help my will? I asked mother one day, and she said I had better ask you."

Rotha's eyes came up to his face with their query; and whatever it might import, he saw that she was in earnest. Grave and intent the girl's fine dark eyes were, and came up to his eyes with a kind of power of search.

"I do not think I understand you."

"Yes, you do. If I do not like something--do not want to be something-- can I help my will?"

"What do you not want to be?" said Mr. Digby, waiving this severe question in mental philosophy.

"Must I tell you?"

"Not if you don't like; but I think it might help me to get at your difficulty, and so to get at the answer you want."

"Mr. Digby, can a person want to do something, and yet not be willing?"

"Yes," said he, in growing surprise.

"Then, can he *help* not being willing?"

"What is the case in hand, Rotha? I am wholly in the dark. I do not know what you would be at."

To come nearer to the point was not Rotha's wish and had not been her purpose; she hesitated. However, the subject was one which exercised her, and the opportunity of discussing her difficulty with Mr. Digby was very tempting. She hesitated, but she could not let the chance go.

"Mother wishes I would be a Christian," she said low and slowly. "And I wish I could, to please her; but I do not want to. Can I help my will? and I am not willing."

There was a mixture of defiance and desire in this speech which instantly roused the somewhat careless attention of the young man beside her. Anything that touched the decision of any mortal in the great question of everlasting life, awoke his sympathies always to fullest exercise. It was not his way, however, to shew what he felt; and he answered her with the same deliberate calm as hitherto. Nobody would have guessed the quickened pulses with which he spoke.

"Why do you not want to be a Christian, Rotha?"

"I do not know," she answered slowly. "I suppose, I want to be free."

"Go on a little bit, and tell me what you mean by being 'free.'"

"Why--I mean, I suppose,--I *know* I mean, that I want to do what I like."

"You are taking the wrong way for that."

"Why, I could not do what I liked if I was a Christian, Mr. Digby?"

"A Christian, on the contrary, is the only person in this world, so far as I know, who can do what he likes."

"Why, do you?" said Rotha, looking at him.

"Yes," said he smiling. "Always."

"But I thought--"

"You thought a Christian was a sort of a slave."

"Yes. Or a servant. A servant he is; and a servant is not free. He has laws to mind."

"And you think, by refusing the service you get rid of the laws? That's a mistake. The laws are over you and binding on you, just the same, whether you accept them or not; and you have got to meet the consequences of not obeying them. Did you never think of that?"

"But it is different if I *promised* to obey them," said Rotha.

"How different?"

"If I promised, I must do it."

"If you do not promise you must take the consequences of not doing it.
You cannot get from under the law."

"But how can you do whatever you like, Mr. Digby?"

"There comes in your other mistake," said he. "I can, because I am free.
It is you who are the slave."

"I? How, Mr. Digby?"

"You said just now, you wished you could be a Christian, but you could not. Are you free to do what you wish?"

"But can I help my will?"

The gentleman took out of his pocket a slim little New Testament which always went about with him, and put it into Rotha's hands open at a certain place, bidding her read.

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Rotha stopped and looked up at her companion.

"Go on," he bade her; and she read further.

"They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?

"Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house forever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

Rotha looked at the words, after she had done reading.

"Mr. Digby," she said then again, "can I help my will?"

"No," said he, "for you are a poor bond-slave. But see what is written there. What you cannot do, Christ can."

"Why don't he do it, then?" she said defiantly.

"You have not asked him, or wished him to do it."

"But why shouldn't he do it without my asking, or wishing, if he can?"

"It is not his way. He says, 'Ask, and ye shall receive'; but he promises nothing to those who do not apply to him. And the application must be in good earnest too, Rotha; not the form of the thing, but the truth. 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.'

"Then, if I asked him, could he change my will?"

"He says, he can make you free. It was one thing he came to do; to deliver people from the bondage of sin and the power of Satan."

"The power of Satan!" said Rotha. "I am not under *his* power!"

"Certainly you are. There are only two parties in the world; two kingdoms; those who do not belong to the one, belong to the other."

"But Mr. Digby," said Rotha, now much exercised, "I hate the devil as much as you do."

"Don't help, Rotha. 'From the power of Satan to God,' is the turn people take when they become Christians."

"What makes you think I am under his power?"

"Because I see you are not under the rule of Christ. And because I see you are doing precisely what Satan would have you do."

"What?" said Rotha.

"Refusing the Lord Jesus Christ, or putting off accepting him"

Rotha was silent. Her breast was heaving, her breath coming thick and short. Mr. Digby's conclusions were very disagreeable to her; but what could she say?

"I can't help my will," she said doggedly.

"You see you are not honest with yourself. You have just learned that there is a remedy for that difficulty."

"But Mr. Digby," said Rotha, "how is it that you can do what you like?"

He smiled down at her, a pleasant, frank smile, which witnessed to the truth of his words and wrought more with Rotha than the words themselves; while the eyes that she admired rested on her with grave penetration.

"There is an old promise the Lord gave his people a great while ago; that in the new covenant which he would make with them in Christ, he would write all his laws in their hearts. He has done that for me."

"You mean--" said Rotha.

"Yes, go on, and say what you think I mean."

"You mean,—that what you like to do, is just what God likes you to do."

"And never anything else, Rotha," he said gravely.

"Well, Mr. Digby," said Rotha slowly, "after all, you have given up yourself."

"And very glad to be rid of that personage."

"But I don't want to give up myself."

"I see."

And there followed a long silence. Mr. Digby did not wish to add anything to his words, and Rotha could not to hers; and they both sat in meditation, until the girl's lighter humour got away from the troublesome subject altogether. Watching her, Mr. Digby saw the pleased play of feature which testified to her being again absorbed in the scene before her; her eye was alive, her lip moved with a coming and going smile.

"It amuses you, does it not?" he said.

"O yes!" Rotha exclaimed with a long breath. "I wish mother could see it."

"She can," said Mr. Digby. "We will have a carriage and take her out. I don't know why I never thought, of it before."

"A carriage? For mother? And bring her here?" said Rotha breathless.

"Yes, to-morrow, if the day is good. It will refresh her. And meanwhile, Rotha, I am afraid we must leave this scene of enchantment."

Rotha had changed colour with excitement and delight; now she rose up with another deep sigh.

"There are more people than ever," she remarked; "more carriages. Mr. Digby, I should think they would be perfectly happy?"

"What makes you think they are not?" said he amused.

"They don't look so."

"They are accustomed to it. They come every day or two."

"Does that make it less pleasant?"

"It takes off the novelty, you know. Most pleasures are less pleasant when the novelty is gone."

"Why?"

Mr. Digby smiled again. "You never found it so?" he said.

"No. I remember when we were at Medwayville, everything I liked to do, I liked it more the more I did it."

"You are of a happy temperament. What did you use to like to do there?"

"O a load of things!" said Rotha sighing. "I liked our old dog, and my kittens; and riding about; and I liked very much going to the hay field and getting into the cart with father and riding home. And then--"

But Rotha's words stopped suddenly, and her companion looking down at her saw that her eyes were brimming full of tears, and her face flushed with the emotion which almost mastered her. A little kind pressure of the hand he held was all the answer he made; and then they made their way through the crowd and got into the cars to go home.

He had not discharged his commission; how could he? Things had taken a turn which made it almost impossible. It must be done another day. Poor child! The young man's mind was filled with sympathy and compassion, as he looked at Rotha sitting beside him and noted how her aspect had changed and brightened; just with this afternoon's pleasure and the new thoughts and mental stir and hope to which it had given rise. Poor child! what lay before her, that she dreamed not of, yet must face and meet inevitably. That in the near future; and beyond--what? No friend but himself in all the world; and how was he to take care of her? The young man felt a little pity for himself by the way. Truly, a girl of this sort, brimfull of mental capacity and emotional sensitiveness, was a troublesome legacy for a young man situated as he was. However, his own trouble got not much regard on the present occasion; for his heart was burdened with the sorrow and the tribulation coming upon these two, the mother and daughter. And these were but two, in a world full of the like and of far worse. He remembered how once, in the sight of the tears and sorrowing hearts around him and in view of the great flood of human miseries of which they were but instances and reminders, "Jesus wept;" and the heart of his servant melted in like compassion. But he shewed none of it, when he came with Rotha into her mother's presence again; he was calm and composed as always.

"Mrs. Carpenter," he said, as he found himself for a moment alone with her, Rotha having run off to change her dress,--"you did not tell me your sister's name. I think I ought to know it."

"Her name?" said Mrs. Carpenter starting and hesitating. What did he want to know her sister's name for? But Mr. Digby did not look as if he cared about knowing it; he had asked the question indifferently, and his face of careless calm reassured her. She answered him at last.

"Her name is Busby."

It was characteristic of Mr. Digby that his features revealed no quickening of interest at this; for he was acquainted with a Mrs. Busby, who was also the wife of a lawyer in the city. But he shewed neither surprise nor curiosity; he merely said in the same unconcerned manner and tone,

"There may be more Mrs. Busby's than one. What is her husband's name?"

"I forget--It begins with 'A.' I know; but I can't think of it. I can think of nothing but the name of that old New York baker they used to speak of--Arcularius."

"Will Archibald do?"

"That is it!"

Mr. Digby could hardly believe his ears. Mrs. Archibald Busby was very well known to him, and he was a welcome and tolerably frequent visiter at her house. Was it possible? he thought; was it possible? Could that woman be the sister of this? and such a sister? Nothing in her or in her house that he had seen, looked like it. He made neither remark nor suggestion however, but took quiet leave, after his wont, and went away; after arranging that a carriage should come the next day to take Mrs. Carpenter to the Park.

CHAPTER VIII.

STATEN ISLAND.

Mr. Digby had a great many thoughts during the next few days; some of which almost went to make Mrs. Carpenter in the wrong. The Mrs. Busby he knew was so very unexceptionable a lady; how could she be the black sheep of the story he had heard? Mrs. Carpenter might labour under a mistake, might she not? Yet facts are said to be stubborn things, and some facts were hard for the truth of the story. Mr. Digby was puzzled. He would perhaps have gone promptly to Mrs. Busby's home, to make observations with a keenness he had never thought worth while when there; but Mrs. Busby and all her family were out of town, spending the hot months at a watering place, or at several watering places. Meanwhile Mr. Digby had his unfulfilled commission to attend to.

Mrs. Carpenter went driving to the Park now every pleasant day; to the great admiration of Mrs. Marble, the wonderful refreshment of the sick woman herself, and the extravagant delight and pride of Ratha. She said she was sure her mother would get well now. But her mother's eye, as she said it, went to Mr. Digby's, with a warning admonition that he must neither be deceived nor lose time. He understood.

"I am going down to Staten Island to-morrow," he remarked. "Would you like to go with me, Ratha?"

"Staten Island?" she repeated.

"Yes. It is about an hour's sail from New York, or nearly; across the bay. You can become acquainted with the famous bay of New York."

"Is it famous?"

"For its beauty."

"Oh I should like to go very much, Mr. Digby, if it was as ugly as it could be!"

"Then when your mother comes from the Park in the morning, we will go."

Ratha was full of delight. But her mother, she thought, was very sober during that morning's drive; she tried in vain to brighten her up. Again and again Mrs. Carpenter's eyes rested on her with a lingering, tender sorrowfulness, which was not their wont.

"Mother, is anything the matter?" she asked at length.

"I am thinking of you, my child."

"Then don't think of me! What about me?"

"I am grieved that a shadow should ever come over your gay spirits. Yet I am foolish."

"What makes you think of shadows? I am going to be always as gay as I am to-day."

"That is impossible."

"Why?"

"It is not the way of this world."

"Does trouble come to everybody?"

"Yes. At some time."

"Well, mother dear, you can just wait till it comes. There is no shadow over me now, at any rate. If you were only well, I should be happy enough."

"I shall never be well, my child."

"O you say that just because a shadow has come over you. I wish I knew where it comes from; I would scare it away."

Mother, mother, look, look!-- see that little carriage with the little horses, and the children driving! Oh--!"

Rotha's expression of intense admiration is not to be given on paper.

"Shetland ponies, those are," said her mother.

"What are Shetland ponies?"

"Ponies that come from Shetland."

"And do they never grow any bigger?"

"No."

"How jolly!"

"Rotha, that is a boy's word, I think."

"If it is good for a boy, why isn't it good for me?"

"I do not know that it is good for a boy. But a lady is bound to be more particular in what she says and does."

"More than a gentleman?"

"In some ways, yes."

"I don't understand in what ways. Right is right, and wrong is wrong, whether one is a boy or a girl."

Mrs. Carpenter sighed. What would bring just notions, who would teach proper ways, to her inquisitive child when she should be left motherless? Rotha perceived the deep concern which gathered in her mother's eyes again; and anew endeavoured by lively talk to chase it away. In vain. Mrs. Carpenter came home tired and exhausted.

"I think she was worrying about something," Rotha said, when soon after she and her friend were on their way to Whitehall. "She does, now and then."

Mr. Digby made no answer; and Rotha's next keen question was,

"You look as if you knew what she was worrying about, Mr. Digby?"

"I think I do."

"Couldn't I know what it was?"

"Perhaps. But you must wait."

It was easy to wait. Even the omnibus ride to Whitehall was charming to Rotha's inexperienced eyes; and when she was on board the ferry boat and away from the quays and the city, and the lively waters of the bay were rolling up all around her, the girl's enjoyment grew intense. She had never seen such an extent of water before, she had no idea of the real look of the waves; a hundred thousand questions came crowding and surging up in her mind, like the broken billows down below her. In her mind; they got no further; merely to have them rise was a delight; she would find the answer to them some day. For the present it was enough to watch the changing forms and varying colours of the water, and to drink in the fresh breeze which brought life and strength with it from the sea. Yet now and then a question was too urgent and must be satisfied.

"Mr. Digby, nobody could paint water, could they?"

"Yes."

"How could they? It is all changing, every instant; it won't stand still to be drawn."

"Most things can be done, if one is only in earnest enough."

"But how can this?"

"Not without a great deal of study and pains. A man must watch the play of the waves and the shapes they take, and the colours of the different parts in any given sort of weather, until he has got them by heart; and then he can put the lines and the colours on the canvas. If he has the gift to do it, that is."

"What has the weather to do with it? Different colours?"

"Certainly. The lights and shadows vary with every change of the sky; and the colours vary."

"Then a person must be very much in earnest," said Rotha, "ever to get it all."

"There is no doing great things in any line without being very much in earnest. The start isn't the thing; it is the steady pull that tries."

"Can you draw, Mr. Digby?"

"Yes, a little."

Again Rotha was all absorbed in what lay before and around her; getting unconscious education through her eyes, as they received for the first time the images of so many new things. To the people on board she gave scarcely any heed at all.

Arrived at Brighton, Mr. Digby's first care was to give his charge and himself some refreshment. He took Rotha to a hotel and ordered a simple dinner. Then he desired to have a little wagon harnessed up, and putting the delighted girl into it, he drove to the sea shore and let her feast her eyes on the incoming waves and breaking surf. He himself was full of one thought, waiting for the moment when he could say to her what he had to say; but he was forced to wait a good while. He had made a mistake, he found, in choosing this precise direction for their drive. Rotha's overwhelming pleasure and entranced absorption for some time could not be broken in upon. She was too utterly happy to notice how different was her friend's absorption from her own; unless with a vague, passing perception, which she could not dwell upon.

At last her friend asked her if she would like a run upon the sand, the tide being then out. He drove up to a straggling bit of fence, tied his horse, and lifted Rotha out; who immediately ran down to the narrow beach and as near to the water as she dared; there stood still and looked. There was but a gentle surf that day, with the ebb tide; but to Rotha it was a scene of unparalleled might and majesty. She was drinking in pleasure, as one can at fourteen, with all the young susceptibilities fully alive and strong. Mr. Digby could not interrupt her. He threw himself down on a dry piece of sand, and waited; watching her, and watching with a sad sort of pleasure the everlasting rise and breaking of those curling billows. Things spiritual and material get very mixed up in such a mood; and anon the ocean became to Mr. Digby somehow identified with the sea of trouble the tides of which do overflow all this world. The breaking waves were but the constantly occurring and recurring bursts of misfortune and disaster which overtake everybody. Here it is, there it is, it is here again, it is always somewhere; ay, far as the eye can reach. Here is this child, now--

"Mr. Digby, you are tired--you don't like it--you are just waiting for me," Rotha said suddenly, with delicate good feeling, coming to his side.

"I do like it, always. I am not tired, thank you, Rotha."

"But you are not taking pleasure in it now," she said gently.

"No. I was thinking, how full the world is of trouble."

"Why should you think that just now? You had better think, how full it is of pleasure. It's as full--it seems to me as full--as the very sea itself."

"Does your life have so much pleasure?"

"To-day--" said the girl, with a rapt look out to sea.

"And yet Rotha, it is for you I am troubled."

"For me!" she said with a surprised look at him.

"Yes. Suppose you sit down here for a few minutes, and let me talk to you."

"I don't want to talk about trouble just now," she said; sitting down however as he bade her.

"I am very sorry to talk about it now, or at any time; but I must. Can you bear trouble, Rotha?"

There was something tender and grave and sympathizing in his look and tone, which somehow made the girl's heart beat quicker. That there was real gravity of tidings beneath such a manner, she felt intuitively; though she strove not to believe it.

"I don't know--" she said in answer to his question. "I *have* borne it."

"This is more than you have borne yet."

"I had a father, once, Mr. Digby--" she said with a curious self-restraint that did not lack dignity.

How could he answer her? He did not find words. And instead, there came over him such a rush of tenderness in view of what was surely to fall upon the girl, in the present and in the future, that for a moment he was unmanned. To hide the corresponding rush of water to his eyes, Mr. Digby was fain to bow his face in the hand which rested on his knees. Neither the action nor the cause of it escaped Rotha's shrewdness and awakened sense of fear, but it silenced her at the same time; and it was not till a little interval had passed, though before Mr. Digby had lifted up his head, that the silence became intolerable to her. She heard the sea and saw the breakers no more, or only with a feeling of impatience.

"Well," she said at last, in a changed voice, hard, and dry,--"why don't you tell me what it is?" If she was impolite, she did not mean it, and her friend knew she did not mean it.

"I hardly can, Rotha," he answered sorrowfully.

"I know what you mean," she said, "but it isn't true. You think so, but it isn't true."

"What are you speaking of?"

"You know. I know what you mean; you are speaking of--mother!" The word came out with difficulty and only by stern determination. "It is not true, Mr. Digby."

"What is not true, Rotha?"

"You know. It is not true!" she repeated vehemently.

"But Rotha, my child, what if it were true?"

"You know it couldn't be true," she said, fixing on him a pair of eyes almost wild in their intensity. "It couldn't be true. What would become of me?"

"I will take care of you, always."

"You!" she retorted, with a scorn supreme and only matched by the pain with which she spoke. "What are you? It couldn't be, Mr. Digby."

"Listen to me, child. Rotha, I have come here to talk to you about it." He saw how full the girl's eyes were growing, of tears just swelling and ready to burst forth; and he stopped. But she impatiently dashed them right and left.

"I don't want to talk about it. It's no use, here or anywhere else. I would like to go home."

"Not yet. Before you go home I want you to be quite composed, and to have good command of yourself, so that you may not distress your mother. She cannot bear it. Therefore she asked me to tell you, because she dreaded to see your suffering. Can you bear it and hide it, Rotha, bravely, for her sake?"

"*She* asked you to tell me?" cried the girl; and Mr. Digby never forgot the face of wild agony with which she looked at him. He answered quietly, "Yes;" though his heart was bleeding for her.

"She thinks--"

"She knows how it must be. It is nothing new, or strange, or sorrowful, to her,--except only for you. But in her love for you, she greatly dreads to see your sorrow. Do you think, Rotha, for her sake, you can bear up bravely, and be quiet,

and not shew what you feel? For her sake?"

He doubted if the girl rightly heard him. She looked at him, indeed, while he spoke, as if listening; but her face was white, or rather livid, and her eyes seemed to be gazing into despair.

"I do not think it can be, Mr. Digby," she said. "She don't look like it.
And what would become of me?

"I will take faithful care of you, Rotha, as long as you live, and I live."

"You are nothing!" she said contemptuously. But then followed a cry which curdled Mr. Digby's blood. It was not a piercing shriek, yet it was a prolonged cry, pointed and sharpened with pain and heavy with despair. One such wail, and the girl dropped her face in her hands and sat motionless. Her companion would rather have seen sobs and tears; he did not know what to do with her. The soft beat and wash of the waves sounded drearily in the silence. Mr. Digby waited. Nothing but time, he knew, can cover the roughness of life's rough places with its moss and lichen of patience and memory. Comfort was not to be spoken of, not here. He comprehended now why Mrs. Carpenter had shrank from telling the tidings herself. But the day was wearing away; they must go home; the burden, however heavy, must be lifted and carried.----

"Rotha--my child--" he said after a long interval.

No answer.

"Rotha, my child, cannot you look up and speak to me? Rotha--my poor little Rotha--it is very heavy for you! But won't you make it as light as you can for your mother?"

The child writhed away from under the hand he had gently laid on her shoulder; but uttered no sound.

"Rotha--we must go home presently. Do you know, your mother will be very anxious to see you. She is expecting us now, I dare say."

It came then, the burst of tears which he had dreaded and yet half longed for. The girl turned a little more from him and flung herself down on the sand, and there wept as he had never seen anybody weep before. With all the passion of an intense nature, and all the self abandonment of an ungoverned nature, sobbing such sobs as shook her whole frame, and with loud weeping which could not be restrained into silence. Better it should not be, Mr. Digby thought; better she should be allowed to exhaust herself so that very fatigue should induce quiet. But to the sitter-by it was unspeakably painful; a scene never to be recalled without a profound prayer, like Noah's, I fancy, after the deluge, that the like might never come again.

And happily, nature did exhaust herself; and just because the passion of sobs and tears was so violent, it did yield after a time, as strength gave way. But it lasted fearfully long. However, at last Rotha grew quieter, and then still; and not till then Mr. Digby spoke again. He spoke as if all this had been an interlude not noticed by him.

"Rotha, my child, can you gather up your courage and be quiet and be brave now?"

She hesitated, and then in a smothered voice said, "I'm not brave."

"I think you can be."

"I wish--I could die," she said slowly.

"But what we have to do, is to live and act for others. Yes, it would often seem a great deal easier to die; but we have something to do in the world. You have something to do. Your mother's comfort, and even the prolonging of her stay with us, may depend on your quietness and self-command. For love of her, can you be strong and do it?"

"I am not strong--" said Rotha, as she had spoken before.

"Love makes people strong. And Jesus will help the weak, if they trust him, to do anything they have to do."

"You know I am not a Christian," Rotha answered in the same matter-of-fact way.

"Suppose you do not let that be true after to-day."

There was another silence.

"I am ready to go, Mr. Digby," Rotha said.

"And you will be a woman, and wise, and quiet?"

"I don't know!"

Mr. Digby thought it was not best to press matters further. He put Rotha into the wagon again and drove back to the hotel. Quiet she was, at any rate, now; he did not even see any more tears; but alas, of all the things in the world which she had been so glad to look at on the way down, she saw nothing on the way back. Driving or sailing, it was all the same; only when Mr. Digby put her into the omnibus at Whitehall he saw a flash of something like terror which crossed her face and left it blanched. But that was all.

He went into the invalid's room at Mrs. Marble's with trepidation. Rotha however was merely less effusive and more hasty than usual in her greetings to her mother, and after a kiss or two turned away "to get her things off," as she said. And when Mrs. Cord unluckily asked her in passing, if she had had a pleasant day? Rotha choked, but managed to get out that it had been "as good as it could be." What she went through in the little hall room which served for closet and wardrobe, no one knew; but Mr. Digby, who stayed purposely till she came back again, was reassured to see that she was perfectly quiet, and that she set about her wonted duties in a grave, collected way, more grave than usual, but quite as methodical. He went away sighing, at the same time with a relieved heart. One of the hard things he had had to do in his life, was over.

Mr. Digby however, as he walked homeward to his hotel, saw the difficulties yet in store for him. How in the world was he to perform his promise of taking care of this wildfire girl? Her aunt surely, would be the fittest person to be intrusted with her. If he only knew what sort of person Mrs. Busby really was, and how much of Mrs. Carpenter's story might have two sides to it? The lady was not in the city, or he would have been tempted to go and see her at once, for the purpose of studying her and gathering information. Nothing of the kind was possible at present; and he could only hope that Mrs. Carpenter's frail life would be prolonged until her sister's return to New York would lift, or might lift, one difficulty out of his path.

CHAPTER IX.

FORT WASHINGTON.

No such hope was to be realized. With all that care and kindness could do, the sick woman failed more and more. The great heats weakened her. The drives in the Park were refreshing, but alas, fatiguing, and sometimes had to be relinquished; and this happened again and again. Rotha behaved unexceptionably; was devoted to the service of her mother; untiring, and unselfish, and quiet; "another girl," Mrs. Cord said. Poor child! she was another girl in more ways than one; her fiery brightness of spirits was over, her cheeks grew thin, her eyes had dark rings round them, and their brown depths were heavy with a shadow darker yet. Energetic she was, as ever, but in a more staid and womanly way; the gladness of her doings was gone. Still, Mrs. Carpenter never saw her weep. In the evenings, or in the twilight, when there was nothing particular to be done, the child would nestle close to her mother, lay her head in her lap or rest it against her knee, and sit quiet. Still, at least, if not quiet; Mrs. Carpenter did sometimes fancy that she felt the drawing of a convulsive breath; but if she spoke then to Rotha, Rotha would answer with a specially calm and clear voice; and her mother did not get at her sorrow, if it were that which moved her. And Mrs. Carpenter was too weak now to try.

Mr. Digby came as usual, constantly. It was known to none beside himself, that he staid in town through the hot July and August days for this purpose solely. He saw that his sick friend grew weaker every day, yet he did not expect after all that the end would come so soon as it did. He had yet a lingering notion of bringing the sisters together, when Mrs. Busby should return. He was thinking of this one August afternoon as he approached the house. Mrs. Marble met him in the hall.

"Well, Mr. Digby,--it's all up now!"

The gentleman paused on his way to the stairs and looked his inquiry.

"She aint there. Warn't she a good woman, though!" And Mrs. Marble's face was all quivering, and some big tears fell from the full eyes.

"Was?" said Mr. Digby. "You do not mean--"

"She's gone. Yes, she's gone. And I guess she's gone to the good land; and I guess she aint sorry to be free; but--I'm sorry!"

For a few minutes the kind little woman hid her face in her apron, and sadly blotched with tears the apron was when she took it down.

"It's all over," she repeated. "At two o'clock last night, she just slipped off, with no trouble at all. And the house does feel as lonely as if fifty people had gone out of it. I never see the like o' the way I miss her. I'd got to depend on her living up there, and it was good to think of it; there warn't no *noise*, more'n if nobody had been up there; but if I aint good myself and I don't think I be--I do love to have good folks round. She *was* good. I never see a better. It's been a blessin' to the house ever since she come into it; and I always said so. An' she's gone!"

"Where is Rotha?"

"Rotha! she's up there. I guess wild horses wouldn't get her away. I tried; I tried to get her to come down and have some breakfast with me; but la! she thinks she can live on air; or I suppose she don't think about it."

"How is she?"

"Queer. She is always a queer child. I can't make her out. And I wanted to consult you about her, sir; what's to be done with Rotha? who'll take care of her? She's just an age to want care. She'll be as wild as a hawk if she's let loose to manage herself."

"I thought she was very quiet."

"Maybe, up stairs. But just let anybody touch her down here, in a way she don't like, and you'd see the sparks fly! If you want to know how, just take and knock a firebrand against the chimney back."

"Who would touch her, here?" asked the gentleman.

"La! nobody, except with a question maybe, or a bit of advice. I shouldn't like to take hold of her any other way. I never did see a more masterful piece of human nature, of fourteen years old or any other age. She aint a bad child at all; I'm not meaning that; but her mother let her have her own way, and I guess she couldn't help it. It'll be worse for Rotha now, for the world aint like that spring chair you had fetched for her poor mother. You've been an angel of mercy in that room, sure enough."

Mr. Digby passed the good woman and began to ascend the stairs.

"I wanted to ask you about Rotha," Mrs. Marble persisted, speaking up over the bannisters, "because, if that was the best, I would take her myself and bring her up to my business. I don't know who is to manage things now, or settle anything."

"I will," said Mr. Digby. "Thank you, Mrs. Marble; I will see you again."

"Thank you, Mrs. Marble, I don't want you,' that means," said the little woman as she retreated to her own apartments. "There's somebody else a little bit masterful, I expect. Well, it's all right for the men, I s'pose, at least if they take a good turn; any way, we can't help it; but for a girl that aint fifteen yet,--it aint so agreeable. And poor child! who'll have patience with her now?"

Meanwhile Mr. Digby went up stairs and softly opened the door of the sitting room. For some time ago, since Mrs. Carpenter became more feeble, he had insisted on her having her old sleeping apartment again, other quarters being found or made for Mrs. Cord in the house. Mrs. Cord had naturally assumed the duties of her profession, which was that of a nurse; for the sake of which, knowing that they would be needed, Mr. Digby had first introduced her here.

At the window of the sitting room, looking out into the street, Rotha was sitting listlessly. No one else was in the room. She turned her head when she heard Mr. Digby's footsteps, and the face he saw then smote his heart. It was such a changed face; wan and pale, with the rings round the eyes that come of excessive weeping, and a blank, dull expression in the eyes themselves which was worse yet. She did not move, nor give any gesture of greeting, but looked at the young man entering as if neither he nor anything else in the world concerned her.

Mr. Digby felt then, what everybody with a heart has felt at one time or another, that the office of comforter is the most difficult in the world. In one thing at least he imitated Job's friends; he was silent. He came close up to the girl and stood there, looking down at her. But she turned her wan face away from him and looked out of the window again. She looked, but he was sure she saw nothing. He did not venture to touch her; he saw that she was not open to the least token of tenderness; such a token would surely turn her apathetic calm into irritation. Perhaps even his standing there had some such effect; for after a little while, Rotha said,

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Digby?"

He sat down, and waited. However, people do not live in these days to be several hundred years old; and proportionately, seven days of silence would be more of that sort of sympathy than can be shewn since Job's time. Yet what to say, Mr. Digby was profoundly doubtful. Finding nothing that would do, of his own, he took his little Testament from his pocket, and turning the leaves aimlessly came upon the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of John. He began at the beginning and read slowly and quietly on till he came to the words,

"Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.

"Jesus said unto her, Thy brother shall rise again!--"

"Please don't, Mr. Digby!" said Rotha, who after a few verses had buried her face in her hands.

"Don't what?"

"Don't read any more."

"Why not?"

"I know how it goes on. I know what he did. But he will not do that-- here."

"Yes, he will. Not immediately, but by and by."

"I don't care for by and by."

"Yes you do, Rotha. By and by the Lord Jesus will come again; and when he comes he will send his angels to gather up and bring to him all his people who are then living, scattered about in the world, and at the same time all his people who once lived and have died shall be raised up. Then will come your dear mother, with the rest, in beauty and glory."

"But," said Rotha, bursting out into violent sobs, "I don't know where I shall be!"--

The paroxysm of tears and sobs that followed, startled Mr. Digby; it was so extreme in its passion beyond anything he had ever seen in his life; even beyond her passion on the sea shore. It seemed as if the girl must almost strangle in her convulsive oppression of breath. He tried soothing words, and he tried authority; and both were as vain as the recoil of waves from a rock. The passion spent itself by degrees, and was succeeded by a more gentle, persistent rain of tears which fell quietly.

"Rotha," said Mr. Digby gravely, "that is not right."

"Very likely," she answered. "How are you going to help it?"

"I cannot; but you can."

"I *can't!*" she exclaimed, with almost a cry. "When it comes, I must."

"No, my child; you must learn self-command."

"How can I?" she said doggedly.

"By making it your rule, that you will always do what is *right*--not what you like."

"It never was my rule."

"Perhaps. But do you mean that it never shall be?"

There followed a long silence, during which Rotha's tears gradually stilled; but she said nothing, and Mr. Digby let her alone. After this time, she rose and came to him and laid one hand half timidly, half confidingly, upon his shoulder.

"Mr. Digby," she said softly, "because I am so wicked, will you get tired and forsake me?"

"Never!" he answered heartily, putting his arm round the forlorn child and drawing her a little nearer. And Rotha, in her forlornness and in the gentle mood that had come over her, laid her head down on his shoulder, or rather in his neck, nestling to him. It was an unconscious, mute appeal to his kindness and *for* his kindness; it was a very unconscious testimony of Rotha's trust and dependence on him; it was very child-like, but coming from this girl who was so nearly not a child, it moved the young man strangely. He had no sisters; the feeling of Rotha's silky, thick locks against the side of his face and the clinging appeal of her hand and head on his shoulder, gave him an entirely new sensation. All that was manly in him stirred to meet the appeal, and at the same time Rotha took a suddenly different place in his thoughts and regards. He was glad Mrs. Cord was not there to see; but if she had been, I think he would have done just the same. He drew the girl close to him, and laid his other hand tenderly upon those waving, thick, dark locks of hair.

"I will never forsake you, Rotha. I will never be tired. You shall be like my own little sister; for your mother left you in my charge, and you belong to me now, and to nobody else in the world."

She accepted it quietly, making no response at all; her violent passion had been succeeded by a gentle, subdued mood. Favourable for saying several things and making sundry arrangements; only that just then was not the time that would do. Both of them remained still and silent, Mr. Digby thinking this among other things; poor Rotha was hardly thinking at all, any more than a shipwrecked man just flung ashore by the waves, and clinging to the rock that has saved him from sweeping out to sea again, lie blesses the rock, maybe, but it is no time for considering anything. The one idea is to hold fast; and Rotha mentally did it, with an intensity of trust and clinging that her protector never guessed at.

"Then I must do what you say, now?" she remarked after a while.

"I suppose so," he answered, much struck by this tone of docility.

"I will try, Mr. Digby."

"Will you trust me too, Rotha?"

"For what?"

"I mean, will you trust me that what I do for you, or want you to do, is the best thing to be done?"

Rotha lifted her head from his shoulder and looked at him.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked.

"Nothing, to-day; by and by, perhaps many things. My question was general."

"Whether I will trust that what you say is the best?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Digby, mightn't you be mistaken?"

"Rotha, might not you? And would it not be more likely?"

Rotha began to reflect that in her past life she had not been wont to give such unbounded trust to anybody; not even to her father, and not certainly to her mother. She had sometimes thought them mistaken; how could she help that? and how could she help it in any other case, if circumstances warranted it? But with the thought of her mother, tears rose again, and she did not speak. Just then Mrs. Cord came in.

"O I am glad you are there, sir!" she began. "I wanted to speak to you, if you please."

Mr. Digby unclosed his arm from about Rotha, and she withdrew quietly to her former station by the window. The other two went into the adjoining room, and there Mrs. Cord received instruction and information as to various points of the arrangements for the next few days.

"And what will I do with Rotha, sir?" she asked finally.

"Do with her? In what respect?"

"She won't eat, sir."

"She will, I fancy, the next time it is proposed to her."

"She's very hard to manage," said Mrs. Cord, shaking her head. "She will have her own way, always."

"Wel-let her have it."

"But other people won't, sir; and I think it's bad for her. She's had it, pretty much, all along; but now--she don't care for what I say, no more'n if I was a post! Nor Mrs. Marble, nor anybody. And is Mrs. Marble going to take her, sir?"

"Not at all. Her mother left her in my care."

"Oh!--" said the good woman, with a rather prolonged accent of mystification and disapprobation; wondering, no doubt, what disposal Mr. Digby could make of her, better than with Mrs. Marble; but not venturing to ask.

"Nothing can be done, till after the funeral," the young man went on.

"Take all the care of her you can until then. By the way, if you can give me something to eat, I will lunch here. If you have nothing in the house, I can get something in a few minutes."

Mrs. Cord was very much surprised; however, she assured Mr. Digby that there was ample supply in the house, and went on, still with a mystified and dissatisfied feeling, to prepare and produce it. She knew how, and very nicely an impromptu meal was spread in a few minutes. Mr. Digby meanwhile went out and got some fruit; and then he and Rotha sat down together. Rotha was utterly gentle and docile; did what he bade her and took what he gave her; indeed it was plain the poor child was in sore need of food, which she had had thus far no heart to eat. Mr. Digby prolonged the meal as much as he could, that he might spend the more time with her; and when he went away, asked her to lie down and go to sleep.

Those must be heavy days, he knew, till the funeral was over. What then? It was a question. Mrs. Busby would not be in town perhaps before the end of September; and here it was the middle of August. Near two months of hot weather to intervene. What should he do? He would willingly be out of the city himself; and for Rotha, the spending all these weeks in her mother's old rooms, in August weather, and with Mrs. Cord and Mrs. Marble for companions, did not seem expedient. It would be good for neither body nor mind. But he could not take her to any place of public resort; that would not be expedient either. He pondered and pondered, and was very busy for the next two or three days.

The result of which activity was, that he took rooms in a pleasant house at Washington Heights, overlooking the river, and removed Rotha there, with Mrs. Cord to look after her. But as he himself also took up his abode in the house, Mrs. Cord's supervision was confined to strictly secondary matters. He had his meals in company with Rotha, and was with her most of the time, and was the sole authority to which she was obliged to refer.

It was an infinite blessing to the child, whose heart was very sore, and who stood in need of very judicious handling. And somewhat to Mr. Digby's surprise, it was not a bore to himself. The pleasure of ministering is always a pleasure, especially when the need is very great; it is also a pleasure to excite and to receive affection; and he presently saw, with some astonishment, that he was doing this also. Certainly it was not a thing in the circumstances to be astonished at; and it moved Mr. Digby so, simply because he was so far from thinking of himself in his present plan of action. All the pleasanter perhaps it was, when he saw that the forlorn girl was hanging upon him all the dependence of a very trusting nature, and giving to him all the wealth of a passionate power of loving. This came by degrees.

At first, in a strange place and with new surroundings and utterly changed life, the girl was exceedingly forlorn. The days passed in alternations of violent outbreaks of grief and fits of seeming apathy, which I suppose were simply nature's reaction from overstrain and exhaustion. The violence she rarely shewed in Mr. Digby's presence; Rotha was taking her first lessons in self-command; nevertheless he saw the work that was going on, knew it must be, for a time, and wisely abstained from interference with it. "There is a time to weep"; and he knew it was now; comfort would be mockery. He was satisfied that Rotha should have so much diversion from her sorrow as his presence occasioned; that she should be obliged to meet him at meals, and to behave then with a certain degree of outward calm, and the necessary attention to little matters; all useful in a sort of slow, unnoticed way. Otherwise for a few days he let her

alone. But then he began to give her things to do. Lessons were taken up again, by degrees multiplied, until Rotha's time was well filled with occupation. It went very hard at first. Rotha even ventured on a little passive rebellion; even declared she could not study. Mr. Digby shewed her that she could; helped her, led her on, and let her see finally that he expected certain things of her, which she could not neglect without coming to an open rupture with him. That was impossible. Rotha bent her will to do what was required of her; and from that time the difficulty of Mr. Digby's task was over. She began soon to be interested again in what she was about and to make excellent progress. Then Mr. Digby would put himself in a hammock on the piazza or out under a great walnut-tree, and make Rotha read to him, and incite her to talk of what she read; or he would give her lessons in drawing; both occasions of the utmost gratification to Rotha; and when the scorching sun had got low down over the Palisades, he would take her in an easy little vehicle and go for a long drive. So one way and another they came to be together all the time. And after the first miserable days were past, and Rotha had been constrained to busy herself with something besides herself; her mental powers called into vigorous exertion and furnished with an abundant supply of new food; by degrees a sort of enjoyment began to creep into her life again, and grew, and grew. It was a help, that everything was so strange about her. Even her own dress.

"Mrs. Cord," Mr. Digby had said in the first week of this new life,--"how is Rotha off for clothes?"

"Well, sir," said the nurse, "of course they were people not likely to have much of that sort of thing; but Rotha has what will do her through the warm season."

"But is she supplied as a young lady ought to be, with everything needful?"

"As a young lady!--no, sir. It's what she never set up for, and don't need, and knows nothing about. Her mother was a very good woman, and didn't pretend to dress her as a young lady. But she's comfortable."

Mr. Digby half smiled at the collocation of things, however he went on with full seriousness.

"She will go to school by and by, and she will go there as a young lady. I wish, Mrs. Cord, you would see to it, as far as you know, that she has a full supply of everything. Go to one of the best shops for outfits and get plenty of every thing and of good quality, and send the bills to me. And get Mrs. Marble to make her some dresses."

"Mourning, sir?"

"No. Simple things, but no black."

"I asked, because it's customary, sir."

"It's a bad custom; better broken."

"Then what shall I get, sir?" asked Mrs. Cord with unwonted stolidity.

"You need not get anything. I will see to it myself. Only the linen and all that, Mrs. Cord, which I should not know how to get. The rest I will take care of."

And he took such good care, that the good woman was filled with a displeased surprise which was inexplicable. Why should she be displeased? Yet Mrs. Cord was quite "put about," as she said, when the things came home. They were simple things, indeed; a few muslins and ginghams and the like. But the ginghams were fine and beautiful, and the muslins of delicate patterns and excellent quality; and with them came a set of fine cambrick handkerchiefs, and ruffles, and lace, and a little parasol, and a light summer wrap; for Rotha had nothing to put on that made her fit to go to drive with her guardian. He had taken her, all the same, dressed as she was, but it seems he thought there must be a change in this state of things. Mrs. Cord was full of dissatisfaction; and when she took the dresses to Mrs. Marble to be made up, the two good women held a regular pow wow over them.

"Muslin like that!" cried the little mantua-maker with an expression of strong distaste. "Why that *never* cost less than fifty cents, Mrs. Cord! My word, it didn't."

"Just think of it! And for that girl, who never wore anything but sixpenny calico if she could get it. Men are the stupidest!--"

"That ashes-of-roses lawn is the prettiest thing I've seen yet. Mrs. Cord, she don't want all these?"

"So I say," returned the nurse; "but I wasn't consulted. That aint all; you should have seen the ruffles, and the ribbands, and the pockethandkerchiefs; and then he took her somewhere, Stewart's, I shouldn't wonder, and got her gloves and gloves; and then a lovely Leghorn hat, with a brim wide enough to swallow her up. And now you must make up these muslins, and let us have one soon; for my master is in a hurry."

The little mantua-maker contemplated the muslins, and things generally.

"There's not the first sign o' black among 'em all! Not a line, nor a sprig, nor a dot."

"Maybe that's English ways," returned the nurse; "but if it is, I never heerd so before."

"Well I like to see mournin' put on, if it's only respect," went on the dress-maker; "and a girl hadn't ought to be learnt to forget her own mother, before she's well out of sight. I'd ha' dressed her in black, poor as I am, and not a sign o' white about her, for one year at least. I think it looks sort o' rebellious, to do without it. Why I've known folks that would put on mourning if they hadn't enough to eat; and I admire that sort o' sperit."

The nurse nodded.

"Just look here, now! What's he thinkin' about, Mrs. Cord?"

"Just that question I've been askin' myself, Mrs. Marble; and I can't get no answer to it."

"What's he goin' to do with her?"

"He says, send her to school."

"These aint for school dresses."

"O no; these are to go ridin' about in, with him."

"Well I think, somebody ought to take charge of her. A young man like that, aint the person to do it Taint likely he's goin' to bring her up to marry her, I suppose."

"She's too young for such thoughts," said the nurse.

"She's young, but she aint far from bein' older," Mrs. Marble went on significantly. "When a girl's once got to fifteen, she's seventeen before you can turn round."

"There'll have to be somebody else to wait upon her, I know, besides me," returned the nurse. "That aint my business. And it's all I'm wanted for now. Nobody can say a word to my young lady if it isn't the gentleman hisself; and she's with him all the while, and not with me. I aint goin' to put up with it long, I can tell 'em."

Mr. Digby's pay was good however, and Mrs. Cord did not find it convenient to give notice immediately; and also the muslin dresses were made and well made, and sent home to the day.

All these her new possessions and equipments were regarded by Rotha herself with a mixture of pleasure and mortification. The pleasure was undeniable; the girl had a nice sense of the fitness of things, inborn and natural and only needing cultivation. It was getting cultivation fast. She had a subtle perception that the new style of living into which she had come was superior to the old ways in which she had been brought up; not merely in the vulgar item of costliness, but in the far higher qualities of refinement and propriety and beauty. Her mother and father had been indeed essentially refined people, of good sense and good taste as far as their knowledge went. Rotha began to perceive that it had stopped short a good deal below the desirable point. Also she felt herself thoroughly in harmony with the new life, little as she had known of it hitherto; and was keen to discern and quick to adopt every fresh point of greater refinement in habits and manners. Mr. Digby now and then at table would say quietly, "This is the better way, Rotha,"--or, "Suppose you try it *so*."--He never had to give such a hint a second time. He never had to tell her anything twice. What he did, Rotha held to be "wisest, discreetest, best," the supreme model in everything; and she longed with a kind of passion to be like him in these, and in all matters. So it was with a gush of great satisfaction that the girl for the first time saw herself well and nicely dressed. She knew the difference between her old and her new garments, knew it correctly; did not place the advantage of the latter in their colour or fineness; but recognized quite well that now she looked as if she belonged to Mr. Digby, while before, nobody could have thought so for a moment. The pleasure was keen. Yet it mingled, as I said, with a sting of mortification. Not simply that her new things were his gift and came to her out of his bounty, though she felt that part of the whole business; but it pained her to feel that her own father and

mother had stood below anybody in knowledge of the world and use of its elegant proprieties. Rotha was perfectly clear-sighted, and knew it, from the very keen delight with which she herself accepted and welcomed this new initiation.

The prevailing feeling however was the pleasure; though in Rotha's face and manner I may say there was no trace of it, the first day she was what Mr. Digby would have called "properly dressed," and met him in their little sitting room. She came in gravely, (she was already trying to imitate his quietness of manner) and came straight up to Mr. Digby where he was standing in the window. Rotha waited a minute, and then looked up at him, blushing.

"Do you like it?" she asked frankly.

His eye caught the new muslin, and he stepped back a step to take a view.

"Yes," he said smiling. "That's very well. Is it comfortable?"

"O yes."

"That's well," he said. "I always think it the prime question in a coat, whether it is comfortable."

He came back to his place in the window, so making an end of the subject; but Rotha had not said all that she wished to say.

"Mrs. Cord wanted me to put this on to-day, though it was not Sunday; was she right?"

"Eight? certainly. Why should one be better dressed Sunday than any other day?"

"I thought people did--" said Rotha, much confused in her ideas.

"And right enough," said Mr. Digby, recollecting himself, "in the cases where the work to be done in the week would injure or soil a good dress. But in other cases?--"

"On Sunday one goes to church," said Rotha.

"Well,--what then?"

"Oughtn't one to be better dressed to go to church?"

"Why should you?"

Rotha was so much confounded that she had nothing to say. This was overturning all her traditions.

"What do you go to church for, Rotha?"

"I *ought* to go--to think about God, I suppose."

"Well, and would much dressing help you?"

Rotha considered. "I don't think it helps much," she confessed.

"You say, you ought to go for such a reason;--what is your real reason?"

"For going? Because mother took me; or made me go without her."

"You are honest," said Mr. Digby smiling. "You will agree with me that that is a poor reason; but I am glad you understand yourself, and are not deceived about it."

"I don't think I understand myself, Mr. Digby."

"Why not?"

"Because, sometimes I am in great confusion, and can *not* understand myself."

"Let me help you when those times come."

"One of the times is to-day," said Rotha in a low tone.

"Ah? What's the matter?" said he looking down kindly at her. Rotha had laid her forehead against the edge of the window frame, and was looking out with an intent grave eye which amused him, and made him curious too.

"Because I want to tell you something of how feel, Mr. Digby, and I cannot." --(He had told her not to say *can't*, and now she never did.)
"It's all mixed up, and I don't know what comes first; and you will think
I am--ungrateful."

"Never in the world!" said he heartily. "I shall never think that. I think I know you pretty well, Rotha."

Yet he was hardly prepared for the look she gave him; a glance only, but so intent, so warm, so laden with gratitude, ay, and so burdened with a yet deeper feeling, that Mr. Digby was well nigh startled. It was not the flash of brilliancy of which Rotha's eyes were quite capable; it was a rarer thing, the dark glow of a hidden fire, true, and deep, and pure, and unconscious of itself. It gave the young man something to think of.

CHAPTER X.

L'HOMME PROPOSE

Mr. Digby thought of it a good deal. He was obliged to recognize the fact, that this friendless child was pouring upon him all the affection of a very passionate nature. Child, he called her in his thoughts, and yet he knew quite well that the time was not distant when Rotha would be a child no longer. And already she loved him with the intensity of a concentrated power of loving. Certainly this was not what Mr. Digby wished, or had in any wise contemplated as possible, and it seemed to him both undesirable and inconvenient; and yet, it is sweet to be loved; and he could not recall that intense look of devotion without a certain thrill. Because of its beauty, he said to himself; but it was also because of its significance. He read Rotha; he knew that she was one of those natures which have a great tendency to concentration of affection; with whom the flow of feeling is apt to be closed in to a narrow channel, and in that channel to be proportionately sweeping and powerful. What training could best be applied to correct this tendency, not happy for the possessor, nor beneficent in its effects upon others? These are the sort of natures that when untrained and ungoverned, use upon occasion the dagger and the poison cup; or which even when not untrained are in danger, in certain cases of shipwreck, of going to pieces altogether. In danger at all times of unwise, inconsiderate acting; as when such a stream meets with resistance and breaks its bounds, spreading waste and desolation where it comes. Truly, he trusted that this little girl's future might be so sheltered and cared for, that no such peril might overtake her; but how could he know? What could he do? and what anyhow was to be the outcome of all this? It was very pleasant to have her love him, but he did not want her to love him too well. At any rate, *he* could not be her tutor permanently; he had something else to do, and if he had not, the arrangement would be inadmissible. Mrs. Busby would return to town in a few weeks, and then-- Yes, there was nothing else to do. Rotha must go under her aunt's care, for the present. How would they agree? Mr. Digby did not feel sure; he had an anticipation that the change would be a sore trial to Rotha. But--it must be made.

He lay in his hammock one day, thinking all this over. Rotha was sitting near him drawing. She was always near him when she could be so, though a spaniel is not more unobtrusive. Nor indeed half as much so; for a pet dog will sometimes try to attract attention, which Rotha never did. She was content and happy if she could be near her one friend and glance at him from time to time. And lately Rotha had become extremely fond of her pencil; I might say, of all the studies Mr. Digby put before her. Whatever he wished her to do, she did with a will. But drawing had grown to be a passion with her, and naturally she was making capital progress. She sat absorbed in her work, her eyes intently going from her model to her paper and back again; nevertheless, every now and then one swift glance went in Mr. Digby's direction. No model, living or dead, equalled in her eyes the pleasantness of his face and figure. He caught one of those glances; quick, wistful, watchful, and meeting his eye this time, it softened with an inexplicable sort of content. The young man could have smiled, but that the look somehow gave him a touch of pain. He noticed Rotha more particularly, as she sat at her drawing. He noticed how she had changed for the better, even in the few weeks since they came to Fort Washington; how her face had refined, grown gentle and quiet, and her manners correspondingly. He noticed what a good face it was, full of intelligence and latent power, and present sensitiveness; and furthermore, a rare thing anywhere, how free from self-consciousness. Full of life and of eager susceptibility as Rotha was always, she seemed to have the least recollection of herself and her own appearance. She did not forget her new dresses, for instance, but she looked at them from her own standpoint and not from that of an imaginary spectator. Mr. Digby drew an involuntary sigh, and Rotha looked up again.

"You like that work, Rotha," he said.

"Very much, Mr. Digby!" He had once told her to be moderate in her expressions, and to say always less than she felt, rather than more. Rotha never forgot, and was sedulously reserved in her manner of making known what she felt.

"But Mr. Digby, it is very difficult," she went on.

"What?"

"To make anything perfect."

He smiled. "Very difficult indeed. People that aim so high are never satisfied with what they do."

"Then is it better to aim lower?"

"By no means! He that is satisfied with himself has come to a dead stand-still; and will get no further."

"But must one be always dissatisfied with oneself?"

"Yes; if one is ever to grow to a richer growth and bring forth better fruit. And anything that stops growing, begins to die."

Rotha gave him a peculiar, thoughtful look, and then went on with her drawing.

"Understand me, Rotha," he said, catching the look. "I am talking of the dissatisfaction of a person who is doing his best. The fact that one is dissatisfied when not doing his best, proves simply that feeling is not dead yet. There is no comfort to be drawn from that."

Rotha went on drawing and did not look up, this time. Mr. Digby considered how he should say what he wanted to say.

"Rotha--" he began, "how is it with that question you were once concerned about? Are you any nearer being a Christian?"

"I don't know, sir. I do not think I am."

"What hinders?"

"I suppose," said Rotha, playing with her pencil absently,--"the old hindrance."

"You do not wish to be a Christian."

"Yes, sometimes I do. Sometimes I do. But I--cannot."

"I should feel happier about you, if that question were well settled."

"Why, Mr. Digby?" said Rotha, answering rather something in his tone than in his words, and looking up to get the reply.

"Because, Rotha, you take hold hard, where you take hold at all; and you may take hold of something that will fail you."

Her eyes, and even a sudden change of colour, put a startled question to him. He smiled as he answered, though again with a reminder of pain which he did not stop to analyse. "No," he said, "I will never fail you, Rotha; never voluntarily; but I have no command over my own life. I would like you to have a trust that could never disappoint you; and there is only One on whom such a trust can be lodged. He who is resting on Christ, is resting on a rock."

"I know, Mr. Digby," said Rotha, in a subdued way. "I wish I was on such a rock, too; but that don't change anything."

"Do you think you really wish to be a Christian, Rotha?"

"Because mother was,--and because you are," she said gravely; "but then, *for myself*, I do not want it."

"What is likely to be the end?"

"That don't change anything, either," said Rotha, not too lucidly.

"Most true!" said Mr. Digby. "Well, Rotha, I will tell you what I think. I think you are your mother's child, and that you will not be left to your own wilfulness. I am afraid, though, that you may have to go through a bitter experience before the wilfulness is broken; and I want to give you one or two things to remember when it comes."

"But why should it come?" said Rotha.

"Because I am afraid nothing else will bring you to seek the one Friend that cannot be lost; and I think you are bound to find Him."

"But where will you be, Mr. Digby?" said Rotha, now plainly much disturbed.

"I do not know. I do not know anything about it."

"But I could not be so forlorn, if I had you."

"Then perhaps you will not have me."

At this, however, there came such flashes of changing feeling, of which every change was a variety of pain, in the girl's face, that Mr. Digby's heart was melted. He stretched out his hand and took hers, which lay limp and unresponsive in his grasp, while distressed and startled eyes were fixed upon him.

"I know nothing about it," he said kindly. "I have no foresight of any such time. I shall never do anything to bring it about, Rotha. Only, if it came by no doing of mine, I want you to have the knowledge of one or two things which might be a help to you. Do you understand?"

She looked at him still silently, trying to read his face, as if her fate were there. He met the look as steadily. On one side, a keen, searching, suspicious, fearful inquiry; on the other a calm, frank, steadfastness; till his face broke into a smile.

"Satisfied?" he asked.

"Then why do you speak so, Mr. Digby?" she said with a quiver in her lip.

"My child, this world is proverbially an uncertain and changing thing."

"I know it; but why should you make it more uncertain by talking in that way?"

"I do not. I forestall nothing. I merely would like to have you provided with one or two bits of knowledge; a sort of note of the way, if you should need it. You are not superstitious, are you?"

"I do not know what is superstitious," said Rotha, her eyes still fixed upon his face with an intentness which moved him, while yet at the same time, he saw, she was swallowing down a great deal of disturbance.

"Well," he said, speaking very easily, "it is superstition, when people think that anything beneath the Creator has power to govern the world he has made--or to govern any part of it."

"I was not thinking of the government of the world," said Rotha,

"Only of a very small part of it,--the affairs of your little life. You were afraid that being prepared for trouble might bring the trouble, in some mysterious way?"

The girl was silent, and her eyes fell to the hand which held hers. What would she do, if ever that hand ceased to be her protection? People of Rotha's temperament receive impressions easily, and to her fancy that hand was an epitome of the whole character to which it belonged. Delicately membered, and yet nervously and muscularly strong; kept in a perfection of care, and graceful as it was firm in movement; yet ready, she knew, to plunge itself into anything where human want or human trouble called for its help. Rotha loved the touch of it, obeyed every sign of it, and admired every action of it; and now as she looked, two big, hot tears fell down over her cheeks. The hand closed a little more firmly upon her fingers.

"Rotha--you believe me?" he said.

"What, Mr. Digby?"

"You believe me when I tell you, that I am never going to leave you or lose you by any will or doing of mine--"

"By whose then?" said Rotha quickly.

"By nobody's else, either, I promise you--unless by your own."

"By mine!" said Rotha, and a faint smile broke upon her troubled face.

"Well, you believe me? And now, my child, that is all you and I can do. And nevertheless, a time might come when you might want help and comfort, that is all I am saying; and I want to give you one or two things to remember in case such a time ever does come, and I am not at hand to ask. Get your Bible, and a pencil."

He let her hand loose, and Rotha obeyed immediately.

"Find the fourth chapter of John, and read to the fourteenth verse."

Rotha did so.

"What do you think the Lord meant?"

Rotha studied, and would have said she "did not know," only she had found by experience that Mr. Digby never would take that answer from her in a case like the present.

"I suppose," she said, speaking slowly, and vainly endeavouring to find words that quite suited her,--"he meant--something like-- He meant, that he could give her something good, that would last."

Mr. Digby smiled.

"That would last always, and never fail, nor change, nor wear out its goodness."

"But, Mr. Digby, I should not want to stop being thirsty, because I should lose the pleasure of drinking."

Mr. Digby smiled again. "Did you think *that* was what the Lord promised? What would be the use of that 'well of water, springing up into everlasting life'? No, he meant only, that thirst and thirst and thirst as you will, the supply should always be at hand and be sufficient."

Rotha gave one of her quick glances of comprehension, which it was always pleasant to meet.

"Then go on, and tell me what is this living water which the Lord will give?"

"I suppose--do you mean--religion?" she said, after another pause of consideration.

"Religion is a rather vague term--people understand very different things under it. But if by 'religion' you mean the knowledge, the loving knowledge, of God,--you are right. Living water, in the Bible, constantly typifies the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart; and what He does, where he is received, is, to shew us Christ."

"Then how can people be thirsty, after they have got the knowledge?" inquired Rotha.

But Mr. Digby's smile was very sweet this time, and awed her.

"After you have once come to know and love a friend," said he, turning his eyes upon Rotha, "are you satisfied, and want to see and hear no more of him?"

"Is religion like that?" said Rotha.

"Just like that. What the Lord Jesus offers to give us is himself. Now suppose the time come when you greatly desire to receive this gift, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know. Pray?"

"Certainly. But how? There are different ways of praying; and there is just one way which the Lord promises shall never miss what it asks for."

"I don't know but one way," said Rotha.

"Are you sure you know *one*? It takes more than words to make a prayer. But turn to the second chapter of Proverbs. Read the third and fourth and fifth verses."

Rotha read, and made no comment.

"You see? You understand?"

"Yes, Mr. Digby."

"If thou searchest for her as for hid treasures, *then* shalt thou understand, and find! -- You know how people search for hid treasures?"

"Yes."

"They leave no stone unturned, they work by night and by day, they think of nothing else, until their object is gained. Mark those two places, Rotha, and mark them in the fly leaf of your Bible, 1. and 2."

"Suppose," he went on when she had done this, "suppose you have sought in this way, and the light does not come, and you are in danger of losing heart. Then turn to Hosea, sixth chapter and third verse. There you have an antidote against discouragement. You shall know, 'if you *follow on* to know the Lord; if you do not give over seeking and grow tired of praying. 'His going forth is prepared as the morning.' Blessed words!" ---

"I do not know what they mean," said Rotha.

"Do you know how the morning is prepared?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know why the sun rises when morning comes?"

"It wouldn't be morning, if he didn't rise, would it?"

"No. Well, when the time comes," said Mr. Digby laughing. "Do you know why the sun rises? and why does he not rise where he went down?"

"No--" said Rotha, her eyes kindling with intelligent curiosity.

Whereupon Mr. Digby turned himself out of his hammock, and coming to the table gave Rotha her first lesson in astronomy; a lesson thoroughly given, and received by her with an eagerness and a delight which shewed that knowledge to her was like what the magnet is to the iron. She forgot all about the religious bearing of the new subject till the subject itself was for that time done with. Then Mr. Digby's questions returned into the former channel.

"You see now, Rotha, how the morning is 'prepared,' do you?"

"Yes, Mr. Digby," she answered joyously.

"And sure to come. If the earth goes on turning round, it cannot help coming. Even so: the Lord's coming is prepared and sure, for any one who persistently seeks him. Keep on towards the east and you will certainly see the sun rise."

"Yes," said Rotha, "I see. It is beautiful."

"Mark that No. 3 in the fly leaf! But Rotha, remember, anybody truly in earnest and searching 'as for hid treasure,' will be willing to give up whatever would render the search useless."

"Yes, of course. But what would?" said Rotha, though she was thinking more of the improvised planetarium with which her imagination had just been delighted.

"Turn once more to the fourteenth of John and read the 21st verse." But
Mr. Digby himself gave the words.

"He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him"

"That is somebody who has found the treasure, I think, Mr. Digby; it is 'he that loveth me.'"

"Quite true; nevertheless, Rotha, it remains a fact that nobody who is not willing to do the Lord's will, can come to the knowledge of him."

"Mr. Digby, why are wrong things so easy, and right things so hard?"

"They are not."

"I thought they were," said Rotha in surprise. "Am I worse than other people?"

"It all depends upon where you stand, Rotha. Would you find it easy to do something that would cause me great pain?"

"No, Mr. Digby,--impossible."

"I believe it," he said. "Then just put the case that you loved Christ much better than you do me; which would be the hard and the easy things then?"

Rotha was silent. But the whole conversation had rather given new food for the meditations it had interrupted and which had occasioned it. Where was all this to end?--the young man asked himself. And when should it end, in so far as the immediate state of things was concerned? As soon as possible! his judgment said. Rotha was already clinging to him with a devotion that would make the parting a hard business, even now; every week would make it harder. Besides, he had other work to do, and could not permanently play tutor. As soon as Mrs. Busby came home he would go to her and broach the matter. That would be, for the present, the best plan he could hit upon. A week or two more--

Which calculations, like so many others of human framing, came to nothing. A day or two later, driving in the Park one evening, a pair of unruly horses coming at a run round a corner dashed into the little phaeton which held Mr. Digby and Rotha, and threw them both out. The phaeton was broken; Rotha was unhurt; Mr. Digby could not stand up. He believed it was a sprain, he said; no more; but one foot was unmanageable.

A carriage was procured, he was assisted into it, Rotha took her place beside him, and the coachman was ordered to drive slowly.

A silent pair they were for some distance; and both faces very pale.

Rotha was the first one to speak.

"Mr. Digby--does it hurt much?"

"Rather, just now," he said forcing a smile. "Rotha, are you all right?"

"O yes. What can I do, Mr. Digby?"

"There is nothing to be done, till we get home."

For which now Rotha waited in an impatience which seemed to measure every yard of the way. Arrived at last, Mr. Digby was assisted out of the phaeton, and with much difficulty into the house. Here he himself examined the hurt, and decided that it was only a sprain; no doctor need be sent for.

"Is a sprain bad?" asked Rotha, when the assistants had withdrawn.

"Worse than a broken bone, sometimes."

Mr. Digby had laid himself down upon the cushions of the lounge; sweat stood on his brow, and the colour varied in his face. He was in great pain.

"Where is Mrs. Cord?"

"She's out. She's gone to New York. I know she meant to go. What shall I do for you, Mr. Digby?"

"You cannot--"

"O yes, I can; I can as well as anybody. Only tell me what. Please, Mr.

Digby!"--Rotha's entreaty was made with most intense expression.

"Salt and water is the thing,--but the boot must come off. You cannot get it off, nor anybody, except with a knife. Rotha, give me the clasp knife that lies on my table over yonder."

Mr. Digby proceeded to open the largest blade and to make a slit in the leg of his boot. The slit was enlarged, with difficulty and evident suffering, till the whole top of the boot was open; but the ankle and foot, the hardest part of the task, were still to do, and the swollen foot had made the leather very tight.

"I cannot manage it," said Mr. Digby throwing down the knife. "I cannot get at it. You'll have to send for a surgeon, after all, Rotha, to carve this leather."

"Mr. Digby, may I try?"

"You cannot do it, child." But the answer was given in the exhaustion of pain, and the young man lay back with closed eyes. Rotha did not hold herself forbidden. She took the knife, and carefully, tenderly, and very skilfully, she managed to free the suffering foot. It took time, but not more, nor so much, as would have been needed to send for a doctor.

"Thank you!--that is great relief. Now the salt and water, Rotha."

With a beating heart, beating with joy, Rotha flew to get what was wanted; flew only outside the door though, for in the room her motions had no precipitation whatever. She came staidly and steadily, and noiselessly. It was necessary to cut open also the stocking, to get that off, but this was an easier matter; and then Rotha's fingers applied the cold salt and water, bathing softly and patiently, with fingers that almost trembled, they were so glad to be employed. For a long time this went on.

"Rotha--"

"Yes, Mr. Digby," said the girl eagerly.

"What o'clock is it?"

"Seven, just."

"You have had no tea."

"Nor you, either. Will you have some now, Mr. Digby?"

"You will. The foot is a great deal easier now, Rotha. Lay a wet cloth over the ankle and let it alone for a while; and have some tea, dear."

Rotha obeyed, moving with the utmost delicacy of soft and quiet movements. She made the foot comfortable; rang the bell, and desired the kettle to be brought; and noiselessly arranged the table when the servant had set the tea things upon it. She made the tea then; and had just cut a slice of bread and put it upon the toasting fork, when the door opened and in came Mrs. Cord, her arms full of cloths and vials and a basin of water. Rotha dropped the toasting fork and sprang towards her.

"What do you want?" she said. "What are you going to do?"

Her accent and action were so striking, that the woman paused, startled.

"There's a sprained ankle here--I'm coming to see it."

"No, you are not," said Rotha with great decision. "I have done all that is necessary, and I am going to do all that is necessary. I can do it as well as anybody; and I do not want you. You may carry all those things away, Mrs. Cord. Mr. Digby is asleep; he is better."

"*You* don't want me, maybe, Rotha, but Mr. Digby does. I've got what he wants here, and I know my business. My business is to take care of him." She would have passed on.

"Stand back!" said Rotha, barring her way. "I tell you, he don't want you, and you are not coming. Stand back! Take your things away. I will manage all that is done here myself. You may go!"--The tone and action were utterly and superbly imperious.

The woman paused again, yielding before the slight girl, as matter always does yield to mind.

"What new sort o' behaviour is this?" she said however in high offence. "You to tell me what I'm to do and not do! You're takin' a good deal upon you, my young lady!"

"I take it," said Rotha, supremely. "Go! and send the girl here, if you please. I heard her go up stairs just now. I want her to make a piece of toast."

Mrs. Cord greatly displeased, withdrew, after a glance at the closed eyelids on the sofa. The eyelids however were not so fast closed as they might be; Rotha's first words, spoken somewhat more emphatically than usual, had roused Mr. Digby out of his light slumber, and he had seen and heard all that passed. He had seen it with not a little amusement; at the same time it had given him new matter for thought. This was Rotha in a new character. He had known indeed before, in a measure, the intense nature of the girl; yet in his presence her manner was always subdued, except in the passion of grief that burst all bounds. But this was passion of another sort, and in that concentration of force which draws out a kind of spiritual electricity from its possessor. He saw how it had magnetized Mrs. Cord, and rendered her bulkiness passive. He had been intensely amused to see the large woman standing face to face with the slim girl, checked and indeed awed by the subtle lightning fire which darted from Rotha's eyes and seemed to play about her whole person. Mrs. Cord was fairly cowed, and gave way. And Rotha's bearing; instead of a poor, portionless little girl, she might have been a princess of the house royal, if she were judged of by her mien and manner. There was nothing assumed or affected about it; the demonstration was pure nature, Mr. Digby saw well enough; but what sort of a creature was this, to whom such a demonstration could be natural? There was force enough there, he saw, to bring the whole machinery into disorder and ruin, if the force were not well governed and well guided, and the machinery wisely managed. Who was to do this? Mrs. Busby? Mr. Digby was not sure yet what manner of person Mrs. Busby was; and he felt more than ever anxious to find out. And now a sprained ankle!

Meanwhile, Rotha having driven her adversary from the field, was making peaceful arrangements. She had sent the toast to be made; seeing that Mr. Digby's eyes were open, she carefully renewed the salt water application to his ankle; poured out a cup of tea, and brought it with the plate of toast to his side; where she sat down, the cup in one hand, the plate in the other.

"What now, Rotha?" said he.

"Your tea, Mr. Digby. I hope it is good."

She looked and spoke as gentle as a dove, albeit full of energetic alertness.

"And do you propose to enact dumb waiter?"

"If you want me to be dumb," she said.

He laughed. "Rotha, Rotha! this is a bad piece of work!" he said; but he did not explain what he meant.--"That won't do. Call Marianne and let her shove the table up to the sofa here--one corner of it."

"I like to hold the things, Mr. Digby, if you will let me."

"I don't like it. Call Marianne, Rotha, and we will take our tea together. I am not a South Sea Islander."

"Suppose you were,--what then?" asked Rotha as she rang the bell.

"Then I suppose I should think it proper for the ladies of the family to take tea after I had done."

The tea time was an occasion of unmitigated delight to Rotha, because she could wait upon her protector. He was suffering less now, and except that he was a prisoner seemed just as usual. After tea, however, he lay still, with closed eyes again; and Rotha had nothing to do but take care of his ankle and look at him. She thought it had never struck her before, what a beautiful person he was.

I use the word advisedly, and that I may justify it I will try, what I believe I have not done before, to describe Mr. Digby. He was not at all one of a class, or like what one sees every now and then; in fact the combination of points in his appearance was very unusual. His features were delicately regular and the colour of skin fair; but all thought of weakness or womanishness was shut out by the very firm lines of the lips and chin and the gravity of the brow. His hair was light and curly, and a fair moustache graced the upper lip; not overhanging it, but trained into long soft points right and left. He wore no English whiskers nor beard. Again, his hands were small and delicate, and the whole person

of rather slight build, as far as outline and contour were concerned; but the joints were well knit and supple, and all the muscles and sinews as if made of steel. Rather slow and easy, generally, in movement, he could shew the spring and power of a cat, when it was necessary; nature and training having done their best. He was habitually a grave person; the gravity was sweet, but very decided, and even when crossed by a smile it was not lost. So at least Rotha had always seen him. There were several reasons for this; one being the yet unhealed wound left by the death of his mother, to whom he had been devotedly attached, and another the sudden death a year or more ago of the lady he was to have married. The world knew nothing of these things, and set Mr. Digby down as a ridiculously sober man, for a man in his circumstances. They gave him also largely the reputation of haughtiness; while no one had more gentle and brotherly sympathy with every condition of humankind, or shewed it more graciously. He got the reputation partly, perhaps, by his real separateness from the mass of men, and his real carelessness about the things in which they take concern; more, however, it came from the feeling of inferiority in his presence, which most people find it hard to forgive a man. He was a welcome guest wherever he appeared; but very few were acquainted with his real tastes and powers and inner nature, even as Rotha knew them.

She knew something of them. She did not misjudge him; but on the contrary dwelt on everything that belonged to him with a kind of worshipping admiration. So she sat and looked at him this evening, and thought she had never known before how beautiful he was; and the evening was not slow to her, nor long, though it was utterly silent.

By and by came in Mrs. Cord, again with her hands full.

"I beg your pardon--can I do anything for you, sir?"

"No, thank you. I have had all the care I needed."

Rotha's heart had beat fearfully, and now it swelled in triumph.

"I have some liniment here, sir, that is an excellent thing for a sprain--if a sprain it is; I wasn't allowed to examine."

"Nothing so good as salt and water. Mrs. Cord, let them make up a bed in the next room for me. I had better not go up stairs."

So the nurse was dismissed, and Rotha confirmed in her office, to her great joy.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. BUSBY.

The weeks that now followed were a time of happiness to Rotha, as perfect as in her present circumstances it was possible for her to know. She was allowed to minister to Mr. Digby, she was constantly with him, and intercourse and lessons were tasted with redoubled zest. For she was kept very busy at her old studies, and new ones were added; she read aloud a good deal; Mr. Digby never shunned talk when she wanted information or help in any puzzle; and the meal times, when ministry was varied and the conversation ran upon lighter topics, were hours of unalloyed enjoyment. I think these weeks were not disagreeable ones to the other party concerned; however, he was constantly reminded of the need of making new arrangements; and as soon as his ankle would permit his getting in and out of a carriage, he was ready to go to Mrs. Busby's. But when at last he was on the way, he thought to himself that he had another hard job on his hands. How would Rotha bear uprooting again, and transplanting to entirely different soil? she who took such terribly fast hold of any ground that suited her. Would Mrs. Busby's family be such ground? If it would not, if he saw cause to think it would not, Mr. Digby resolved she should not be put there. But how was he to find out? He came into Mrs. Busby's drawing room with the full measure of his usual gravity.

It was almost the end of October now, and the family had been long enough returned from the country for the mistress of it to have her house put in perfect winter order. Carpets were down, curtains were up; mirrors and lamps were unswathed from their brown linen coverings; everything that was metal shone with the polish put upon it, and everything that was upholstery shewed soft and rich colours and draperies. It was all harmonious, it was all very handsome; the fault was the fault of so many rooms, a failure to shew cause why it should be at all. Nothing was done there, nothing could be done; there was plush and satin and brocade and gilding and lacquered wood; but no life. Even the fire, for there was a fire, was a solid mass of firestones; a glowing grateful of hard coal; if there was life in that, it was the life of mere existence.

Plenty of money! What else?

One of the great polished doors opened a little? softly, and the mistress of the house came in. She was rather a contrast to it all. Perhaps she had not yet made her toilette for the afternoon; she was in a very plain dress, and came in drawing a shawl around her. Not a handsome shawl either; the lady's whole appearance was most absolutely without pretension, and so was her manner. But the manner was not artless; it gave you the impression that she always knew what she was saying and had a reason for saying it. And the face, which had once been handsome, and might still have laid claim to some distinction, seemed likewise to lay claim to nothing, beyond the possession of sense and discernment and knowledge of the world.

"Mr. Southwode!" she said as she closed the door. "You are quite a stranger."

She was far too acute to tell Mr. Digby how welcome a visiter he was. She let the fact sufficiently appear in her smile and the tones of her greeting.

"I think, you have been a stranger here too, Mrs. Busby. Were you not late in returning to town?"

"Yes-- September was so warm! But I think eight months of the year is sufficient to spend in the city. Soul and body want the cultivation of nature for the other four; don't you think so? The ocean and the mountains are better than books. There is enlargement of the faculties to be sought, as well as stores for the memory."

"And what mountains, and what sea, have you been looking upon this summer?"

"We have seen no mountains this year; we kept to the sea beach. Except for a short interval. And you, Mr. Southwode? What have you done with yourself?"

"My last achievement was to let somebody run into me, in the Park, and sprain my ankle in consequence."

There followed of course inquiries and a full account of the affair. Mr. Digby could not be let off with less; and then advice and recipes, in the giving of which Mrs. Busby was quite motherly.

"And have you resolved at last to make your home in America?" she asked after this.

"I make my home wherever I am," the young man replied, with his slight grave smile.

"But surely you do not think it well for any ordinary mortal to imitate the Wandering Jew, and have a settled home nowhere?" said Mrs. Busby, shewing her white teeth, of which she had a good many and in good order.

"It may be best for some people," the young man said lightly. "But I came to speak to you about a matter of business. Mrs. Busby, pardon me for asking, had you once a sister?"

There was a change in the lady's face, marked enough, yet not so as to strike any but a nice observer. The bland smile faded from her lips, the lines about her mouth took a harder set, the eyes were more watchfully on the alert.

"Yes," she said quietly, not shewing her surprise. "I have a sister."

"Have you heard from her lately?"

"No. Not lately." The eyes were keenly attentive now, the words a little dry. She waited for what was to come next. As Mr. Digby paused, she added, "Do you know her?"

"I have known her."

"In Medwayville? I did not know you had ever travelled in the western part of the state."

"I have never been there. I knew Mrs. Carpenter here, in New York."

"In New York!" repeated Mrs. Busby. "She did not tell me-- When did you know her in New York? I was not aware she had ever been here."

"She was here the early part of this summer. But she was very ill, and failing constantly; and in July--did you know nothing of it?--she left us all, Mrs. Busby."

"My sister? Did she *die* here? Do you mean that?"

Mr. Digby bowed his head. The lady folded her arms, and removed her eyes from his face. Her own face was a shade paler, yet immovable. She sat as if lost in thought for several minutes; in a silence which Mr. Digby was determined this time he would not break.

"What brought my sister to New York, Mr. Digby?" Mrs. Busby at length asked, stooping as she spoke to pick up a thread from the carpet at her feet.

"I am afraid,--the difficulty of getting along at home, where she was."

"Her husband was dead, I knew," said the lady. "I gave Eunice permission to go and occupy the old house, where we were brought up, and which by my father's will came to me; and as I knew she had not done that, I had no reason to suppose that she was not getting along comfortably. My sister was one of those people who will not take advice, Mr. Digby; who will go their own way, and whom nobody can help. She was here several months, then?"

"More than that"

"More? How much more?"

"She came here before I had the pleasure of knowing her."

"Did she tell you anything of her story?"

"Something; and so I came, by a question or two, to find out that you were her sister."

"Eunice separated herself from her family," Mrs. Busby said shortly; "and such people always in time come to feel their mistake, and then they charge the fault upon their family."

"Mrs. Carpenter did not seem to me inclined to charge fault upon anybody.
I never heard anything from her that shewed a censorious spirit."

Mrs. Busby opened her lips, and pressed them a little closer together.
Evidently she was minded to ask no more questions. Mr. Digby went on.

"Mrs. Carpenter had a daughter--"

"I know she had a daughter," Mrs. Busby said briskly. "Is she living?"

"Certainly."

"Pray, how old?"

"About--I believe, about fifteen."

"Where is she?"

"She is here."

"*Here!* In whose care? and where is she?"

"She is in my care. It is about her I wished to speak to you."

"In *your* care! But Mr. Southwode, that is very strange! How came my sister to leave her child in your care?"

"She honoured me, I believe, with so much trust as to believe I would be a faithful guardian," Mr. Digby said, with his extremely composed gravity.

"But was there nobody else?" said the lady, for a moment forgetting herself.

"Nobody else, whom Mrs. Carpenter thought as competent, or as trustworthy," the young man said with the gleam of a smile.

"Mr. Southwode, I cannot allow that for a moment," Mrs. Busby said with energy. "I am the proper person to take

charge of my sister's child, and if you please I will assume the charge immediately. Where is she? She ought to be under my roof."

"It occurred to me, that if you were so inclined, your house would be the safest place for her; for the present at least."

"For the present and for always," said the lady decidedly. "Who else should take care of her? Where can I find her, Mr. Southwode?"

"Nowhere. I will bring her to you, if you will allow me."

"Do you know the girl? do you know much of her, I mean?"

"Something--" Mr. Digby easily assented.

"And what is she, if you can tell?"

"I do not know that I *can* tell, what you will find her. Do you not think, Mrs. Busby, that a human character of any richness shews different sides of itself to different persons, as varying affinities call out corresponding developments?"

"Then you call hers, a character of some richness?"

"I suppose I implied as much."

"And will you tell me what you have found her?"

"Pardon me; that would be an injustice to her. You would naturally look to verify my impressions, and perhaps could not do it. It is unkind to praise or blame anybody beforehand to third persons. You make it impossible for the balance of judgment to swing clear."

"She ought to come here at once. Will you bring her to-morrow?"

"I think not to-morrow."

"Why not? When, then?"

"This is Thursday? Suppose we say, next week?"

"Next week! That is waiting very long. Where is she? I will go to see her."

"Quite unnecessary," said Mr. Digby rising. "As soon as she is ready, and I am ready, I will bring her; but not before Monday or Tuesday."

"Mr. Southwode," said Mrs. Busby, with a mixture of suspicion and raillery in her look, which was but indifferently compounded, "if my niece were a few years older, I should begin to suspect that you had *reasons* for being unwilling to put her out of your care."

The young man met her eyes with the grave, careless composure which was habitual with him.

"I *have* reasons," he said. "And I am not going to put her 'out of my care.' I am only purposing to allow you, for the time being, a share in the care, Mrs. Busby. A trust that is given to me, I do not resign."

The lady shut her lips a little tight.

"What school is your daughter attending?" Mr. Southwode went on.

"I am not sure where I shall send her this year. She has been going-- But I am thinking of making a change. I do not know yet where she will be."

The gentleman remarked, that could be talked of another time; and took his leave. Every trace of smiles disappeared from Mrs. Busby's face as he closed the door behind him. She stepped to the window and drew down the linen shade where the sun was coming too brightly in; and then she stood for some minutes upon the hearth rug, grave and thoughtful, one eyebrow arched in meditation as society never saw it arched. Her concluding thought might be

summed up thus:—"When she is under my care, my young gentleman, I think she will *not* be under yours. Preposterous!"

Mr. Digby had his thoughts too as he drove homeward. They will never get on together, he said to himself. It will not be happy for Rotha, nor easy. And yet--it is the best thing I can do for her just now. She must have a woman's care; and whose could be so proper as her aunt's? Besides, I shall see her frequently; I shall know all that concerns her, for Rotha will tell me; and if things go wrong, I can at any time put in my hand and set them straight. I am sorry--but this is the thing to do; and there is no help for it.

In spite of all which certainty in his own mind, Mr. Digby looked forward with positive uneasiness to the telling Rotha what was in store for her. There was no help for that either; it must be done; and Mr. Digby was not one to put off a duty because it was disagreeable.

The next morning Rotha was at her drawing again, and Mr. Digby lay on the lounge, thinking how he should begin what he had to say. Rotha was looking particularly well; fresh and bright and happy; very busily intent over her drawing. How the girl had improved in these weeks, softened and refined and grown mannerly. She has good blood in her, thought Mr. Digby; her features shew it, and so do her instincts, and her aptitudes.----

"How would you like to go to school, Rotha?"

She looked up, with the flash of interest and of feeling which came so readily to her eye.

"I shouldn't like it as well as *this*, Mr. Digby,"--("this" meant the present course and manner of her education;) "but I suppose you could not go on teaching me always."

"I am not tired of it, Rotha; but I think it would be better in many respects for you to be at school for a while. You will like it, too."

"When shall I go, Mr. Digby?" she asked in a subdued voice, without looking up this time.

"The sooner the better, now. The schools have all begun their terms some weeks ago. And then, Rotha, you must have a home in the city. You could not live out here at Fort Washington, and attend school in New York. I shall be obliged to go back to the city, too."

"Then I would like to go," said Rotha simply.

"But you must have more care than mine, my child; at least you must have other care. You must have some lady friend, to look after you as I cannot do. I am going to put you under your aunt's protection."

Rotha's pencil fell from her hand and she raised her head now.

"My aunt?" she repeated.

"Yes. Your mother's sister; Mrs. Busby. You knew you had an aunt in the city?"

Rotha disregarded the question. She left her seat and came and stood before the lounge, in the attitude of a young tragedy queen; her hands interlocked before her, her face pale, and not only pale but spotted with colour, in a way that shewed a startling interruption of the ordinary even currents of the blood.

"O Mr. Digby," she cried, "not her! not her! Do not give me up to her!"

"Why not?" he asked gently.

"She is not good. She is not a good woman. I don't like her. I can't bear the thought of her. I don't want to have anything to do with her. *Please*, keep me from her! O Mr. Digby, don't let her have me!" These words came out in a stream.

"My dear Rotha, is this reasonable? What cause have you to dislike your aunt?"

"Because she wasn't good to mother--she didn't love her--she wasn't kind to her. She is not a good woman. She wouldn't like me. I don't like her *dreadfully*, Mr. Digby!"

The words Rotha would have chosen she did not venture to speak.

"Hush, hush, child! do not talk so fast. Sit down, and let us see what all this means."

"O Mr. Digby, you will not put me with her?"

"Yes, Rotha, it is the best. We will try it, at least. Why Rotha!--Rotha!--"

She had flung herself down on the floor, on her knees, with her head on a chair; not crying, not a tear came; nor sobbing; but with the action of absolute despair. It would have done for high tragedy. Alas, so it is with trouble when one is young; it seems final and annihilating. Age knows better.

"Rotha," Mr. Digby said very quietly after a minute, "why do you dislike your aunt so? You do not know her."

"O Mr. Digby," cried the girl in accents of misery, "are you going to give me up to somebody else? Are you going to give me up to *her*?"

"No. Not to her nor to anybody. I am not going to give you up to anybody. Look here, Rotha. Look up, and bring your chair here and sit down by me, and we will talk this over. Come!"

Yielding to the imperative tone in his words, she obeyed; rose up and brought her chair close and sat down; but he was startled to see the change in her face. It was livid; and it was woe-begone. She took her place submissively; nevertheless he could perceive that there was a terrible struggle of pain going on in the girl. He put out his hand, took hers kindly and held it.

"Rotha--my child--I am not going to give you up to anybody," he repeated gravely.

Rotha thought it practically amounted to that, to place her in her aunt's house; words were not at command. A sort of sob wrung from her breast.

"What do you know about your aunt?"

"Not much,--but too much," Rotha laconically answered.

"Tell me what you know."

"I know she wasn't good to mother." Then, as Mr. Digby made no reply to this unanswerable statement, she went on;--"She is a hard woman; she didn't help her. She is rich, rich! and we were--She has everything in the world; she can do whatever she likes; she rides about in her beautiful carriage; and we--we were--you know!--we were--if it hadn't been for you--"

Rotha had choked and swallowed several times, and then the gathered passion overcame her. Thoughts and feelings and memories came like the incoming waves on a level shore piling up one upon another, until they could bear their own weight and rush no more and broke all together. The girl had striven to command herself and prevent the outbreak which Mr. Digby did not like; and the restraint had acted like the hindrance of the underlying sands, and allowed the tide of feeling to swell till there was no longer any check to it. Restraint was gone now, although Rotha did try to keep her sobs down; passion and grief burst out now and then in a wail of despair, and she struggled with the sobs which seemed to come from a breaking heart.

Mr. Digby let the storm have its way, meanwhile feeling a renewed presentiment that the aunt and niece would never get on well together. In the granite of Mrs. Busby's composition there lay, he judged, a good deal of iron, in the rough state of unpurified ore. Waves beat on such rock without making much impression, only breaking themselves to pieces. Would such encounters take place between them? Rotha's character was not soft, and did not lack its iron either; but in another and much more refined form, and in a widely different combination. Had he done well after all? And yet what else could he do? And at any rate it was too late now to go back.

He waited till the passion of the storm had somewhat lulled, and then called Rotha gently. Gently, but there was a certain ring in his voice too; and Rotha obeyed. She rose from the floor, dried her eyes and came and stood by the couch. She was in no manner relieved; passion had merely given place to an expression of helpless despair.

"Sit down, Rotha," said Mr. Digby. And when she had done it he took her hand again.

"You ought not to allow yourself such outbursts," he went on, still very gently.

"I could not help it. I tried--"

"I believe you tried; and for a time you did help it."

"I know it displeases you," she said. "I did not want to do so before you."

"It is not because it displeases me, that I want you not to do it; but because it is not right."

"Why not right?" she asked somewhat defiantly.

"Because it is not right for any one ever to lose command of himself."

Rotha seemed to prick up her ears at that, as if the idea were new, but she said nothing.

"You will ask me again perhaps why? Rotha, if you lose command of yourself, who takes it?"

Rotha's eye carried a startled inquiry now. "I suppose--nobody," she said.

"Do you think we have such an enemy as we have, and that he will let such an advantage go unimproved? No; when you lose command of yourself Satan takes it,--and uses it."

"What does he do with it?" said Rotha in full astonishment.

"According to circumstances. To tempt you to wrong, or to tempt you to folly; or if neither of those, to break down your mental and bodily powers, so that you shall be weaker to resist him next time."

"Mr. Digby--do you *think* so?"

"Certainly. And when people go on in a way like this, giving ground to Satan, he takes all they give, until finally he has the whole rule of them. Then they seem to their neighbours to be slaves of passion, or of greed, or of drink; but really they are 'possessed of the devil,' and those are the chains in which he holds them."

"Mr. Digby," said Rotha humbly, "do you think I have been losing ground?"

"I think you have been gaining ground, for a good while."

"I am sorry," she said simply. "But how can I help it, Mr. Digby?"

"You remember," he said. "You must be under one king or the other; there is no middle ground. 'Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin';--but, 'If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.'"

Rotha drew a deep sigh, and one or two fresh tears fell.

"Now," said he very gently, "do not let us get excited again, but let us talk quietly. What is all this about?"

"You are sending me away," said Rotha; "and you are all I have got."

"You are not going to lose me. That is settled. Now go on. What next?"

"But I shall not be with you?"

"Not every day, as here. But I hope to see you very often; and you can always write to me if you have anything in particular upon your mind."

"Then," said Rotha, her voice several shades clearer, "you are sending me to be with a person that I don't--respect."

"That is serious! Are you sure you are justified in such an opinion, with no more grounds?"

"I cannot help it," said Rotha. "I do not think I have reason to respect her."

"Then how are you going to get along together?"

"I am sure I do not know."

"Rotha, I may ask this of you. I ask of you to behave as a lady should, in your aunt's house. I ask you to be well-bred and well-mannered always; whatever you feel."

"Do you think I can, Mr. Digby?" said the girl looking earnestly at him.

"I am sure of it."

"But--do I know how?"

"I will give you an unfailing recipe," said Mr. Digby smiling.

"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; and for details, study the 13th chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians."

"Is that the chapter about charity?"

"About love. The word means love, not charity."

"Mr. Digby, it is very hard to act as if you loved people, when you do not."

"True," said he smiling. "That is what the world means by good manners. But what Christians should mean by that term is the real thing."

"And I do not think I can," Rotha went on.

"Do not try to make believe anything. But the courtesy of good manners you can give to everybody."

"If I do not lose command of myself," said Rotha. "I will try, Mr. Digby."

"I think you can do, pretty nearly, Rotha, whatever you try."

This declaration was a source of great comfort to the girl, and a great help towards its own justification; as Mr. Digby probably guessed. Nevertheless Rotha grieved, deeply and silently, through the days that followed. Her friend saw it, and with serious disquiet. That passion of pain and dismay with which she had greeted the first news of what was before her was no transient gust, leaving the air as clear as it had been previously. True, the storm was over. Rotha obtruded her feelings in no way upon his notice; she was quiet and docile as usual. But the happiness was gone. There were rings round her eyes, which told of watching or of weeping; her brow was clouded; and now and then Mr. Digby saw a tear or two come which she made good efforts to get rid of unseen. She was mourning, and it troubled him; but, as he said to himself over and over again, "there was no help for it." He was unselfish about it; for to himself personally there was no doubt but to have Rotha safely lodged with her aunt would be a great relief. He had other business to attend to.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. BUSBY'S HOUSE

By the beginning of the week Rotha had recovered command of herself, externally at least; and on the Monday Mr. Digby and his charge were to go to Mrs. Busby's. It was the first of November; dull, cloudy and cold; getting ready for snow, Mr. Digby said, to judge by the sky. From the clouds his eye came down to Rotha, who had just entered the room dressed for her departure.

"Rotha," said he, "what is that you have on?"

"My brown lawn, Mr. Digby."

"Lawn? on such a day as this? You want a warmer dress, my child."

Rotha hesitated and coloured.

"My warm dresses--are not very nice," she said with some difficulty. "I thought I must look as well as I could."

"And I have forgotten that the season was changing! and left you without proper provision. You see, Rotha, I never had the charge of a young lady before. Never mind, dear; that will soon be made right. But put on something warm, no matter how it looks. You will take cold with that thin dress."

Rotha hesitated.

"I don't think you will like it, if I put on my old winter frock," she said.

"I would like it better than your getting sick. Change your dress by all means."

When Rotha came in again, she was a different figure. She had put on an old grey merino, which had once belonged to her mother and had been made over for her. At the time she had rejoiced much over it; now Rotha had got a new standard for judging of dresses, and she seemed to herself very "mean" looking. Truly, the old grey gown had been made a good while ago; the fashion had changed, and Rotha had grown; it was scant now and had lost even a distant conformity with prevailing modes. Moreover it was worn, and it was faded, and it was not even very clean. Rotha thought Mr. Digby would hardly endure it; she herself endured it only under stress of authority. He looked at her a little gravely.

"That's the best you have, is it? Never mind, Rotha; it is I who am to blame. I am very much ashamed of myself, for forgetting that winter was coming."

He had never known what it was, in all his life, to want a thick coat or a thin coat and not find it in his wardrobe; and that makes people forget.

"This will not do, do you think it will, Mr. Digby?" said Rotha tentatively.

"Better than to have you get sick. It will keep you warm, will it not? and we will soon have you fitted up with better supplies."

It was not time quite for the carriage to be at the door, and Mr. Digby sat down to a bit of drawing; he was making a copy for Rotha. Rotha stood by, doubtful and thoughtful.

"Mr. Digby," she said at last shyly, "there is something I should like very much to ask."

"Ask it, Rotha."

"But I do not know whether you would like it--and yet I cannot know without asking--"

"Naturally. What is it, Rotha?"

"Mr. Digby, my mother hadn't anything at all, had she? Money, I mean."

"Of late? No, Rotha, I believe not."

The girl hesitated and struggled with herself.

"I thought so," she said. "And while it was you, I didn't mind. But now,--how will it be, Mr. Digby?"

Mr. Digby got at the sense of this by some intuition.

"Who will be at the charge of your schooling, you mean? and other things? Certainly I, Rotha, unless your aunt wishes very decidedly that it should be herself."

"She will not wish that," said the girl. "Then, Mr. Digby, when I am done with school--what am I to do? What do you want me to do? Because if I knew, I might work better to get ready for it."

"Well," said Mr. Digby, making some easy strokes with his pencil, every one of which however meant something,--"there is generally something for everybody to do in this world; but we cannot always tell what, till the time comes. The best way is to prepare yourself, as far as possible, for everything."

"But I cannot do that," said Rotha, with the nearest approach to a laugh that she had made since the previous Friday.

"Yes, you can. First, be a good woman; and then, get all the knowledge and all the accomplishments, and all the acquirements, that come in your way. Drawing, certainly, for you have a true love for that. How is it with music? Are you fond of it?"

"I don't know," Rotha said low. "Mr. Digby, can I not--some time--do something for you?"

"Yes," said he, looking up at her with a laughing glance, "you can do all these things for me. I want you to be as good a woman, and as wise a woman, and as accomplished a woman, as you are able to become."

"Then I will," said Rotha very quietly.

The carriage came. Rotha covered up her old dress as well as she could under her silk mantle, very ill satisfied with the joint effect. She behaved very well, however; was perfectly quiet during the drive, and only once asked,

"Mr. Digby, you said I might write to you?"

"As often as you like. But you will see me too, Rotha, though not every day. If anything goes wrong with you, let me know."

That was all; and then the carriage turned a corner and stopped in a street of high, regular, stately houses, with high flights of doorsteps. Poor Rotha felt her gown dreadfully out of place; but her bearing did not betray her. She was trying hard to form herself on Mr. Digby's model, and so to be even and calm and unimpassioned in her manners. Not easy, when a young heart beats as hers was beating then. They entered the house. Mrs. Busby was not in, the servant said; at the same time she opened the door of the parlour, and Mr. Digby and Rotha went in.

Nobody was there; only the luxurious presence of warmth and colour and softness and richness, whichever way the girl looked. She tried not to look; she fixed her eyes on the glowing grate; while a keen sense of wrong and a bitter feeling of resentment and opposition swelled her heart. This was how her aunt lived! and her mother had done sewing for her bread, and not got it. If the flowers in the carpet had been living exotics, they would have thriven in the warm air that surrounded them, and feared no frost; and her mother's fire had been fed by charity! It was to the credit of Rotha's budding power of self-command that she shewed nothing of what she felt. She was outwardly calm and impassive.

Then the heavy door was pushed inward and a figure appeared for which she was scarcely prepared. A young girl of about her own age, also a contrast. There was nothing but contrasts here. She was excessively pretty, and as lively as a soap bubble. Something of her mother's hardness of outlines, perhaps; but in that fifteen must needs be far different from fifty; and this face was soft enough, with a lovely tinting of white and red, charming little pearly teeth, a winning smile, and pretty movements. She was not so tall as Rotha; and generally they were as unlike as two girls could be. In dress too, as in everything else. This new-comer on the scene was as bright as a flower; in a new cashmere, fashionably made, of a green hue that set off the fresh tints of her skin, edged with delicate laces which softened the lines between the one and the other. She came in smiling and eager.

"Mr. Southwode! how long it is since we have seen you! What made you stay away so? Mamma is out; she told me if you came I must see you. I am so sorry she is out! No, I am very glad to see you; but I know you wanted to see mamma. I'll do as well as I can." And she smiled most graciously on him, but hitherto had not looked at Rotha, though Mr. Digby knew one glance of her eye had taken her all in.

"Miss Antoinette," said he, shaking hands with her, "this is your cousin."

The eyes came round, the smile faded.

"Oh!--" said she. "I knew it must be you. How do you do? Mamma is out; she'll be so sorry. But your room is ready. Would you like to go up to it at once, and take off your things?"--Then without waiting for an answer, she pulled the bell twice, and springing to the door cried out, "Lesbia! Lesbia!--Lesbia, where are you? O here you are. Lesbia, take this young lady--up stairs and shew her her room--you know, the little room that you put in order yesterday. Take her up there and shew her where things are; and then take her to mamma's room; do you understand? Miss Carpenter what is her name, Mr. Southwode? Rotha? O what a lovely name! Rotha, if you will go up stairs with the girl, she will shew you your way."

"I will not go yet, thank you," said Rotha.

Antoinette looked at her, seemingly taken aback at this.

"Don't you want to go up and take off your things?" she said. "I think you will be more comfortable."

"I would rather stay here."

Mr. Digby suppressed a smile, and had also to suppress a sigh. This by-play was very clear to him, and gave him forebodings. He hoped it was not clear to Rotha. However, he did not much prolong his stay after that. He knew it was pain to Rotha and better ended; she must learn to swim in these new waters, and the sooner she was pushed from her hold the kinder the hard service would be. So he took leave of Miss Antoinette, and then, taking Rotha's cold hand, he did what he had never done before; stooped down and kissed her. He said only one word, "Remember!"--and went away.

He had thought to give the girl a little bit of comfort; and he had not only comforted her, but lifted her up into paradise, for the moment. A whole flood tide of pleasure seemed to pour itself into Rotha's heart, making her deaf and blind to what was around her or what Antoinette said. She went up stairs like one on wings, with the blood tingling in every corner of her frame. If she had known, or if Mr. Digby had guessed, what that kiss was to cost her. But that is the way in this life; we start and shiver at the entrance of what is to be a path of flowers to our feet; and we welcome eagerly the sugared bait which is to bring us into a network of difficulty.

There was an under current of different feeling however, in Rotha's mind; and the two girls as they went up stairs were as great a contrast to each other as could be imagined. The one carried a heart conscious of a secret and growing weight; the other had scarce gravity enough to keep her to the earth's surface. So the one tripped lightly on ahead, and the other mounted slowly, rebelling inwardly at every step she set her foot upon. What a long flight of stairs! and how heavily carpeted; and with what massive balusters framed in. Nothing like it had Rotha ever seen, and she set her teeth as she mounted. Arrived at last at the second floor, Antoinette passed swiftly along to the foot of another flight. "There is mamma's room," said she, pointing to an open door; "and that is mine," indicating a small room adjoining; "now here is yours." She had got to the top, and preceded Rotha into the small room off the hall at the head of the stairs.

It was very small, of course; furnished with sufficient neatness, but certainly with old things. It was not like the rest of the house. That was no matter; the furniture was still as good as Rotha had been accustomed to in her best days, at home; yet she missed something. It looked poor and bare, and very cramped. Perhaps one reason might be, that the day was chill and dark and here were no signs of a fire, nor even a place to make one; and *that* luxury Rotha had never missed. Her mother and she had kept scant fires at one time, it is true; but since Mr. Digby had taken the oversight of their affairs, their rooms had been always deliciously warm. Anyhow, the place made a cheerless impression on Rotha. She took off her hat and mantle.

"Where are they to go?" she asked her companion.

"You can put the mantle in one of those drawers."

"Not my hat, though."

"Yes, you could, if you turn up the edges a little. O never mind; it'll go somewhere, and you can't wear that hat any longer now. It's too cold. Let us go down to mamma's room."

This was the large front room on the second floor. Here was a warm fire, a cosy set of easy chairs, tables with work, a long mirror in the door of the wardrobe between the windows; a general air of comfort and household living. Antoinette's room opened into this, and the door stood thrown back, letting the fire warmth penetrate there also; and a handsome dressing table was visible standing before the window. Antoinette stirred the fire and sat down. Rotha stood at the corner of the hearth, charging herself to be cool and keep quiet.

"Where did you come from?" Antoinette began cheerfully. "We might as well get acquainted."

"Will that help you?" said Rotha.

"Help me what?"

"You said we might as well get acquainted."

"Well I want to know where you come from, to be sure," said the other girl laughing. "I always want to know where people come from. It's one of the first things I want to know."

"I come from Medwayville," said Rotha. "That is a place in the western part of the state."

"But you don't come from there now. I know you did live in Medwayville.
But where do you come from now?"

There sprang up in Rotha's mind an instant and unwonted impulse of reserve; she hardly knew why. So she answered,

"Mr. Digby brought me; he can tell you about the place better than I can."

"Why, don't you know where you have been living?"

"I know the place when I see it. I could not find my way to it."

"Then you can't have the organ of locality. Do you know about organs, and bumps on the head? That's what is called phrenology. Mamma thinks a great deal of phrenology; she'll be examining your head, the first thing."

"Examining my head!"

"Yes, to find out what you are, you know. She has a little map, with everything marked on it? so she'll feel your head to see where the bumps are, and where she finds a bump she will look in her map to see what's there, and then she'll know you have it."

"What?" said Rotha.

"*That*; whatever the map says the bump ought to be."

"There are no bumps on my head," said Rotha a little proudly; "it is quite round."

"O you're mistaken; everybody has bumps; when the head is round, it means something, I forget what; whether bad or good. Mamma'll know; and she'll judge you by your head. How long have you known Mr. Southwode?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know how long you have known him?"

"I do not know just how long it is."

"O I didn't mean that. Have you known him a month?"

"More than that."

"How came you to know him at all?"

"He came to see us?"

"Us? You and aunt Eunice? What made him go to see you? at first, I mean."

"How can I tell?" said Rotha, more and more displeased.

"Well, do you like him?"

The answer did not come suddenly.

"Do I like Mr. Digby?" Rotha said slowly. "I think I do."

"*We* do. What sort of a carriage was he in when he was overturned?"

"A little phaeton."

"One-horse?"

"Yes."

"Was he alone?"

"No."

"What became of the other person?"

"Thrown out, like him."

"Hurt?"

"No."

"Do you know who it was?"

"Yes."

"Who was it?"

"It was I."

"*You?*" exclaimed Antoinette. "Were *you* driving with Mr. Southwode? How came you to be going with him?"

"Why should I not?"

"Why--" with a glance at Rotha's dress. Rotha saw and understood, but would not enlighten her.

"Did you ever go with him before?"

"Yes."

"How many times?"

But Rotha was getting amused now, and was mistress of the situation.

"Does it matter how many times?" she said quite unexcitedly.

"He never took *me* anywhere," said Antoinette. "I declare, I'll make him. It isn't using me well. What makes you call him Mr. Digby?"

"I have been accustomed to call him so."

"Did he tell you to?"

"Yes."

"I wonder if he'd let me? I don't believe mamma would, though. She won't let you either do it any more. Digby is Mr. Southwode's first name. She would say it was too familiar, to call him by his first name, even with a 'Mr.' to it. Mamma's a little poky at times. But how did you come to know him first? you haven't told me."

"I suppose, the same way you came to know him," said Rotha slowly.

But the suggestion of anything similar in what concerned the social circumstances of her and her cousin, struck Antoinette with such a sense of novelty that, for a moment she was nonplussed. Then her eye fell upon the clock on the mantel-piece, and she started up.

"I must rush right off," she said; "it is time for my drawing lesson.
That's one thing I don't get in school. Have you ever been to school?"

"No."

"I suppose you don't know much, then. Won't you have to work, though! I am sorry I must go and leave you alone; but mamma will be in by and by."

While she was speaking, Antoinette had been putting on her wraps to go out; handsome, ample, and becoming they were. A dark green cloak of some figured, lustrous stuff; a little green hat with a coquettish leather; gloves fitting nicely; and finally a little embroidered pocket-handkerchief stuffed into an outer pocket of her cloak. Then taking her portfolio, Antoinette hurried away.

Rotha felt a sense of uneasiness growing upon her. She was not at home, and nothing promised her that she ever would be, in this house. For awhile she sat still where she was, looking and thinking; or rather feeling; for thought was scarcely organized. She was tired at last of the stillness, the ticking of the clock and the soft stir of the coals in the grate or falling of ashes into the pan. She went down to the parlour again, having a mind to become a little acquainted with her new surroundings while she could make her observations unobserved; and besides, that parlour was a study to Rotha; she had seen nothing like it. She went down and took her seat upon an ottoman, and surveyed things. How beautiful it all was, she thought; beyond imagination beautiful. The colours and figures in the carpet; the rich crimsons and soft drabs, and the thick, rich pile to the stuff, what a wonder they were to her. The window curtains, hanging in stately folds and draperies of drab, with broad bands of crimson satin shot through the tamer colour, how royal they were! And did anybody ever see anything so magnificent as the glass in the pier, which filled the space from floor to ceiling between those royal draperies? The furniture was dark and polished, as to the wood; covers of striped drilling hid what might be the beauty of cushions beneath, and Rotha was not one of the sort that can lift a corner to see what was hidden. There was enough not hidden, and she could wait. But as her eye roved from one thing to another, her heart gathered fuel for a fire that presently rivalled its more harmless neighbour in the grate; a fierce, steady, intense glow of wrath and indignation. This was how her mother's sister lived and had been living; and her mother in the poor little rooms in Jane Street. Magnificence and luxury here; and there toil and the bread of charity. And not a hand held out to help, nor love enough to be called upon for it. Rotha's heart fed its fire with dark displeasure. There was built up a barrier between her and her aunt, which threatened perpetual severance. Kindness might break it down; Rotha was open to kindness; but from this quarter she did not expect it. She bent her determination however on behaving herself so as Mr. Digby had wished. She would not shew what she thought. She would be quiet and polite and unexcited, like him. Poor Rotha! The fire should burn in her, and yet she would keep cool!

She was studying the gas reading stand on the centre table, marvelling at the beauty of its marble shaft and the mystery of its cut glass shade, where bunches of grapes and vine leaves wandered about in somewhat stiff order; when the door of the room opened softly and Mrs. Busby came in. Rotha divined immediately that it was her aunt; the lady wore still the bonnet and the shawl in which she had been abroad, and had the air of the mistress, indefinable but well to be recognized. Softly she shut the door behind her and came towards the fire. Rotha did not dislike her appearance. The features were good, the eyes keen, the manner quiet

"And this is my niece Rotha," she said with a not unkindly smile. "How do you do?" She took her hand and kissed her. Alas! the kiss was smooth ice. Rotha remembered the last kiss that had touched her lips; how warm and soft and firm too it had been; it meant something. This means nothing but civility, thought Rotha to herself.

"You are all alone?" Mrs. Busby went on. "Antoinette had to go out. Shall we go up stairs, to my room? We never sit here in the morning."

Rotha followed her aunt up stairs, where Mrs. Busby laid off hat and shawl and made herself comfortable, calling a maid to take them and to brighten up the fire.

"I'll have luncheon up here, Lesbia," she said by the way. "Now Rotha, tell me all about yourself and your mother. I have heard nothing for a long while, unless from some third person."

"Mother was ill a long time," said Rotha, uncertain how to render obedience to this command.

"Yes, I know. When did you come to New York?"

"It is--two years now."

"Two years!" Mrs. Busby started up in her chair a little, and a faint colour rose in her cheeks; then it faded and her lips took a hard set. "Ill all that time?"

"No. She was not ill for the first year."

"Say, 'No ma'am,' my dear. That is the proper way. Do you know what induced her to move to New York, Rotha?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Rotha colouring.

"May I know?"

"Didn't you know we were very poor?" said Rotha in a lower voice.

"How was *that* the reason?"

"We couldn't--I mean--she couldn't, get work at Medwayville."

"Get work!" Mrs. Busby was silent. Perhaps that was an unfruitful, and would prove an unrefreshing, field of inquiry. She would leave it unexplored for the present. She paused a little.

"So since then you have been living in New York?"

"Yes."

A longer pause followed. Mrs. Busby looked at the fire and raised one eyebrow.

"Under whose care have you been living, my dear, since you lost your mother's?"

Rotha hesitated. Great soreness of heart combined now with another feeling to make her words difficult. She did not at all want to answer. Nevertheless the girl's temper was to be frank, and she saw no way of evasion here.

"I have had nobody but Mr. Digby," she said.

"Mr. Digby! Mr. Southwode, you mean? That is his name, my dear; don't speak of him as 'Mr. Digby.'"

Rotha's mouth opened, and closed. She was forming herself with all her might on Mr. Digby's model; and besides that, she was trying to obey his injunctions about pleasant behaviour.

"Where have you lived all this time?" a little shorter than the former questions had been put.

"Since we came to New York?"

"No, no; since you have been under this gentleman's care? Where have you been?"

"In a pleasant place near the river. I do not know the name of the street."

"Who took care of you there, Rotha?"

Rotha lifted her eyes. "Mr. Digby--Mr. Southwode."

"Mr. Southwode! Did he live there himself?"

"Yes, at that time; not always."

"Near the river, and in New York?" said Mrs. Busby, mystified.

"I did not say in New York. It was out of the city."

"I was out of town," said Mrs. Busby musingly. "I wish I had come home earlier, that I might have received you at once. But I am glad I have got you now, my dear. Now you will have the pleasure of going to school with Antoinette. You will like that, won't you?"

"I do not know, ma'am. I think so."

"Why you want to learn, don't you? You don't want to be ignorant; and the only way is to go to school and study hard. Have you ever been to school at all?"

"No, ma'am."

"You will have a great deal to do. And the very first thing for me to do is to see to your wardrobe, that you may begin at once. Your box has come; I found it down stairs when I came in, and I had it taken right up to your room. Have you the key?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then go up, my dear, immediately; and bring down all your best dresses. Then I can see what is to be done."

As Rotha went out, enter Antoinette.

"O mamma, here you are! I'm glad, I'm sure. I don't want that young lady on *my* hands any more."

"How do you like her, Antoinette?"

"Mamma, did you ever see such a figure? You won't let her go down stairs till she is decently dressed, will you? I should be ashamed for even Lesbia to see her."

"Lesbia has got to see her and make the best of it."

"O but servants always make the worst of it. And company--she *couldn't* be seen by company, mamma. Why she looks as if she had come out of the year one. To have such a creature supposed to belong to us!"

"Mr. Southwode brought her?"

"Yes, mamma; and you should have seen the parting. I declare, it was rather striking! He kissed her, mamma, fancy! a real smacking kiss; and Rotha coloured up as if she was delighted. Did you ever hear anything like it?"

"She has done with him now," said Mrs. Busby drily.

"How'll you manage, mamma, if he comes and asks for her?"

"Get your things off, Antoinette, and make yourself ready for dinner. Ah, here comes Rotha."

Rotha's arms were full of muslin and lawn dresses, which she deposited on the table. Antoinette forgot or disregarded the order she had received and came to take part in the inspection. With a face of curiosity and business at once, Mrs. Busby unfolded, examined, refolded, one after another.

"Mamma! how pretty that is!" exclaimed her daughter; "and that ashes of roses is lovely!"

"Fine," said Mrs. Busby; "very fine. No sparing of money. Well made. Your mother cannot have felt herself in straits when she made such purchases as these, Rotha."

Rotha's heart gave a bound, but she shut her lips and was silent. Some instinct within her was stronger than even the impulse to justify her mother. What did it matter, what her aunt thought?

"These are all summer dresses," Mrs. Busby went on. "They are of no use at this season. Where are your warm clothes?"

"I have none," said Rotha, with sad unwillingness. "This is the best I have on."

"That?" exclaimed Mrs. Busby; and there was a pause. "Nothing better than that, my dear?"

"The others are worse. They are all worn out."

A heavy step was heard coming up the stair at this moment. It reached the landing place.

"Mr. Busby--" cried the voice of his wife, a little uplifted, "don't come in here--I am engaged."

"Very well, my dear," came answer in a husky, rough voice, and the step passed on.

"The first thing is a school dress," Mrs. Busby proceeded. "Antoinette, fetch that purple poplin of yours, that you wore last winter, and let us see if that would not do, for a while at least, till something can be made."

Nothing that fits her can fit me, thought Rotha; but with some self-command she kept her thoughts to herself. Antoinette brought the dress in question and held it up, chuckling.

"It's about six inches too short, I should say, and wouldn't meet round the waist by three at least."

"Try it on, Rotha."

Very unwillingly Rotha did as she was told. Mrs. Busby pulled and twitched and stroked the dress here and there.

"It is a little too short. Could be let out."

"Then the marks of the gathers would shew, mamma."

"That could be hidden by a basque."

"There isn't much stuff left to make a basque. Miss Hubbell cut it all up for the trimming."

"It could be made to do for a few days. I am anxious that Rotha should lose no time in beginning school. See, it is November now."

All this was extremely distasteful to the subject of it. She knew right well that her cousin's dress could never be made to look as if it belonged to her, unless it were wholly taken to pieces and put together again; neither was the stuff of the dress very clean, and the trimmings had the forlorn, jaded look of a thing which has been worn to death. The notion of appearing in it revolted her unbearably.

"Aunt Serena," she said, "I would just as lief wear my old dress, if you don't mind. It would do as well as this, and be no trouble."

"Well--" said Mrs. Busby; "it would take some time, certainly, to fit Antoinette's to you; perhaps that is the best way; and it is only for a day or two; it wouldn't matter much. Well, then you may take these things away, Rotha, and put them by."

"Where?" said Rotha. "In my trunk?"

"Yes, for the present That will do."

Rotha carried her muslins up stairs again, and had some ado not to sit down and cry. But she would not, and fought the weakness successfully down, appearing before her aunt again in a few minutes with an imperturbable exterior. Which she was able to maintain about ten minutes.

Antoinette was dressing for dinner; dressing in front of her mother's fire; making herself rather striking in a blue silk, over which her long curling fair hair tumbled as over a pretty foil. Mrs. Busby also was putting herself in order. Rotha looked on. Presently the dinner bell rang.

"I'll send you up your dinner, Rotha," Mrs. Busby said, turning to her niece. "Till we get some gowns made for you, you must keep in hiding. I'll send it up to you here, hot and nice."

Rotha said not one word, but two flames shot into her cheeks, and from her dark eyes flared two such lightnings, that Mrs. Busby absolutely shrank back, and did not meet those eyes again while she remained in the room. But in that one moment aunt and niece had taken their position towards each other, and what is more, recognized it.

"I shall have my hands full with that girl," Mrs. Busby muttered as she went down stairs. "Did you see how she looked at me?"

"I didn't know she could look so," replied Antoinette. "Isn't she a regular spitfire?"

"I shall know how to manage her," Mrs. Busby said, with her mouth set.
"She is not at all like her mother."

Rotha, left in the dressing room, sat down and laid her head on her arms on the table. Wrath and indignation were boiling within her. The girl dimly felt more than her reason could as yet grasp; somewhat sinister which ran through all her aunt's manner towards her and had undoubtedly called forth this last regulation. What did it mean? So she could go to school in her old dress and be seen by a hundred strange eyes, but might not sit at the table with her aunt's family and take her dinner in their company! And this was the very dress in which she had gone to the Park with Mr. Digby more than once. *He* had not minded it. And here there was nobody that had not seen it already, except Mr. Busby.

Poor Rotha's heart, when once a passion of displeasure seized it, was like the seething pot in Ezekiel's vision. She was helpless to stay the outpour of anger and pride and grief and contempt and mortification, every one of which in turn came uppermost and took forms of utterance in her imagination. She had a firm determination to follow Mr. Digby's teaching and example; but for the present she was alone, and the luxury of passion might storm as it would. Upon this state of things came the dinner, borne by the hands of Lesbia, who was a very sable serving maid; otherwise very sharp. She set the tray on the table. Rotha lifted a white face and fiery eyes, and glared at it and at her. Gladly would

she have sent it all down again; but she was hungry, and the tray steamed a pleasant savour towards her.

"Thank you," said Rotha, with the courtesy she had learned of her friend.

"Would you like anything else?" the girl asked with an observing look.

"Nothing else, thank you."

"Why aint miss down stairs with the rest?"

"I couldn't go down to-day. That will do, thank you."

Lesbia withdrew, and Rotha mustered her viands. A glass of water and a piece of bread, very nicely arranged; a plate with hot potatoes, turnips mashed, beets, and three small shrimps fried.

Rotha cleared the board, and found the fish very small. By and by came up Lesbia with a piece of apple pie. She took the effect of the empty dishes.

"Did miss have enough?"

"It will do very well, thank you," said Rotha, attacking the piece of pie, which was also small.

"Didn't you want a bit of the mutton?"

"Mutton!" exclaimed Rotha, and again an angry colour shewed itself in her cheeks.

"Roast mutton and jelly and sweet potatoes. You hadn't only fish, had ye?
Don't ye like yaller potatoes? Car'linna potatoes?"

"Yes, I like them," said Rotha indifferently.

N. B. She had eaten them but a few times in her life, and thought them a prime delicacy.

"I'll bring you some if you like, and some of the meat."

"No, thank you," said Rotha, finishing her pie and depositing that plate with the rest.

"You'll have time enough," said Lesbia sympathizingly. "They won't come up stairs; they stays down to see company."

"No, thank you," said Rotha again; but a new pang seized her. Company!
Mr. Digby would be company. What if he should come?

Lesbia went off with the tray, after casting several curious glances at the new comer, whom she had heard talked of enough to give her several clues. Rotha was left in the darkening dressing room; for the afternoon had come to its short November end.

CHAPTER XIII.

NOT DRESSED.

Mr. Digby did not come that evening. Next evening he did. He came early, just as the family had finished dinner. Mrs. Busby welcomed him with outstretched hand and a bland smile.

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Southwode," she said, before he had time to begin anything. "I want to know what you think of this proposition to open picture galleries and libraries to the people on Sunday?"

"The arguments for it are plausible."

"Certainly plausible. What do you think?"

"It is of no consequence, is it, what any individual thinks?"

"Why yes, as it seems to me. By comparing views and the reasons given in support of the views, one may hope to attain some sound conclusion."

"Is it a matter for reason to consider?"

Mrs. Busby opened her eyes. "Is not everything that, Mr. Southwode?"

"I should answer 'no,' if I answered."

"Please answer, because I am very much in earnest; and I like to drive every question to the bottom. Give me an instance to the contrary."

"When you tell Miss Antoinette, for example, to put on india rubbers when she goes out in the wet, is she to exercise her reason upon the thickness of the soles of her boots?"

"Yes," cried the young lady referred to; "of course I am! India rubbers are horrid things anyhow; do you think I am going to put them on with boots an inch thick?"

Mr. Southwode turned his eyes upon her with one of his grave smiles. Mrs. Busby seemed to ponder the subject.

"Is it raining to-night, Mr. Southwode?" Antoinette went on.

"Yes."

"How provoking! then I can't go out. Mr. Southwode, you never took me anywhere, to see anything."

"True, I believe," he answered. "How could I ask Mrs. Busby to trust me with the care of such an article?"

"What 'such an article'?"

"Subject to damage; in which case the damage would be very great."

"I am not subject to damage. I never get cold or anything. Mr. Southwode, won't you take me, some night, to see the Minstrels?"

"They are not much to see."

"But to hear, they are. Won't you, Mr. Southwode? I am crazy to hear them, and mamma won't take me; and papa never goes anywhere but to his office and to court; won't you, Mr. Southwode?"

"Perhaps; if Mrs. Busby will honour me so much."

"O mamma will trust *you*, I know. Then the first clear evening, Mr. Southwode? the first that you are at leisure?"

Without answering her he turned to Mrs. Busby.

"How is Rotha?"

"Very well!" the lady answered smoothly.

"Shall I have the pleasure of seeing her?"

"I am afraid, not to-night. She was unable to come down stairs this afternoon, and so took her dinner alone. Next time, I hope, she will be able to see you."

Mr. Digby privately wondered what the detaining cause could be, but thought it most discreet not to inquire; at least, not in this quarter. "Is the school question decided?" he therefore went on quietly.

"Why no. I have been debating the pros. and cons.; in which process one is very apt to get confused. As soon as one makes up one's mind to forego certain advantages in favour of certain others, the rejected ones immediately rise up in fresh colours of allurement before the mind, and disturb one's judgment, and the whole calculation has to be gone over

again."

"The choice lies between--?"

"Mrs. Mulligan, Miss Wordsworth, and Mrs. Mowbray, have the highest name in the city."

"And may I know the supposed counter advantages and disadvantages?"

"I'll tell you, Mr. Southwode," said Antoinette. "At Mrs. Mulligan's you learn French and manners. At Miss Wordsworth's you learn arithmetic and spelling. At Mrs. Mowbray's you learn Latin and the Catechism."

Mr. Southwode looked to Mrs. Busby.

"That's rather a caricature," said the lady smiling; "but it has some truth. I think Mrs. Mowbray's is quite as fashionable a school as Mrs. Mulligan's. It is quite as dear."

"Is it thought desirable, that it should be fashionable?"

"Certainly; for that shews what is public opinion. Besides, it secures one against undesirable companions for a girl. Both at Mrs. Mulligan's and Mrs. Mowbray's the pupils come from the very best families, both South and North. There is a certain security in that."

Mr. Southwode allowed the conversation presently to take another turn, and soon took his leave.

Rotha had watched and listened from the upper hall; had heard him come in, and then had waited in an ecstasy of impatient eagerness till she should be sent for. She could hear the murmur of voices in the parlour; but otherwise the house was ominously quiet. No doors opening, no bell to call the servant, no stir at all; until the parlour door opened and Mr. Digby came out. Rotha was in a very agony, half ready to rush down, unsummoned, and see him; and yet held back by a shy feeling of proud reserve. He could ask for her if he had wanted her, she thought bitterly; and while she lingered he had put on his overshoes and was gone. Rotha crept up stairs to her own room, feeling desperately disappointed. That her aunt might have made excuses to keep her up stairs, she divined; but the thought put her in a rage. She had to sit a long while looking out of her window at the lights twinkling here and there through the rain, before the fever in her blood and her brain had cooled down enough to let her go to bed and to sleep.

The next day she began her school experience. The intervening day had been used by Mrs. Busby to make a call upon Mrs. Mowbray, in which she explained that she had an orphan niece left under her care, for whom she much desired the training and the discipline of Mrs. Mowbray's excellent school. The girl had had no advantages; her mother had been ill and the child neglected; she supposed Mrs. Mowbray would find that she knew next to nothing of all that she ought to know. So it was arranged that Rotha should accompany her cousin the very next morning, and make her beginning in one of the younger classes.

Rotha went in her old grey dress. The walk was not long. Antoinette stopped at the area gate of a house in a fine open street.

"Where are you going?" said Rotha.

"Here. This is the place."

"This? Why it is a very handsome house," said Rotha. "As good as yours."

"Of course it is handsome," Antoinette replied. "Do you think my mother would let me go to a shabby place. Handsome! of course it is. Come down this way; we don't ring the bell."

What a new world it was to Rotha! In the lower hall the girls took off bonnets and wraps, hanging them up on hooks arranged there. Then Antoinette took her up stairs, up a second flight of stairs, through halls and stairways which renewed Rotha's astonishment. Was this a school? All the arrangements seemed like those of an elegant private home; soft carpet was on the stairs, beautiful engravings hung on the walls. The school rooms filled the second floor; they were already crowded, it seemed to Rotha, with rows and ranks of scholars of all sizes, from ten years old up. Antoinette and she, being later than the rest, slipped into the first seats they could find, near the door.

There was deep silence and great order, and then Rotha heard a voice in the next room beginning to read a chapter in the Bible. The sound of the voice struck her and made her wish to get a sight of the reader; but that was impossible, for

a bit of partition wall hid her and indeed most of the room in which she was from Rotha's view. So Rotha's attention concentrated itself upon what she could see. The pleasant, bright apartments; the desks before which sat so many well-dressed and well-looking girls; ah, they were very well dressed, and many of them, to her fancy, very richly dressed; as for the faces, she found there was the usual diversity. But what would anybody think of a girl coming among them so very shabby and meanly attired as she was? If she had known-- However, self-consciousness was not one of Rotha's troubles, and soon in her admiration of the maps and pictures on the walls she almost forgot her own poor little person. She was aware that after the reading came a prayer; but though she knelt as others knelt, I am bound to say very little of the sense of the words found its way to her mind.

After that the girls separated. Rotha was introduced by her cousin to a certain Miss Blodgett, one of the teachers, under whose care she was placed, and by whom she was taken to a room apart and set down to her work along with a class of some forty girls, all of them or nearly all, younger than she was. And here, for a number of days, Rotha's school life went on monotonously. She was given little to do that she could not do easily; she was assigned no lessons that were not already familiar; she was put to acquire no knowledge that she did not already possess. She got sight of nobody but Miss Blodgett and the girls; for every morning she was sure to be crowded into that same corner at school-opening, where she could not look at Mrs. Mowbray; nobody else wanted that place, so they gave it to her; and Rotha was never good at self-assertion, unless at such times as her blood was up. She took the place meekly. But school was very tiresome to her; and it gave her nothing to distract her thoughts from her troubles at home.

Those were threefold, to take them in detail. She wore still the old dress; she was consequently still kept up stairs; and it followed also of course that Mr. Digby came and went and she had no sight of him. It happened thus.

Several days he allowed to pass without calling again. Not that he forgot Rotha, or was careless about her; but he partly knew his adversary and judged this course wise, for Rotha's sake. His first visit had been on Tuesday evening; he let a week go by, and then he went again. Mrs. Busby was engaged with other visitors; he had to post-pone the inquiries he wished to make. Meanwhile Antoinette attacked him.

"Mr. Southwode,--now it is a nice evening, and you promised;--will you take me to the Minstrels?"

"I always keep my promises."

"Then shall we go?" with great animation.

"Did I say I would go to-night?"

"No; but to-night is a good time; as good as any. Ah, Mr. Southwode! let us go. You'll never take me, if you do not to-night."

"What would Mrs. Busby say?"

"O she'd say yes. Of course she'd say yes. Mamma always says yes when I ask her things. Mamma! I say, mamma! listen to me one moment; may I go with Mr. Southwode?"

One moment Mrs. Busby turned her head from the friend with whom she was talking, looked at her daughter, and said, "Yes"; then turned again and went on with what she was saying. Antoinette jumped up.

"And bring your cousin too," said Mr. Southwode as she was flying off.
Antoinette stopped.

"Rotha? she can't go."

"Why can she not go?"

"She has got nothing ready to wear out yet. Mamma hasn't had time to get the things and have 'em made. She couldn't go."

"She might wear what she wore when I brought her here," Mr. Digby suggested. Antoinette shook her head.

"O no! Mamma wouldn't let her go out so. She *couldn't*, now that she is under her care, you know. Her things are not fit at all."

"Will you have the kindness to send word to your cousin that I should like to see her for a few minutes?"

"O she can't come down?"

"Why not?"

"O she's in no condition. Mamma--mamma! Mr. Southwode wants to see Rotha."

"I am very sorry!" said Mrs. Busby smoothly and calmly, turning again from the discourse she was carrying on,--"I have sent her to bed with a tumbler of hot lemonade."

"What is the matter?"

"A slight cold--nothing troublesome, I hope; but I thought best to take it in time. I do not want her studies to be interrupted."

Mr. Southwode was powerless against this announcement, and thought his own thoughts, till Mrs. Busby drew him into the discussion which just then engaged her. Upon this busy talk presently came Antoinette, hatted and cloaked, and drawing on her gloves. Stood and waited.

"Mr. Southwode--I am ready," she said, as he did not attend to her.

"For the Minstrels?" said he, with that very unconcerned manner of his.

"But, Miss Antoinette, would not your cousin like to go?"

"She *can't*, you know. Where are your ears, Mr. Southwode? Mamma explained to you that she was in bed."

"Then do you not agree with me, that it would be the kindest thing to defer our own pleasure until she can share it?"

Antoinette flushed and coloured, and tears of disappointment came into her eyes. A little tinge rose in Mrs. Busby's cheeks too.

"Go and take your cloak off," she said coldly. "And Antoinette, you had better see that your lessons for to-morrow morning are all ready."

Mr. Southwode thereupon took his departure. If he had known what eyes and ears were strained to get knowledge of him at that moment, I think he would have stood his ground and taken some very decided measures. But he could not see from the lighted hall below up into the darkness of the third story, even' if it could have occurred to him to try. There stood however a white figure, leaning over the balusters, and very well aware whose steps were going through the hall and out at the front door. Poor Rotha had obeyed orders and undressed and gone to bed, though she insisted her throat was only a very little irritated; and neither the one fact nor the other had prevented her from jumping tip to listen when the door bell rang, and again when steps she knew came out from the parlour. Again he had been here, and again she had missed him. Of course he could do nothing when told that she was in bed with a cold. Rotha went back into her room and stood trembling, not with a chill, though the night was cold enough, but with a fever of rage and desperation. She opened the window and poured out the lemonade which she had not touched; she shut the window and wrung her hands. She seemed to be in a net, in a cage, in a prison; and the walls of her prison were so invisible that she could not get at them to burst them. She would write to Mr. Digby, only she did not know his address. Would he not write to her, perhaps? Rotha was in a kind of fury of impatience and indignation; this thought served to give her a little stay to hold by.

And a letter did come for her the very next evening; and Rotha's eyes never saw it, nor did her ears hear of it.

Neither did her new dresses come to light; and evening after evening her condition was not changed. She was prisoner up stairs with her books and studies, which did not occupy her; and hour after hour Rotha stood in the hall and listened, or sat watching. She could not hear Mr. Digby's voice again. She wondered what had power to detain him. With craving anxiety and the strain of hope and fear, Rotha's cheek began to grow pale. It was getting at last beyond endurance. She went through her school duties mechanically, thinking of something else, yet doing all that was required of her; for, as I said, it was ground that she had gone over already. She queried with herself whether Mr. Southwode might not come even to the school to seek her; it seemed so impossible that she should be utterly kept from the sight of him. All this while Rotha never spoke his name before her aunt or cousin; never asked a question about him or his visits. By what subtle instinct it is hard to tell, she knew the atmosphere of the house was not favourable to the transmission of those particular sounds.

One thing, one day, had made a break in her gloomy thoughts. She was in her class, in the special room appropriated to that class, busy as usual; when the door opened and a lady came in whom Rotha had not fairly seen before, yet whom she at once recognized for what she was, the head of the establishment. Rotha's eyes were fascinated. It was a tall figure, very stately and dignified as well as graceful; handsomely and carefully dressed; but Rotha took in that fact without knowing what the lady wore, she was so engrossed with the face and manner of this vision. The manner was at once gracious and commanding; courteous exceedingly, while the air of decision and the tone of authority were well marked. But the face! It was wonderfully lovely; with fair features and kind eyes; the head sat well upon the shoulders, and the hair was arranged with very rare grace around the delicate head. So elegant a head one very rarely sees, as was Mrs. Mowbray's, although the dressing of the hair was as simple as possible. The hair was merely twisted up in a loose knot or coil at the back; the effect was what not one in a thousand can reach with all the arts of the hair-dresser. This lovely apparition paused a minute or two before Miss Blodgett, while some matter of business was discussed; then the observant eyes came to the young stranger in the class, and a few steps brought them close up to her.

"This is Miss Carpenter, isn't it?--yes. How do you do, my dear." She took Rotha's hand kindly. "How is your aunt, Mrs. Busby?"

Rotha answered. Perhaps those watchful eyes saw that there was no pleasure in the answer.

"Your cousin--she is in Miss Graham's class, is she not?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, I hope you have made some friends here. Miss Doolittle, won't you be helpful to Miss Carpenter if you can? she is a stranger among us.-- Good morning, young ladies!"

The lady swept away from the room; but all that day there hovered in Rotha's thoughts a vision of beauty and grace and dignity, an accent of kindness, a manner of love and authority, which utterly fascinated and wholly captivated her. It was quite a sweetener of that day's dry work. She looked to see the vision come again the next day, and the next; in vain; but Rotha now knew the voice; and not a word was let fall from those lips, in reading or prayer, at the school opening now, that she did not listen to.

Days went on. At last one day Mrs. Busby said it was no use to wait any longer for the mantua-makers; Rotha might as well come down and have her dinner with the family. She could not stay in the drawing room of course, until she was decently dressed; but she might as well come to dinner. Rotha could not understand why so much could not have been granted from the first; there was nobody at the dinner table but her aunt and cousin and Mr. Busby. Mr. Busby was a very tall, thin man, always busy with newspapers or sheets of manuscript; whose "Good morning, my dear!" in that peculiar husky voice of his, was nearly all Rotha ever heard him say. He took his breakfast, or his dinner, and went off to his study at once.

Rotha climbed the stairs to Mrs. Busby's dressing room, after the meal was over, and sat down to think. She was consuming herself in impatience and fretting. By and by Lesbia came in to see to the fire.

"Lesbia," said Rotha with sudden resolution, "will you do something for me?" She looked at the girl eagerly.

"Mebbe, miss. Like to know what 'tis, fust."

"It is only, to tell me something," said Rotha lowering her voice.

"Aint nothin' harder 'n to tell things," said the girl. "That's the hardest thing I know."

"It isn't hard, if you are willing."

"Don' know about that. Well, fire away, Miss Rotha. What you want?"

Rotha went first to the door and shut it. Then came back and stood by the table where Lesbia was lighting the gas drop.

"Lesbia, I want you to tell me-- You always open the door, don't you?"

"'Cept when I aint there."

"But in the evenings you do?"

"I'm pretty likely to, miss--if it aint my evening out."

"I want you to tell me--" Rotha lowered her voice to a whisper,--"if Mr. Southwode has been here lately?"

Lesbia stood silent, considering.

"You know him? You know Mr. Southwode?"

"He brought you here the fust, didn't he?"

"Yes. Yes, that is he. When was he here last?"

"Don't just 'member."

"But *about* when? Two weeks or three weeks ago?"

"Well, 'pears to me as if I'd seen him later 'n that."

"When, Lesbia? Oh do tell me! do tell me!"

"Why he aint nothin' particular to you, is he?"

"He is *everything* to me. He is the only friend I have got in the world.
When was he here, Lesbia?"

"He's a mighty handsome gentleman, with hair lighter than your'n, and a mustaches?"

"Yes. He came with me that first day. Tell me, Lesbia!"

"But Miss Rotha, I can't see what you want to know fur?"

"Never mind. I tell you, he is all the friend I have got; and I'm afraid something is wrong, because I don't see him."

"I reckon there is," said Lesbia, not reassuringly.

"What?"

"Mrs. Busby will kill me."

"No, I shall not tell her you told me. O Lesbia, Lesbia, speak, speak!"

Lesbia glanced at the girl and saw her intense excitement, and seemed doubtful.

"You'll be so mad, you'll go tellin' the fust thing," she said.

Rotha sat down, in silence now, and gazed in Lesbia's face with her own growing white. Lesbia seemed at last overcome.

"He was here last week, and he was here this week," she said.

"This week!--and last week too. What day this week, Lesbia?"

"This here is Friday, aint it. Blessed if I kin keep the run o' the days.
Let us see--Mr. Southwode was here the last time, Tuesday."

"Tuesday? And I was here studying."

"Then you don't know?" said Lesbia eyeing her. "He's done gone away."

"What do you mean? That can't be."

"He's done gone, miss. Sailed Wednesday. I heerd 'em talking about it at dinner. His name was in the list, they was sayin'; in the papers."

"Sailed Wednesday? O where to, Lesbia?"

"Don' know, miss; some place where the ships goes."

"England?"

"Mebbe. I doesn't know all de places on dis yere arth."

"How long is he going to be gone?"

"Can't tell dat, miss. I haint heerd nobody say. La, I dare say he'll come back. It's as easy to come as to go. Folks is allays goin' and comin'. But if you tell Mis' Busby, then I've done gone and lost my place, Miss Rotha."

Rotha stood still and said not a word more. But she turned so white that Lesbia looked on in alarm, expecting every moment she would faint. There was no faintness, however. Rotha was not one of those who lose present knowledge of misery in the weakness of a swoon. She turned white and even livid in the intensity of passion, the fury of rage and despair which held her; then, knowing that she must not betray Lesbia and that accordingly she must not meet anybody's eyes, she seized her books and rushed up stairs to her own little room.

It was dark there, but so much darker in the child's heart that she never noticed that. It was cold, yet not to her, for in her soul a fire was burning, hot enough to dispense with material warmth. She never missed that. But the walls of her room did seem to her a prison, a dreadful prison, from which she must flee if there were any place to flee to. Had her only refuge failed her? Was her one heart's treasure lost to her? Was the world empty, and all gone? The bewilderment of it almost equalled the pain. Rotha held her head in both hands and tried to find some hope, or some stay for her thoughts and for her feelings.

She charged it all presently with the certainty of intuition upon her aunt. For in her Rotha had not one particle of trust. She had received at her hands no unkind treatment, (what was the matter with the mantua-makers, though?) she had heard from her lips no unkind word; yet both would not have put such a distance between them as this want of trust did. It was Rotha's nature to despise where she could not trust; and here unhappily there was also the complication of fear. Somehow, she was sure, her aunt had done it; she had prevented Mr. Digby from seeing her; and now he was away, and how could she tell but cunning arrangements would be potent enough to keep him from seeing her evermore? Any reason for such machinations Rotha indeed failed to divine; why her aunt should desire to keep them apart, was a mere mystery; all the same, she had done it; and the chances were she would choose to do it permanently. Mr. Digby had been duped, or baffled somehow; else he would never have left the country without seeing his charge. She did not know before that Mr. Digby could be duped, or baffled; but if once or twice, why not again.

She would write to him. Ah, she had not his address, that he was to have given her. *He* would write. Yes, but somebody else would get the letters. Rotha was of anything but a suspicious disposition, yet now suspicion after suspicion came in her mind. The possible moving cause for her aunt's action was entirely beyond her imagination; the action itself and the drift of it she discerned clearly. There rose in her a furious opposition and dislike towards her aunt, a storm of angry abhorrence. And yet, she was in Mrs. Busby's care, under her protection, and also--in her power. Rotha gnashed her teeth, mentally, as she reviewed the situation. But by degrees grief overweighed even anger and fear; grief so cutting, so desolating, so crushing, as the girl had hardly known in her life before; an agony of anguish which held her awake till late in the night; till feeling and sense were blunted with exhaustion, and in her misery she slept.

When the day came, Rotha awaked to a cold, dead sense of the state of things; the ashes of the fire that had burned so fiercely the night before; desolate and dreary as the ashes of a fire always are. She revolved while she was dressing her plan of action. She must have certain information from Mrs. Busby herself. She was certain indeed of what she had heard; but she must hear it from somebody besides Lesbia, and she must not betray Lesbia. She thought it all over, and went down stairs trembling in the excitement and the pain of what she had to do.

It was winter now in truth. The basement room where the family took their meals in ordinary, was a very warm and comfortable apartment; handsomely furnished; only Rotha always hated it for being half underground. The fire was burning splendidly; Mr. Busby sat in his easy chair at the side of the hearth next the light; Mrs. Busby was at the table preparing breakfast. Rotha stood by the fire and thought how she should begin. The sun shone very bright outside the windows. But New York had become a desert.

"Mr. Busby, will you come to the table?" said his wife. "Rotha, I am going to see about your cloak to-day."

Rotha could not say "thank you." She began to eat, for form's sake.

"What are you going to get her mother?" Antoinette enquired.

"You can come along and see."

"Aunt Serena," said Rotha, trying to speak un-concernedly, "what has become of Mr. Digby--Mr. Southwode, I mean."

"I do not know, my dear," the lady answered smoothly.

"Why haven't I seen him?"

"My dear, you have not seen anybody. Some day I hope you will be able; but I begin to despair of the dress-makers."

"If my tailor served me so, I should give him up," said Mr. Busby's quick, husky utterance.

"Yes, papa, but you wouldn't, if there was only one tailor you liked."

"Isn't there more than one mantua-maker for all this big city?"

"My dear, Miss Hubbell suits me, and is uncommonly reasonable, for the quality of her work; and she has so much custom, we cannot get her without speaking long beforehand."

"Why don't you speak, then?"

"When was Mr. Digby--Mr. Southwode here, aunt Serena?" Rotha began again.

"A few nights ago. I do not recollect. Mr. Busby, as you go down town will you stop at Dubois's and order the piano tuner? The piano is quite out of tune. And I wish you would order me a bag of coffee, if you say you can get it more reasonably at your down town place."

"Very well, my dear." The words used to amuse Rotha, they rolled out so, brisk and sharp, like the discharge from a gun. To-day she was impatient.

"Aunt Serena, I have been wanting to see Mr. Southwode very much."

No answer. Mrs. Busby attended to her breakfast as if she did not hear.

"When can I?" Rotha persisted.

"I am sure, I cannot say. Mr. Busby, I will trouble you for a little of that sausage."

"This sausage has too much pepper in it, mamma."

"And too little of something else," added Mr. Busby.

"Of what, Mr. Busby?"

"That I do not know, my dear; it belongs to your department."

"But even the Chaldean magicians could not interpret the dream that was not told to them," Mrs. Busby suggested, with smiling satisfaction. "How can I have the missing quality supplied, if you cannot tell me what it is you miss?"

"You can divine, my dear, quite as well as the Chaldean magicians."

"Then if that is true, aunt Serena," Rotha put in desperately, "will you please tell me where Mr. Southwode is?"

"Her divining rod is not long enough for that," said Mr. Busby. "Mr. Southwode is on the high seas somewhere, on his way to England."

"On the high seas!" Rotha repeated slowly.

"There was no occasion to mention that, Mr. Busby," said his wife. "Mr. Southwode's movements are nothing to us."

"Seem to be something to Rotha," said the gentleman.

"You knew that," said Rotha, steadily. "Why did you keep it from me, aunt Serena?"

"I did not keep it from you," Mrs. Busby returned, bridling. "The papers are open. I did not speak of it, because Mr. Southwode and his affairs are no concern of yours, or of mine, and therefore are not interesting."

"Of yours? No! But they are all I have in the world!" said Rotha, with fire in her cheeks and in her eyes. Mrs. Busby went on with her breakfast and avoided looking at her. But Antoinette cried out.

"All she has in the world! Mr. Southwode! Pretty well for a young lady!
Mamma, do you hear that? Mr. Southwode is all she has in the world."

"Once hearing a silly thing is quite enough. You need not repeat it,
Antoinette."

"Didn't he come to say good bye?" asked Rotha, her eyes blazing.

"I do not answer questions put in that tone," said Mrs. Busby, coldly.

"I know he did," said Rotha. "What did he go to England for, Mr. Busby?"

"Mr. Busby," said his wife, "I request you not to reply. Rotha is behaving improperly, and must be left to herself till she is better-mannered."

"I don't know, my dear," said the gentleman, rising and gathering his newspapers together, previous to taking his departure. "Seems to me that's an open question--public, as you say. I do not see why you should not tell Rotha that Mr. Southwode is called home by the illness and probable death of his father. Good-morning, my dear!"

"Did you ever see anything like papa!" said Antoinette with an appealing look at her mother, as the door closed. "He don't mind you a bit, mamma."

Mrs. Busby's slight air of the head was more significant than words.

"He is the only fraction of a friend I have in this house," said Rotha. "But you needn't think, aunt Serena, that you can do what you like with Mr. Southwode and me. I belong to him, not to you; and he will come back, and then he will take me under his own care, and I will have nothing to do with you the rest of my life. I know you now. I thought I did before, and now I know. You let mamma want everything in the world; and now perhaps you will let me; but Mr. Southwode will take care of me, sooner or later, and I can wait, for I know him too."

Rotha left the room, unconsciously with the air of a tragedy queen. Alas, it was tragedy enough with her!

"Mamma!" said Antoinette. "Did you ever see anything like that?"

"I knew it was in her," Mrs. Busby said, keeping her composure in appearance.

"What will you do with her?"

"Let her alone a little," said Mrs. Busby icily. "Let her come to her senses."

"Will you go to get her cloak to-day?"

"I don't know why I should give myself any trouble about her. I will let her wait till she comes to her senses and humbles herself to me."

"Do you think she ever will?"

"I don't care, whether she does or not. It is all the same to me. You let her alone too, Antoinette."

"I will," said Antoinette. "I don't like spifires. High! what a powder-magazine she is, mamma! Her eyes are enough to set fire to things sometimes."

"Don't use such an inelegant word, Antoinette. 'High!' How can you? Where did you get it?"

"You send me to school, mamma, to learn; and so I pick up a few things.
But do you think it is true, what she says about Mr. Southwode?"

"What?"

"That he will come and take her away from you."

"Not if I don't choose it,"

"And you will not choose it, will you?"

"Don't be foolish, Antoinette. Rotha will never see Mr. Southwode again.
She has defied me, and now she may take the consequences."

"But he *will* come back, mamma? He said so."

"I hope he will."

"Then he'll find Rotha, and she'll tell him her own story."

"Will you trust me to look after my own affairs? And get yourself ready to go out with me immediately."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN SECLUSION.

Rotha climbed the three flights of stairs from the breakfast room, feeling that her aunt's house, and the world generally, had become a desert to her. She went up to her own little room, being very sure that neither in the warm dressing room on the second floor, nor indeed in any other, would she be welcome, or even perhaps tolerated. How should she be, after what had taken place? And how could she breathe, anyhow, in any atmosphere where her aunt was? Imprudent? had she been imprudent? Very possibly; she had brought matters to an unmanageable point, inconvenient for all parties; and she had broken through the cold reserve which it had been her purpose to maintain, and lost sight wholly of the principles by which it had been Mr. Digby's wish that she should be guided. Rotha had a mental recognition of all this; but passion met it with simple defiance. She was not weeping; the fire at her heart scorched all tender moisture, though it would not keep her blood warm. The day was wintry indeed. Rotha pulled the coverlet off her bed and wrapped herself in it, and sat down to think. .

Thinking, is too good a name to give to what for some time went on in Rotha's mind. She was rather looking at the procession of images which passion called up and sent succeeding one another through the chambers of her brain. It was a very dreary time with the girl. Her aunt's treachery, her cousin's coldness, Mr. Digby's pitiless desertion, her lonely, lonely place in the world, her unendurable dependence on people that did not love her; for just now her dependence on Mr. Digby had failed; it all rushed through and through Rotha's head, for all the world like the changing images in a kaleidoscope, which are but new combinations, eternally renewed, of the same changeless elements. At first they went through Rotha's head in a kind of storm; gradually, for very weariness, the storm laid itself, and cold reality and sober reason had the field.

But what could reason do with the reality? In other words, what step was now to take? What was to be done? Rotha could not see. She was at present at open war with her aunt. Yes, she allowed, that had not been exactly prudent; but it would have had to come, sooner or later. She could not live permanently on false social grounds; as well break through them at once. But what now? What ground did she expect to stand and move on now? She could not leave her aunt's house, for she had no other home to go to. How was she to stay in it, if she made no apology or submission? And I cannot do that, said the girl to herself. Apology indeed! It is she who ought to humble herself to me, for it is she who has wronged me, bitterly, meanly. Passion renewed the storm, for a little while. But by degrees Rotha came to be simply cold and tired and miserable. What to do she did not know.

Nobody was at home to luncheon. She knew this, and got some refreshment from Lesbia, and also warmed herself through at the dressing-room fire. But when the door bell announced the return of her aunt and cousin, she sped away up stairs again and wrapped herself in her coverlet, and waited. She waited till it grew dark. She was not called to dinner, and saw that she would not be. Rotha fed upon indignation, which furnished her a warm meal; and then

somebody knocked softly at her door. Lesbia had brought a plate with some cold viands.

"I'll fetch it agin by and by," she whispered. "I'm allays agin seein' folks starve. What's the matter, Miss Rotha?"

Lesbia had heard one side down stairs, and impartially was willing now to hear the other. Rotha's natural dignity however never sought such solace of her troubles.

"Thank you, Lesbia," she simply said. "My aunt is vexed with me."

"She's vexed worse'n ever I seen her. What you gone and done, Miss Rotha?"

"It can't be helped," said Rotha. "She and I do not think alike."

"It's convenientest not to quarrel with Mrs. Busby if you live in the house with her," said Lesbia. "She's orful smart, she is. But she and me allays thinks just alike, and so I get on first rate with her."

"That's a very good way, for you," said Rotha.

She went to bed, dulled that night with pain and misery, and slept the night through. When the light of a bright Sunday morning awoke her, she opened her eyes again to the full dreariness of her situation. So terribly dreary and cold at heart Rotha had never felt. Deserted by her one friend--and with that thought Rotha broke down and cried as if she would break her heart. But hearts are tough, and do not break so easily. The necessity of getting dressed before breakfast obliged her to check her passion of grief and dry her eyes; though *that* she did not; the tears kept dripping on her hands and into her basin of water; but she finished dressing, and then queried what she should do about going to the breakfast-table. She was very uncertain whether she would be allowed there. However, it was disagreeable, but the attempt must be made; she must find out whether it was war to the knife or not. And although the thought choked her, she was hungry; and be it the bread of charity, and her aunt's charity to boot, she could not get along without it. She went down stairs, rather late. The family were at breakfast.

Her aunt did not look at her. Antoinette stared at her. Mr. Busby, as usual, took no notice. Rotha came up to the side of the table and stood there, changing colour somewhat.

"I do not know," she said, "if I am to be allowed to come to breakfast. I came to see."

Mrs. Busby made no answer.

"Polite--" said Antoinette.

"Eh?" said Mr. Busby looking up from a letter, "what's that? Sit down, my dear, you are late. Hold your plate--"

As nobody interfered, Rotha did so and sat down to her meal. Mrs. Busby said nothing whatever. Perhaps she felt she had pushed matters pretty far; perhaps she avoided calling her husband's attention any further to the subject. She made no remark about anything, till Mr. Busby had left the room; nor then immediately. When she did speak, it was in her hard, measured way.

"As you present yourself before me this morning, Rotha, I may hope that you are prepared to make me a proper apology."

"What have I done, aunt Serena?"

"Do you ask me? You have forgotten strangely the behaviour due from you to me."

"I did not forget it--" said Rotha slowly.

"Will you give me an excuse for your conduct, then?"

"Yes," said Rotha. "Because, aunt Serena, you had forgotten so utterly the treatment due from you to me."

Mrs. Busby flushed a little. Still she commanded herself She always did.

"Mamma, she's pretty impudent!" said Antoinette.

"I always make allowances, and you must learn to do so, Antoinette, for people who have never learned any manners."

Rotha was stung, but she confessed to herself that passion had made her overleap the bounds which she had purposed, and Mr. Digby had counselled, her behaviour should observe. So she was now silent.

"However," Mrs. Busby went on, "it is quite necessary that any one living in my family and sheltered by my roof, should pay me the respect which they owe to me."

"I will always pay all I owe," said Rotha deliberately, "so far as I have anything to pay it with."

"And in case the supply fails," said Mrs. Busby, her voice trembling a little, "don't you think you had better avoid going deeper into debt?"

"What do I owe you, aunt Serena?" asked the girl.

Mrs. Busby saw the gathering fire in the dark eyes, and did not desire to bring on another explosion. She assumed an impassive air, looked away from Rotha, rose and began to put her cups together on the tea-board, and rang for the tub of hot water.

"I leave that to your own sense to answer," she said. "But if you are to stay in my house, I beg you to understand, you must behave yourself to me with all proper civility and good manners. Else I will turn you into the street."

Rotha recognized the necessity for a certain decency of exterior form at least, if she and her aunt were to continue under one roof; and so, though her tongue was ready with an answer, she did not at once make it. She rose, and was about quitting the room, when the fire in her blazed up again.

"It is where mother would have been, if it had not been for other friends," she said.

She opened the door as she spoke, and toiled up the long stairs to her room; for when the heart is heavy somehow one's feet are not light. She went to her cold little room and sat down. The sunshine was very bright outside, and church bells were ringing. No going to church for her, nor would there have been in any case; she had no garments fit to go out in. Would she ever have them? Rotha queried. The church bells hurt her heart; she wished they would stop ringing; they sounded clear and joyous notes, and reminded her of happy times past. Medwayville, her father, her mother, peace and honour, and latterly Mr. Southwode, and all his kindness and teaching and his affection. It was too much. The early Sunday morning was spent by Rotha in an agony of weeping and lamentation; silent, however; she made no noise that could be heard down stairs where Mrs. Busby and Antoinette were dressing to go to church. The intensity of her passion again by and by wore itself out; and when the last bells had done ringing, and the patter of feet was silenced in the streets, Rotha crept down to the empty dressing room, feeling blue and cold, to warm herself. She shivered, she stretched her arms to the warmth of the fire, she was chilled to the core, with a chill that was yet more mental than physical. Alone, and stripped of everything, and everybody gone that she loved. What was she to do? how was she to live? She was struggling with a burden of realities and trying to make them seem unreal, trying for an outlook of hope or comfort in the darkness of her prospects. In vain; Mr. Digby was gone, and with him all her strength and her reliance. He was gone; nobody could tell when he would come back; perhaps never; and she could not write to him, and his letters would never get to her. Never; she was sure of it. Mrs. Busby would never let them get further than her own hands. So everything was worse than she had ever feared it could be.

Sitting there on the rug before the fire, and with her teeth chattering, partly from real cold and partly from the nervous exhaustion, there came to her suddenly something Mr. Digby had once said to her. If she should come to see a time when she would have nobody to depend on; when her world would be wholly a desert; *all* gone that she had loved or trusted. It has come now!--she thought to herself; even he, who I thought would never fail me, he has failed. He said he would not fail me, but he has failed. I am alone; I have nobody any more. Then he told me----

She went back and gathered it up in her memory, what he had told her to do then. Then if she would seek the Lord, seek him with her whole heart, she would find him; and finding him, she would find good again. The poor, sore heart caught at the promise. I will seek him, she suddenly said; I will seek till I find; I have nothing else now.

The resolve was as earnest as it was sudden. Doubtless the way had been preparing for it, in her mother's and her father's teachings and prayers and example, and in Mr. Digby's words and kindness and his example; she remembered now the look of his eyes as he told her the Lord Jesus would do all she trusted him to do. Yet the determination was extremely sudden to Rotha herself. And as the meeting of two currents, whether in the waters or in the air or the human mind, generally raises a commotion, so this flowing in of light and promise upon the midst of her despair almost broke

Rotha's heart. The tears shed this time, however, though abundant, were less bitter; and Rotha raised her head and dashed the drops away, and ran up stairs to fetch her mother's Bible and begin her quest upon the spot. Lying there upon the rug in her aunt's dressing room, she began it.

She began with a careful consideration of the three marked passages. The one in John especially held her. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."--I do not love Him, thought Rotha, for I do not know Him; but I must begin, I suppose, with keeping his commandments. Now the thing is, to find out what.--

She opened her book at hap hazard, lying on the rug there with it before her. A leaf or two aimlessly turned,--and her eye fell on these words:

"And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel."

I am poor enough, thought Rotha, while soft warm tears streamed afresh from her eyes;--and deaf enough, and blind enough too, I have been; but meek?--I guess I'm not meek.

Turning over a leaf or two, her eyes were caught by the thirty fifth chapter of Isaiah, and she read it all. There was the promise for the deaf and the blind again; Rotha applied that to herself unhesitatingly; but the rest of the chapter she could not well understand. Except one thing; that the way of the blessed people is a "way of holiness." And also the promise in the last verse, which seemed to be an echo of those words of Jesus--"He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." And Rotha was so hungry, and so thirsty! She paused just there, and covering her eyes with her hand, made one of the first real prayers, perhaps, she had ever prayed. It was a dumb stretching out of her hands for the food she was starving for; not much more; but it was eagerly put in the name of Christ, and such cries he hears. She turned over a few more leaves and stopped.

"I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house."

Who could that be? Rotha knew enough to guess that it could mean but one, even the great Deliverer. And a little further on she saw other words which encouraged her.

"I will bring the blind by a way that they know not; I will lead them in paths they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

So many promises to the blind, Rotha said to herself; and that means me. I don't think I am meek, but I know I am blind.-Then on the very next leaf she read--

"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins; return unto me; for I have redeemed thee."

Redeemed, that means, bought back, said Rotha; and I know who has done it, too. I suppose that is how he delivered the prisoners out of the prison house. Well, if he has redeemed me, I ought to belong to him,--and I will! I do not know much, but there is another promise; he will bring the blind by a way they have not known, and will make darkness light before them. Now what I have to do,--yes, I am redeemed, and I *will* be redeemed; and I belong to him who has redeemed me, of course. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them"--what are they?

She thought she must look in the New Testament for them; and not knowing where to look in particular, she turned to the first chapter. It did not seem to contain much that concerned her, till she came to the 21st verse.

"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

Rotha put that together with the "way of holiness," but it seemed to her unspeakably wonderful. In fact, it was hard to believe. Save *her* from her sins? from pride and anger and self-will and self-pleasing? why, they were inborn; they were in her very blood; they came like the breath of her breathing. Could she be saved from them? Mr. Digby was like that. But a Rotha without anger and pride and self-will--would she know herself? would it be Rotha? and was she quite sure that she desired to be the subject of such a transformation? Never mind; desire it or not, this was the "way of holiness," and there was no other. But about commandments?--

She read the second chapter with an interest that hitherto she had never given to it; so also the third, without finding

yet what she was looking for. The second verse, John the Baptist's cry to repentance, she answered by saying that she *had* repented; that step was taken; what next? In the fourth chapter she paused at the 10th verse. I see, she said, one is not to do wrong even for the whole world; but what must I do that is *right*? She startled a little at the 19th verse; concluded however that the command to "follow him" was directed only to the people of that time, the apostles and others, who were expected literally to leave their callings and accompany Jesus in his wanderings. The beatitudes were incipient commands, perhaps. But she did not quite understand most of them. At the 16th verse she came to a full pause.

"Let your light so shine"--That is like Mr. Digby. Everything he does is just beautiful, and shews one how one ought to be. Then according to that, I must not do any wrong at all!--

ust here Rotha heard the latch key in the house door, and knew the family were coming home from church. She seized her Bible and ran off up stairs. There it was necessary to wrap herself in her coverlet again; and shivering a little she put her book on the bed side and knelt beside it. But presently poor Rotha was brought up short in her studies. She had been saying comfortably to herself, reading v. 22,--I have not been "angry without a cause"; and I have not called anybody "Raca," or "Thou fool"; but then it came--

"If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest *that thy brother hath ought against thee*, leave there thy gift... go thy way... first be reconciled... then offer thy gift."

Rotha felt as if she had got a blow. Her aunt had "something against her." But, said Rotha to herself, not the thousandth part of what *I* have against her. No matter, conscience objected; her charge remains the same, although you may have a larger to set off against it. Then am I to go and make it up with her? I can't do it, said Rotha. I do not wish to do it. I wish her to know that I am angry, and justly angry; if I were to go and ask her pardon for my way of speaking, she would just think I want to make it up with her so that she may get me my new cloak and other things.? And Rotha turned hot and cold at the thought. Yet conscience pertinaciously presented the injunction?"first be reconciled to thy brother." It was a dead lock. Rotha felt that her prayers would not be acceptable or accepted, while a clear duty was knowingly left undone; and do it she would not. At least not now; and how ever, that she could not see. Her heart which had been a little lightened, sank down like lead. O, thought she, is it so hard a thing to be a Christian? Did Mr. Digby ever have such a fight, I wonder, before he got to be as he is now? He does not look as if he ever had fights. But then he is strong.

And Rotha was weak. She knew it. She let her eye run down the page a little further; and it came to these words--

"If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee."...

"If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off."...

Duty was plain enough. This luxury of anger at her aunt was a forbidden pleasure; it must be given up; and at the thought, Rotha clutched it the more warmly. So the bell rang for dinner, always early on Sunday. She would rather not have gone down, and did linger; then she heard it rung the second time and knew that was to summon the stragglers. She went down. The rest were at table.

"Mamma," Antoinette was saying, "you must get a new bonnet."

"Why?"

"Mrs. Mac Jimpsey has got a new one, and it is handsomer than yours."

"What does that signify?" was asked in Mr. Busby's curious husky tones and abrupt utterance.

"O papa, you don't understand such things."

"Nor you neither. You are a little goose."

"Papa! don't you want mamma and me to be as nice as anybody?"

"You are."

"O but Mrs. Mac Jimpsey's bonnet was fifty times handsomer than mamma's. *You* don't know, but it was."

"Nevertheless, your mamma is fifty times handsomer than Mrs. Mac Jimpsey."

"O papa! but *that* isn't the thing."

"And Mr. Mac Jimpsey's pocket is some fifty dollars or so emptier than mine. You see, we have a hundred times the advantage, to say the least."

"Papa, gentlemen never understand such things."

"Better for them if the ladies didn't."

"My dear," said Mrs. Busby smoothly, "you do not consider dress a subject of small importance?"

"I have no occasion to think about it, my dear, I am aware."

"Why do you say that, Mr. Busby?"

"It receives such exhaustive consideration from you."

"It cannot be done without consideration; not properly. Good dressing is a distinction; and it requires a careful regard to circumstances, to keep up one's appearance properly."

"What do you think about it, Rotha?" said Mr. Busby.

Rotha was startled, and flushed all over. To answer was not easy; and yet answer she must. "I think it is comfortable to be well dressed," she said.

"Well dressed! but there is the question. What do you mean by 'well dressed'? You see, Antoinette means by it simply, handsomer things than Mrs. Mac Jimpsey."

Antoinette pouted, much incensed at this speech and at the appeal to Rotha generally; and Mrs. Busby brought her lips into firmer compression; though neither spoke. Mr. Busby went on, rather kindly.

"What's the matter, that you didn't go to church to-day? Is Antoinette's bonnet handsomer than yours?"

"It ought to be, Mr. Busby," said the lady of the house here.

"Ought it? Rotha might put in a demurrer. May I ask why?"

"Circumstances are different, Mr. Busby. That is what I said. Proper dressing must keep a due regard to circumstances."

"Mine among the rest. Now I don't see why a bonnet fit for Antoinette's cousin isn't good enough for Antoinette; and the surplus money in my pocket."

"And you would have your daughter dress like a poor girl?"

"Couldn't do better, in my opinion. That's the way not to become one."

Fetch me your bonnet, Rotha, and let us see what it is like."

Rotha coloured high and sat still. Indeed her aunt said, "Nonsense! do no such thing." But Mr. Busby repeated, "Fetch it, fetch it. We are talking in the abstract; I cannot convict anybody in the abstract."

"But it is Sunday, Mr. Busby."

"Well, my dear, what of that? The better day, the better deed. I am trying to bring you and Antoinette to a more Christian mind in respect of bonnets; that's good work for Sunday. Fetch your bonnet, Rotha."

"Do no such thing, Rotha," said her aunt. "Mr. Busby is playing; he does not mean his words to be taken literally. You would not send her up three pair of stairs to gratify your whim, when another time would do just as well?"

"My dear, I always mean my words to be taken literally. I do not understand your arts of rhetoric. I will send Rotha up stairs, if she will be so obliging as to gratify my whim."

He looked at Rotha as he spoke, and Rotha half rose from her seat; when Antoinette suddenly dashed past her, saying, "I will fetch it"--and ran off up stairs. Rotha sat down again, much confounded at this benevolence, and wondering

what that was not benevolent might lie beneath it. Mrs. Busby pursed up her mouth and looked at nobody. Presently Antoinette came down again. In her hand she held a little grey plush hat, somewhat worn but very jaunty, with a long grey feather, curled round it. This hat she held out on the tips of her fingers for her father's inspection. Rotha's eyes grew large with astonishment. Mrs. Busby's lips twitched. Antoinette looked daring and mischievous. Mr. Busby innocently surveyed the grey plush and feather.

"So that is what you call a hat for a poor girl?" he said. "It seems to me, if I remember, that is very like one you used to wear, Nettie."

"Yes, papa, it is; but this is Rotha's."

"Mrs. Busby, was this your choice?"

"Yes, Mr. Busby."

"Then of course this is proper for Rotha. Now will you explain to me why it is not equally proper for Antoinette? But this is not what I should have called a hat for a poor girl, my dear."

"Mr. Busby, while Rotha lives with us, it is necessary to have a certain conformity--there cannot be *too* much difference made."

"Hum--ha!" said the bewildered man. Rotha by this time had got her breath.

"That is not my hat however, Mr. Busby," she said, with cheeks on fire.

"Yes, it is your hat," said Antoinette. "Do you think I am saying what is not true? It is your hat, and nobody else's."

"It is *your* hat. I have seen you wear it."

"I have given it to you. It is your hat."

"I don't take it," said Rotha. "Your things do not suit me, as your mother has just said. You may do what you like with it; but you do not give it to me!"

Mr. Busby looked from one to the other.

"Do you expect me to buy new everything for you?" Mrs. Busby asked now. "Is it not good enough? I suppose it is much better than any hat you ever had before in your life."

"But it is not mine," said Rotha. "It never was given to me. I never heard anything of it until now, when Antoinette fetched it because she did not want Mr. Busby to see what sort of a hat I really had. Thank you! I do not take it."

"But it is yours!" cried Antoinette. "I have given it to you. Do you think I would wear it, after giving it away?"

"If it was convenient, you would," said Rotha.

"You may lay your account with not having any hat, then, unless you wear this," said Mrs. Busby. "You may take your choice. If you receive Antoinette's kindness so, you must not look for mine."

"Your kindness, and hers, are the very strangest sort I ever heard of in my life," said Rotha.

"What am I to understand by all this?" asked the perplexed Mr. Busby, looking from the hat to the faces of the speakers.

"Only, that I never heard of that hat's being intended for me until this minute," said Rotha.

"Rotha," said her aunt quietly, "you may go up stairs."

"What did you bring it down for, Nettie?"

"Because you took an insane fancy to see Rotha's bonnet, papa; so I brought it."

"That is not true, Mr. Busby," Rotha said, standing up to go.

"It is not your hat?"

"No, sir."

"Mr. Busby, if you would listen to Antoinette's words," said his wife with her lips very compressed, "you would understand things. Rotha, I said you might go."

Which Rotha did, Antoinette at the same moment bursting into tears and flinging the hat on the dinner table.

What followed, Rotha did not know. She climbed the many stairs with a heavy heart. It was war to the knife now. She was sure her aunt would never forgive her. And, much worse, she did not see how she was ever to forgive her aunt. And yet--"if thy neighbour hath ought against thee"--. Rotha had far more against *her*, she excused herself, in vain. The one debt was not expunged by the other. And, bitter as her own grievances seemed to her, there was a score on the other side. Not so would Mr. Digby have received or returned injuries. Rotha knew it. And as fancy represented to her the quiet, manly, dignified sweetness which always characterized him, she did not like the retrospect of her own behaviour. So true it is, that "whatsoever doth make manifest is light." No discourse could have given Rotha so keen a sense of her own failings as that image of another's beautiful living. What was done could not be undone; but the worst was, Rotha was precisely in the mood to do it over again; so though sorry she was quite aware that she was not repentant.

It followed that the promises for which she longed and to which she was stretching out her hands, were out of reach. Clean out of reach. Rotha's heart was the scene of a struggle that took away all possibility of comfort or even of hope. She had no right to hope. "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off"--but Rotha was not so minded. The prospect was dark and miserable. How could she go on living in her aunt's house? and how could she live anywhere else? and how could she bear her loneliness? and how could she get to the favour of that one great Friend, whose smile is only upon them that are at least trying to do his commandments? It was dark in Rotha's soul, and stormy.

It continued so for days. In the house she was let alone, but so thoroughly that it amounted to domestic exile or outlawry. She was let alone. Not forbidden to take her place at the family table, or to eat her portion of the bread and the soup; but for all social or kindly relations, left to starve. Mr. Busby's mouth had been shut somehow; he was practically again a man of papers; and the other two hardly looked at Rotha or spoke to her. Antoinette and she sometimes went to school together and sometimes separate; it was rather more lonely when they went together. In school they hardly saw each other. So days went by.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. MOWBRAY.

"How is that Carpenter girl doing?" Mrs. Mowbray inquired one day of Miss Blodgett, as they met in one of the passages.

"I have been wanting to speak to you about her, madame. She knows all I can teach her in that class."

"Does she! Her aunt told me she had had no advantages. Does she study?"

"I fancy she has no need to study much where she is. She has been further."

"How does she behave?"

"Perfectly well. She does not look to me happy."

"Not happy! Is her cousin kind to her? She is cousin to that pretty Busby, you know."

"I think she hardly speaks to her. Not here, I mean."

Mrs. Mowbray passed on. But that very afternoon, when school was breaking up, Miss Blodgett asked Rotha to wait a few minutes. The girls were all gone in a trice; Miss Blodgett herself followed; and Rotha was left alone. She waited a little while. Then the door opened and the figure which had such a fascination for her appeared. The face looked gentler and kinder than she had seen it before; this was not school time. Mrs. Mowbray came in and sat down by

Rotha, after giving her her hand.

"Are you quite well, my dear?" was her instant question after the greeting. "You are hoarse."

Rotha said she had caught a little cold.

"How did you do that?"

"I think it was sitting in a cold room."

"Were you obliged to sit in a cold room?"

Rotha hesitated. "It was pleasanter there," she said with some embarrassment.

"You never should sit in a cold room. What did you want to be in a cold room for?"

Rotha hesitated again. "I wanted to be alone."

"Studying?"

"Not my lessons,"--said Rotha doubtfully.

"Not your lessons? If you and I were a little better acquainted, I should ask for a little more confidence. But I will not be unreasonable."

Rotha glanced again at the sweet face, so kindly now with all its penetrating acuteness and habit of authority; so sweet with its smile; and confidence sprang forth at the instant, together with the longing for help. Did not this look like a friend's face? Where else was she to find one? Reserve gave way.

"I was studying my duty," she said softly.

"Your duty, my dear? Was the difficulty about knowing it, or about doing it?"

"I think--about doing it."

"Is it difficult?"

"Yes," said Rotha from the bottom of her heart.

Mrs. Mowbray read the troubled brow, the ingenuous mouth, the oppressed manner; and her soul went forth in sympathy to her little perplexed human sister. But her next words were a departure, and in a different tone.

"You have never been to school before, your aunt tells me?"

"No, ma'am," said Rotha, disappointed somehow.

"Are you getting along pleasantly?"

"Not very pleasantly," Rotha allowed, after a pause.

"Does Miss Blodgett give you too hard work to do?"

"O no, ma'am!" Rotha said with a spark more of spirit. "I have not anything to do. I know it all already."

"You do! Where did you learn it?"

"Mother used to teach me--and then a friend used to teach me."

"What, my dear? It is important that I should know."

"Mother taught me history, and geography, and grammar, and little things. Then a gentleman taught me more history, and arithmetic, and algebra, and Latin, and natural history--"

"The gentleman was the friend you spoke of?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Do you like to study, Rotha?"

"O yes, ma'am! when it *is* study, and I can understand it."

"I suppose your aunt did not know about all this home study?"

"She knew nothing about me," said Rotha.

"Then where has your home been, my dear?"

"Here,—for two years past. Before that, it was in the country."

Mrs. Mowbray was silent a bit.

"My dear, I think the first thing you should do should be, to take care of that cold. Will you?"

"I do not know how, ma'am," said Rotha, for the first time lifting her eyes with something like a smile to the lady's face.

"Does Mrs. Busby know that you have taken cold?"

"I do not know, ma'am."

"Will you take some medicine, if I give you some?"

"If you please, ma'am."

Mrs. Mowbray sent a servant for a certain box, and proceeded to choose out a vial which she gave to Rotha, instructing her how to use it.

"And then, some time when we know each other better," she went on, "perhaps you will tell me about that difficulty of duty, and let me see if I can help you."

"O thank you, ma'am!" was spoken so earnestly that Mrs. Mowbray saw the matter must be much on the young girl's heart.

That same evening did Mrs. Mowbray make a call on Mrs. Busby.

She came in with her gracious, sweet, dignified manner, which always put everybody upon his best behaviour in her presence; as gracious as if she had come for the sole pleasure of a talk with Mrs. Busby; as sweet as if she had had no other object in coming but to give her and her family pleasure. And so she talked. She talked public news and political questions with Mr. Busby, with full intelligence, but with admirable modesty; she bewitched him out of his silence and dryness into being social and conversible; she delighted him with his own unwonted performance. With Mrs. Busby she talked Antoinette, for whom she had at the same time brought a charming little book, which compliment flattered the whole family. She talked Antoinette and Antoinette's interests, but not Antoinette alone; with a blessed kind of grace she brought in among the other things relations and anecdotes the drift and bearing of which was away from vanity and toward soul health; stories which took her hearers for the moment at least out of the daily and the trivial and the common, into the lofty and the noble and the everlasting. Even Mr. Busby forgot his papers and cases and waked up to human interests and social gentleness; and even Mrs. Busby let the lines of her lips relax, and her eyes glistened with something warmer than a steely reflection. Antoinette bloomed with smiles. Rotha was not in the room.

And not till she was drawing up her fur around her, preparatory to departure, did Mrs. Mowbray refer to the fourth member of the family. Then she said,

"How is your niece, Mrs. Busby? Miss Carpenter?"

"Quite well," Mrs. Busby answered graciously. "I believe she is at her books."

"How does she like going to school?"

"I am afraid I can hardly say. Netta, how does Rotha enjoy her school life?"

"I don't know," said Antoinette. "She doesn't enjoy anything, I should say."

The tone of neither question nor answer escaped the watchful observation of the visiter.

"I think you said she had had no advantages?"

"None whatever, I should say; not what we would call advantages. I suppose she has learned a few common things."

"She is an orphan?"

Mrs. Busby assented. "Lost her mother last summer."

"I should like to have her more under my own eye than is possible as she is now; a mere day scholar. What do you say to letting her become a member of my family? Of course," added Mrs. Mowbray graciously, "I should not propose to you to charge yourself with any additional burden on her account. As she is an orphan, I should make no difference because of receiving her into my family. I have a professional ambition to gratify, and I like to be able to carry out my plans in every detail. I could do better for Antoinette, if you would let me have *her* altogether; but I suppose that is not to be thought of."

Mrs. Busby wore an air of deliberation. Mr. Busby was understood to mutter something about "very handsome."

"Will you let me have Antoinette?" said the lady smiling. "I think it would do her no harm."

"Antoinette must content herself at home," Antoinette's mother replied.

"I am accustomed to having her under my own wing."

"And that is a privilege you would not yield to any one else. I understand. Well, what do you say about Miss Carpenter?"

Mrs. Busby looked at her husband. Long experience enabled him to guess at what he was desired to say.

"My dear--since Mrs. Mowbray is so kind--it would be a great thing for Rotha the best thing that could happen to her--"

Mrs. Busby turned her eyes to her visiter.

"Since you are so good, Mrs. Mowbray--it is more than I could ask you to do--"

"I shall be very glad to do it. I am nothing if not professional, you know," Mrs. Mowbray said rising and drawing her fur together again. "Then that is settled."-- And with gracious deference and sweetness of manner she took her leave.

"That's what I call a good riddance!" exclaimed Antoinette when she was free to express her opinion.

"You will find it a happy relief," added Mr. Busby. "And not a little saving, too."

Mrs. Busby was silent. With all the relief and the saving, there was yet something in the plan which did not suit her. Nevertheless, the relief, and the saving, were undoubted facts; and she held her tongue.

"Mamma, what are you going to do about Rotha's dresses?"

"I will see, when she comes to me with a proper apology."

Of all this nothing was told to Rotha. So she was a little surprised, when next morning Mrs. Mowbray came into the schoolroom and desired to see her after school. But then Mrs. Mowbray's first words were about her cold.

"My dear, you are very hoarse! You can hardly speak. And you feel miserably, I see. I shall sequester you at once. Come with me."

Wondering but obedient, Rotha followed. What was going to happen now? Up stairs, along a ball, up another flight of stairs, past the great schoolrooms, now empty, through a small bedroom, through a large one, along another passage. At last a door is opened, into what, as Rotha enters it, seems to her a domestic paradise. The air deliciously warm and

sweet, the walls full of engravings or other pictures, tables heaped with books, a luxuriously appointed bed and dressing tables, (what to Rotha's eyes was enormous luxury)--finally a couch, where she was made to lie down and covered over with a brilliant affghan. Rotha was transported into the strangest of new worlds. Her new friend arranged the pillow under her head, gave her some tasteless medicine; that was a wonderful innovation too, for all Rotha's small experience had been of nauseous rhubarb and magnesia or stinging salts; and finally commanded her to lie still and go to sleep.

"But aunt Serena--?" Rotha managed to whisper.

"She has made you over to me. You are going to live in my house for the present, where you can carry on your studies better than you could at home, and I can attend to you better. Here you have been losing a month, because I did not know what you properly required. Are you willing to be my child, Rotha?--instead of Mrs. Busby's?--for a time?"

The flash of joy in Rotha's eyes was so eloquent and so bright, that Mrs. Mowbray stooped down and kissed her.

"I never was Mrs. Busby's child,"--the girl must make so much protest.

"Well, no matter; you are not her child now. Lie still, and go to sleep if you can."

Could she? Not at once. Is it possible to tell the sort of Elysium in which the child was lapped? Softness and warmth and ease and rest, and *hiding*, and such beauty and such luxury! Mrs. Mowbray left the room presently; and Rotha lay still under her affghan, looking from one to another point of delight in the room, wondering at this suddenly entered fairyland, comforted inexpressibly by the assurance that she was taken out of her aunt's house and presence, happy in the promise of the new guardianship into which she had come. What pretty pictures were on the walls, all around her, over her head; here was a lady, there a lovely little girl; here a landscape; there a large print shewing a horse which a smith is just about shoeing, and a little foal standing by. And so her eye wandered, from one to another, every one having its peculiar interest for Rotha. Then the books. How the books were piled up, on the floor, on the dressing-table, on benches, on the mantelpiece; there was a kind of overflow and breaking wave of literary riches which seemed to have scattered its surplus about this room. And there were trinkets too, and pretty useful trifles, and pretty things of use that were not trifles. Rotha had always lived in a very plain way; her father's house had shewed no far-off indication of this sort of life. Neither had her aunt's house. Plenty of means was not wanting there; the house had money enough; what it lacked was the life. No love of the beautiful; no habit of elegant surroundings; no literary taste that had any tide or flow whatsoever, much less overflow. No art, and no associations. Everything here had meaning, and indications of life, or associations with it; with mental life especially. What exactly it was that charmed her, Rotha could not have told; she could not have put all this into words; yet she felt all this. The girl had come into a new atmosphere, where for the first time her soul seemed to draw free breath. It was, by its affinities, her native air. Certainly in the company of Mr. Southwode all this higher part of her nature had been fed and fostered, and with him too she was at home; but she had seen him only in Mrs. Marble's house or in the lodgings at Fort Washington.

It was long before Rotha could sleep. She waked as the day was declining and the room growing dusky. A maid came in and lit the fire, which presently sparkled and snapped and sent forth jets of flame which lit up the room with a red illumination. Rotha recognized, she thought, the sort of coal which Mr. Digby had sent in for her mother, and hailed the sight; but she was mistaken, a little; it was kennal coal, not Liverpool. It snapped and shone, and the light danced over pictures and books and curtains; and Rotha wondered what would come next.

What came next was Miss Blodgett, followed by the maid bearing a tray. The tray was placed on a stand by the couch, and Rotha was informed that this was her dinner. Mrs. Mowbray wished her to keep quite quiet and live very simply until this cold was broken up. Rotha raised herself on her couch and looked in astonishment at what was before her. A hot mutton chop, a roll, a cup of tea, and some mashed potatoe. A napkin was spread over the tray; and there was a little silver salt cellar, and a glass of water, and a plate of rice pudding. Ah, surely Rotha was in fairyland; and never was there so beneficent and so magnificent a fairy in human shape. Miss Blodgett saw her arranged to her mind, and left her to take her dinner in peace and at leisure; which Rotha did, almost ready to cry for sheer pleasure. When had dinner been so good to her? Everything was so hot and so nice and so prettily served. Rotha lay down again feeling half cured already.

However, such well-grounded colds as she had taken are not disposed of in a minute; and Rotha's kept her shut up for yet several days more. Wonders went on multiplying; for a little cot bed was brought into the room, (which Rotha found was Mrs. Mowbray's own) and made up there for her occupancy; and there actually she slept those nights. And Mrs. Mowbray nursed her; gave her medicine, by night and by day; sent her dainty meals, and allowed her to amuse

herself with anything she could find. Rotha found a book suited to her pleasure, and had a luxurious time of it. Towards the end of the second day, Mrs. Mowbray came into the room; a little while before dinner.

"How do you do?" she said, standing and surveying her patient.

"Very well, ma'am; almost quite well."

"You will be glad to be let out of prison?"

"It is a very pleasant prison."

"I do not think any prison is pleasant. What book have you got there?
Mrs. Sherwood. Do you like it?"

"O *very* much, ma'am!"

"My dear, your aunt has sent your trunk, at my request; and Miss Blodgett has unpacked it to get at the things you were wanting. But there is only one warm dress in it. Is that your whole ward robe?"

"What dress is that? what sort, I mean?"

"Grey merino, I believe."

"It is not mine," said Rotha flushing. "It is Antoinette's. They tried it on, but it did not fit me. I told aunt Serena I would rather wear my own old one."

"That is the one you are wearing now?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"My dear, is that your whole supply for the winter?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I observe you have a nice supply of under wear."

"Yes, ma'am. That was got for me by somebody else; not my aunt."

"Have you other relations then, besides Mrs. Busby?"

"No, ma'am. But I have a friend."

"May I know more, since you have begun to confide in me? Who is this friend?"

"It is the friend mother trusted me to, when she--when she--"

"Yes, I understand," said Mrs. Mowbray gently. "Why does not this friend take care of you then, instead of leaving you to your aunt?"

"O he does take care of me," cried Rotha; "but he is in England; he is not here. He had to go home because his father was very ill--dying, I suppose."

"*He?*" repeated Mrs. Mowbray. "A gentleman?"

"Yes, ma'am. He was the only friend that took care of mother. He got those things for me."

"What is his name, my dear?"

"Mr. Digby. I mean, Mr. Southwode. I always used to call him Mr. Digby."

"Digby Southwode!" said Mrs. Mowbray. "But he is a *young* gentleman."

"O yes," said Rotha. "He is not old. He was called away, back to England suddenly, and aunt Serena hindered my knowing, and hindered him somehow from seeing me at all to say a word to me before he went. And I never can forgive

her for it,--never, never!"

"Hush, my dear," said Mrs. Mowbray softly. "Your aunt may have thought she had good reasons. How came you under your aunt's care then?"

"Mr. Digby took me to her," said Rotha, her eyes filling, while they sparkled at the same time. "He said it was best for me to be there, under her care, as he had no home where he could take me. But if he had known, he never would have left me with her. I know he would not. He would have taken care of me some other way."

"What has Mr. Southwode done for you, that you should have such trust in him?"

But Rotha somehow did not want to go into this subject in detail.

"He did everything for us that a friend could do; he taught me, and he took care of mother; and mother left me in his charge."

"Where was Mrs. Busby?"

"Just where she is now. She did not know we were here."

"Why was that?"

Rotha hesitated. "Mother did not like to tell her," she said, somewhat obscurely.

"And she left you in this gentleman's care."

"Yes."

"And he put you under your aunt's care."

"Yes, for the present. But I was to tell him if anything went wrong; and I have never been able to speak a word to him since. Nor to write, because he had not given me his address."

"Mr. Southwode is an Englishman. It is probable, if his father is dead, that he will make his home in England for the future."

Rotha was silent. She thought Mr. Digby would not forget her, or fail in his promises; but she kept her views to herself.

"He did very properly in committing you to your aunt's care; and now I am very glad I have got you," Mrs. Mowbray went on cheerily. "Now we will try and get all those questions straightened out, that were troubling you. What was it? a question of duty, you said, didn't you?"

Mrs. Mowbray was arranging her heterogeneous masses of books in something like external order; she put a little volume into Rotha's hand as she said the last words. It was a very small New Testament; very small, yet in the clear English printing which made it delightfully legible. "That is the best thing to solve questions of duty with," she went on. "Keep it, my dear."

"O thank you, ma'am!" cried Rotha, a bright colour of pleasure rushing into her cheeks. "O thank you, ma'am! How beautiful! and how nice! But here is where I found my question," she added sorrowfully.

"I dare say. It is the old story--'When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' What was the point this time?"

"Just that point I spoke of, about aunt Serena. I do not forgive her; and in the fifth chapter of Matthew,--here it is: 'If thou bring thy gift to the altar--'"

"I know," Mrs. Mowbray broke in, very busy seemingly with her books and not looking at Rotha. "Why cannot you forgive her?"

"Because I am so wrong, I suppose," Rotha answered humbly.

"Yes, but what has she done?"

"I told you, ma'am. She kept me from seeing Mr. Southwode before he went away. She never even told me he had been

at the house, nor that he was gone. I found it out. She meant I should not see him."

"My dear," said Mrs. Mowbray, "that does not seem to me a very heinous offence."

"It was the very worst thing she could do; the cruellest, and the worst."

"She might have thought she had good reasons."

"She did not think that. She knew better. I think she wanted me all in her power."

"Never think evil of people, if it is possible to think good," Mrs. Mowbray continued. "Always find a pleasant reason for the things people do, if it is possible to find one. It is quite as likely to be true, and it leaves you a great deal more comfortable."

"You cannot always do that," said Rotha.

"And this is one of the times? Well, what are you going to do about it?
Can't you forgive your aunt, even if you think the worst?"

"It would be very easy to forgive her, if I could think differently," said Rotha.

"It occurs to me--Those words you began to quote,--they run, I think, 'If thy brother hath ought *against* thee.' Is that the case here?"

"Yes, ma'am, because I charged her with what she had done; and she did not excuse herself; and I thought I had a right to be angry--very angry; but when I came to those words in my reading, I remembered that though I had so much against her, she had a little against me; because I had not spoken just right. And then I knew I ought to confess it and make an apology; and I was so angry I could not."

"And do you feel so now?" Mrs. Mowbray asked after a slight pause.

"Just the same."

"Do you think you are a Christian, Rotha?"

"No, ma'am. I know--a Christian does His commandments," the girl answered low.

"Do you want to be a Christian?"

"Yes, ma'am, if I could; but how can I?"

"You cannot, while your will goes against God's will."

"Can I help my will?" said Rotha, bringing up her old question.

"There is the dinner-bell," said Mrs. Mowbray. "If I can get a little time this evening, I will try to shew you the answer to your question. I must go now, my dear. Read your New Testament."

Rotha curled herself up on her couch, and by the light of the kennel coal did read her Testament; full of delight that it was hers, and full of comfort in the hope that after all there would be a way for her out of her difficulties.

Then came her dinner. Such a nice dinner it was; and served with a delicacy and order which charmed Rotha. She eat it alone, but missing nothing; having a sense of shelter and hiding from all roughnesses of people and things, that was infinitely soothing. She eat her dinner, and hoped for Mrs. Mowbray's return. Waiting however in vain. Mrs. Mowbray came not. The room was bright; the fire burned; the cheerful shine was upon everything; Rotha was full of comfort in things external; if she only could settle and quiet this question in her heart. Yes, this question was everything. Were she but a child of God, secure and established,--yes, not that only, but pure and good,--like Mr. Digby; then, all would be right. Then she would be happy. With that question unsettled, Rotha did not feel that even Mrs. Mowbray could make her so.

Late in the evening Mrs. Mowbray came. Her arms were full of packages.

"I could not get free before," she said, as she shut the door behind her. "I had an errand--and then company kept me.

"Well, my dear! have you had a pleasant evening, all alone?"

"I like to be alone sometimes," Rotha replied a little evasively.

"Do you! Now I like company; unless I have something to do. Perhaps that was your case, eh?"

"Yes, ma'am, it was."

"And did you accomplish it?--what you had to do."

"No, ma'am."

"You must take me into your counsels. See here--how do you like that?"

She had drawn up a chair to the side of Rotha's couch, and opening one of the packages on her lap, transferred it to Rotha's. It was the fashion then for young people to wear woollen stuffs of bright plaid patterns; and this was a piece of chocolate and black with a thread of gold colour; soft and beautiful and rich tinted. "How do you like that?" Mrs. Mowbray repeated; and Rotha answered that she thought it very beautiful.

"Don't you think that would make you a nice school dress? and here--how would this do for company days?"

As she spoke, she laid upon the chocolate plaid another package, containing a dark brown poplin, heavy and lustrous. Poor Rotha looked up bewildered to the lady's face, which was beaming and triumphant.

"Like it?" she said gleefully. "I couldn't tell your taste, you know. I had to go by my own. Don't you think that would become you?"

"Me?" said Rotha.

"Yes. You see, we cannot wait for your aunt's slow motions, and you must be clothed. Do you like it, my dear?"

"I like it *very* much--of course--they are most beautiful; but--will aunt Serena give you the money, Mrs. Mowbray?"

"I shall not ask her," said Mrs. Mowbray laughing. "You need not say anything about it, to her or anybody else. It is our affair. Now here is a warm skirt, my dear; I want to keep you warm while you are in my house, and you are not sufficiently armed against the cold weather. I don't want to have you catching any more colds. You see, this is for my interest. Now with that you will be as warm as a toast."

It was a beautiful petticoat of scarlet cloth; soft and thick. Rotha looked at the pile of things lying on her lap, and was absolutely dumb. Mrs. Mowbray bent forward and kissed her cheek.

"I think you will be well enough to go out by Saturday--and I will let Miss Jewett go with you to a dress-maker and have these things made up at once. Is there any particular dress-maker who is accustomed to work for you?"

"No," Rotha said first, and then immediately added--"Yes! I forgot; the one who made my summer dresses, that I had in the summer." *That Mr. Southwode got for me*, she had been about to say; but she checked herself. Some fine instinct made her perceive that the mention of that gentleman's name was not received with absolute favour. She thought Mrs. Mowbray did not approve of Mr. Southwode.

"And now, my dear," said that lady, as she swept away the packages of goods from Rotha's lap, "what about your question of conscience?"

"It remains a question, ma'am."

"Not settled yet? What makes the difficulty?"

"I told you, ma'am. I did not speak quite as I ought to my aunt, one or two times, and so--she has something against me; and I cannot pray."

"Cannot pray, my dear! that is dreadful. I should die if I could not pray. The Bible says, pray always."

"But it says, here, 'if thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.'"

"Let me see that place," said Mrs. Mowbray. She sat down beside Rotha and took the little Testament out of her hand, and considered the passage.

"Well, my dear," she said at last,--"and so you think these words forbid you to pray?"

"Do they not?" said Rotha, "until I could reconcile myself to aunt Serena? or at least try."

"What is the matter between you and your aunt?"

"I do not know. I cannot tell what makes her do so."

"Do what?"

"Hide me from the only friend I have got."

"You mean that gentleman? My dear, she may have had very good reasons for that?"

"She could not have good reasons for it," said Rotha flushing.

"My dear, old people often see things that young people do not see, and cannot judge of."

"You do not know Mr. Southwode, ma'am. Anyhow, I do not feel as if I could ever forgive her."

"That makes it difficult for you to go and ask her pardon, hey?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What are you going to do?"

"I do not know," said Rotha sadly.

"It is too late for us to talk longer to-night. I will shew you a Bible to-morrow--stop, there is no time like the present--"

Mrs. Mowbray rose and went to a table from which she brought a little volume. "This will do better," she said. "I have a Bible in which all this, in this book, is arranged in reference columns; but this is more convenient. You can use this with your own Bible, or any Bible. I am going to give you this, my dear." And she fetched a pen as she spoke and entered Rotha's name on the title page, with the date of day and month and year. Then she went on--"Now see, Rotha; here is what will give light on your question. Here are references from every verse in the Bible to other parts and other verses which explain or illustrate it. Find your place,--what is it?--Mat. v. 24, is it?--here; now see, here are references to other passages, and from them you will find references to still others. Take this to-morrow and study it out, and pray, my dear. You cannot get along without praying."

CHAPTER XVI.

SCHOOL.

Rotha received the book with an access of pleasure, which expressed itself however mainly in sparkling eyes and the red tinge of excitement in her cheeks. She did say some words of thanks, but they were not fluent, as customary with her when any great degree of delight was pressing for utterance. Then speech was poor. Mrs. Mowbray did not miss it; she could read the signs, and was satisfied. But long after she was asleep, Rotha lay on her cot with eyes wide open, staring at the remains of the fire. What had come to her? what strange, enchantment-like, fabulous, change of circumstances? and this dispenser and contriver of happiness, slumbering peacefully on the bed yonder, what was she but a very fairy of blessing, bringing order out of disorder and comfort out of the very depths of confusion. A home, and a friend, and nice dresses, and study, and books! Two books to-day! Rotha was too happy to sleep.

The next day she began school duties again; but Mrs. Mowbray would not have her join the family at meals, until, as she said, she had something comfortable to wear. Rotha was thankful for the kind thoughtfulness that spared her feelings; and in return bent herself to her appointed tasks with an energy which soon disposed of them. However, they took all her time, for Mrs. Mowbray had introduced her to another part of the school and a much more advanced class

of the pupils. This of itself gave her new spirit. The following day Mrs. Mowbray, as she had promised, sent her with one of the under teachers to have her dresses cut out. They went in a carriage, and drove to Mrs. Marble's. Mrs. Marble wore a doubtful countenance.

"Well, it *is* time you had something warmer, if you've got nothing more made since those lawns. Where's Mr. Digby?"

"In England."

"England! Don't say! And who's taking care of you?"

"Miss Carpenter is in Mrs. Mowbray's family," said Miss Jewett stiffly.

"Mrs. Mowbray, hey? what, the great school? You *are* in luck, Rotha. Did Mr. Digby put you there?"

"He did not choose the school," said Rotha. "I went to the same place where my cousin went. Mrs. Marble, that's too tight."

"It'll look a great deal handsomer, Rotha. Slim waists are what all the ladies want."

"I can't be pinched," said Rotha, lifting and lowering her shoulders in the exultation of free play. "I would rather be comfortable."

"It does look better, to be snug, Miss Carpenter," said Miss Jewett, taking the mantua-maker's part.

"I don't care," said Rotha. "I must have room to breathe. Make it loose enough, Mrs. Marble, or it will just come back to you to be altered."

"You're as masterful as you just was, and as I always thought you would be," said the mantua-maker. "I suppose you think times is changed."

"They are very much changed, Mrs. Marble," said Rotha calmly. "But I always had my dresses loose."

"And everything else about you!--" muttered the dress-maker. However, she was never an ill-natured woman, and took her orders with tolerable equanimity.

"You are the first young lady I ever saw trying on dresses, who did not want them to fit nicely," Miss Jewett remarked as they were driving away.

"But I could not *breathe!*" said Rotha. "I like to be comfortable."

"Different people have different notions of comfort," was the comment, not admiring. But Rotha did not give the matter another thought.

The next day was Sunday. "You will not go to church, dear," Mrs. Mowbray had whispered. "I shall not ask you till you have something to keep you warm. Have you a thick outer coat?"

Rotha explained. Her aunt had been about to get her one two or three weeks ago; then they had had their falling out, and since then she had heard no more on the subject.

"We will get things in order by next Sunday. You can study at home to-day, and maybe that will be the best thing for you."

It was the most welcome order Rotha could have received. She went up to Mrs. Mowbray's room, which she still inhabited, and took Bible and New Testament and her newly acquired possession, which she found bore title, "The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge," and sat down on the couch. It was all so comfortable around her that Rotha paused to look and think and enjoy. Hid away, she felt; safe and secure from all disturbances; her aunt could not worry her, Antoinette could not even look at her; nobody could interfere with her; and the good fairy of her life would come in only to help and shelter her. The warm air; poor Rotha had been inhabiting a region of frost, it must be remembered, material as well as spiritual; the slight sweet perfume that pervaded the room and came, Rotha knew not from what; the pretty, cosy look of the place, furniture, fire, pictures and all;--Rotha sat looking and feeling in a maze of astonishment. That all this should be, geographically, so near Mrs. Busby's house! With a breath of admiring delight, at last Rotha turned to her books. Yes, if she could get that question settled--

She opened her "Treasury of Scripture Knowledge" and found the fifth chapter of Matthew; then the 24th verse. The first reference here was to Mat. xviii. 15-17.

That does not tell me anything, thought Rotha. I cannot go to aunt Serena and tell her her fault; it would be no use; and besides, that is what I have done already, only not so, I suppose.--Then followed a passage from Job and one from Proverbs, which did not, she thought, meet her case. Then in Mark ix. 50 she found the command to "have peace one with another." But what if I cannot? thought Rotha. Next, in Romans, the word was "Recompense to no man evil for evil"; and, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." This at first caused some exultation, which evaporated upon further reflection. Had it not been possible? If she had been patient, forgiving, sweet; if she had spoken and looked accordingly; would there not have been peace? Her aunt at least would have had nothing against her. Her own cause of grievance would have remained; might she not have forgiven that? A resolute negative answered this gentle suggestion of conscience; like Jonah in the case of his gourd, Rotha said to herself she did well to be angry. At least that Mrs. Busby deserved it; for conscience would not allow the conclusion that she had done "well," at all. It was not as Mr. Digby would have done. He was Rotha's living commentary on the word. She went on. The next passage forbade going to law before unbelievers. Then came a word or two from the first epistle of Timothy; an injunction to "pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, *without wrath*--"

Rotha got no further. That arrow struck home. She must not pray with anger in her heart. Then she must forgive, unconditionally; for it would never do to intermit all praying until somebody else should come to a right, mind. Give up her anger! It made Rotha's blood boil to think of it. How could she, with her blood boiling? And till she *did*--she might not think to pray and be heard.

O why is it so hard to be a Christian! why is it made so difficult!

Then Rotha's conscience whispered that the difficulty was of her own making; if *she* were all right, that would be all easy. She would go on, she thought, with her comparison of Bible passages; perhaps she would come to something that would help. The next passage referred to was in James.

"But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not...
This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.
For where envying and strife are, there is confusion and every evil
work."

"Devilish"! well, I suppose it is, Rotha confessed to herself. "Envying" --I am not envying; but "strife"--aunt Serena and I have that between us. And so "there is confusion and every evil work." I suppose there is. But how am I to help it? I cannot stop my anger--She went on to the next reference. It was,

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed."

The Bible was all against her. Tears began to well up into Rotha's eyes. She thought she would see what the words were about forgiving. Her eye had caught the Lord's prayer on the next leaf. She turned to that place in her reference book. And here, first of all, the words of the prayer itself struck her, and then the 14th and 15th verses below. It was a dead lock! If she could not forgive, she could not be forgiven; sharp and clear the sentence ran; there was no mistaking it, there could be no glossing it over. Rotha's tears silently rose and fell, hot and sorrowful. She did want to be forgiven; but to forgive, no. With tears dripping before her Bible, she would not let them fall on it, she studied a passage referred to, in the 18th of Matthew, where Peter was directed to set no bounds to his overlooking of injuries, and the parable of the unmerciful servant is brought up. Rotha studied that chapter long. The right and the truth she saw clearly; but as soon as she thought of applying them to her aunt Busby, her soul rose up in arms. She has done me the cruelest and the meanest of wrongs, said the girl to herself; cruel beyond all telling; what she deserves is to be well shaken by the shoulders. Go to her and say that *I* have done wrong to *her* and ask her to forgive *me*, and so help her to forget her own doings--I cannot.- -Rotha made a common mistake, the sophistry of passion, which is the same thing as the devil's sophistry. Her confessing and doing right, would have been the very likeliest way to make Mrs. Busby ashamed of herself.

However, Rotha went on with her study. Two passages struck her particularly, in Ephesians and Colossians. The first--"Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." The other to the same purport, in Col. iii. 13.

But he has not forgiven me, cried Rotha in her heart, while the tears poured; he will not forgive me, unless I forgive her--"But he is ready to forgive you," the very words before her proclaimed. It was a dead lock, nevertheless; and when

Mrs. Mowbray came home from church she found, to her surprise, Rotha still bending over her Bible with her tears dripping on the floor. Mrs. Mowbray took off her hat and cloak before she said a word. Then coming to Rotha's side on the couch, she put one arm round her.

"My dear," she said gently, "what is the matter?"

The tone and the touch were so sympathizing, so tender, that Rotha answered by an affectionate, clinging gesture, taking care at the same time that none of her tears fell on Mrs. Mowbray's rich silk. For a little space she made no other answer. When she spoke, it was with a passionate accent.

"Madame, if I am ever to be a Christian, I must be made all over new!"

"That is nothing uncommon," the lady replied.

"It is every one's case. So the Bible says; 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.'"

"But how am I to get made over all new?" Rotha cried.

"That is the Holy Spirit's work. 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'"

"Then must I ask for him?"

"Certainly."

"But if I do not forgive aunt Serena, it is no use for me to pray?"

"Nay, Rotha, if that were true we should be in a bad case indeed. If you read the fifteenth chapter of Luke, you will find that when the prodigal son was returning, his father saw him *while he was yet a great way off*; and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. If you are truly setting yourself to seek God, you will find him; and if you are in earnest in wishing to do his will, he will enable you to do it. You must always ask, my dear. The Bible says, 'the Lord over all is rich unto all--' not, that are perfect, but--'that call upon him.'"

"But it says, 'if ye do not forgive, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you.'"

"True; but he will give you that new nature you say you must have; and then forgiving will be easy."

Rotha looked up, partly comforted. And from that time she prayed for a new nature.

A few days more saw her school dress finished and at home. It looked magnificent to Rotha; far too good for a school dress. But Mrs. Mowbray said no; she must look nice in school as well as anywhere; and that very evening she brought to Rotha a box full of neat collars and cuffs and ruffles; some of plain linen and some of lighter and prettier manufacture. The supply was most abundant; and with these things were some ribbands of various colours and little silk neck ties. Rotha received them in the same mute way of speechless gratitude and delight; and resolved one thing; that Mrs. Mowbray should have nothing to complain of in her, whether regarding school duties or anything else.

Another thing Mrs. Mowbray did for Rotha that week. Calling Antoinette Busby to her, at the close of a lesson, she said, "My dear, among the things sent round from your house for your cousin's use, there is no coat or cloak for cold weather wear. Will you tell your mother, Rotha's coat has not been brought with the rest of her things? Thank you. That is all, my dear."

Antoinette went home in a good deal of a fluster, and told her mother. Mrs. Busby looked impenetrable.

"Now mamma, what are you going to do about it?"

"What did you say?"

"I said nothing. What could I say?"

"Did you see Rotha?"

"No; she is up stairs, getting nursed for her cold."

"Stuff!"

"Well, she had a cold, mamma. Mrs. Mowbray always finds out if the girls are shamming. She is sharp enough."

"Rotha is no more ill than I am."

"Mrs. Mowbray always sends a girl off to her room if she is out of sorts, and coddles her up with pills and tea. She don't do it unless she sees reason."

"Why didn't you ask to see Rotha? It would have looked better."

"I never thought of it," said Antoinette laughing. "Because, really, I didn't want to see her. I should rather think I didn't!"

"You had better ask to-morrow."

"Very well. And what shall I say about the coat?"

"I suppose I shall have to get her one," Mrs. Busby said grimly.

"Then she will want a hat, mamma."

"I'll send your grey plush."

"She won't wear it."

"Mrs. Mowbray will make her. *She* won't hear nonsense."

"Who does, mamma? Not you, I am sure."

Having to do the thing, Mrs. Busby did it well, for her own sake. She would have let Rotha stay within doors all winter; but if she must get her a cloak, it should never be said she got her a poor one. Accordingly, the next day two boxes were sent round to Mrs. Mowbray's; one containing the rejected hat, the other a warm and handsome cloak, which Mrs. Busby got cheap because it was one of the last year's goods, of a fashion a little obsolete. Antoinette asked leave to see Rotha, that same day, and was refused. Mrs. Mowbray wished her to be left quite to herself. So the next time the cousins met was in class, a day or two later. It was a class to which Mrs. Mowbray herself gave a lesson; it was a class of the more advanced scholars; and Antoinette, who had left her cousin in a lower department, among Miss Blodgett's pupils, was exceedingly astonished to see Rotha come in among the young ladies of the family and take her seat in the privileged library where these lessons were given. Yet more was Antoinette astonished at her cousin's transformation. Rotha was dressed well, in the abovementioned chocolate plaid; her linen collar and cuffs were white and pretty like other people's; the dress was well made; Rotha's abundant dark hair, now growing long, was knotted up loosely at the back of her head, her collar was tied with a little cherry coloured bow; and her whole figure was striking and charming. Antoinette, who was an acknowledged beauty, felt a pang of displeasure. In fact she was so much disturbed and annoyed that her mind was quite distracted from the business in hand; she paid little attention to the lesson and rather got into disgrace. Rotha on the contrary, entering the class and enjoying the teaching for the first time, was full of delighted interest; forgot even her new dress and herself altogether; took acute, intelligent part in the discussion that went on, (the 'subject being historical) and at one bound unconsciously placed herself at the head of the class. There was no formal taking rank, but the judgment of all present involuntarily gave her the place. And Mrs. Mowbray herself had some difficulty not to look too often towards the face that always met hers with such sympathy and life in every feature. Many there indeed were interested; yet no eyes shewed such intelligent fire, no lips were so expressive in their play, no interest was so evidently unalloyed with any thought of self-consciousness.

As the girls scattered, after the hour was over, the cousins met.

"Well!" said Antoinette, "what's come over you?"

The tone was not pleasant. Rotha asked her distantly what she meant?

"Why I left you one thing, and I find you another," said Antoinette. "How did you get here?"

"Mrs. Mowbray desired it. I came to school to study, Antoinette. Why should I not be here?"

"But how *could* you be here? These are the upper girls."

Rotha laughed a little. She felt very gay-hearted.

"And where did you get this?" Antoinette went on, feeling of a fold of Rotha's dress. "What beautiful cashmere! Where did you get it?"

"There came a good fairy to my room one night, and astonished me."

"A fairy!" said Antoinette.

"Yes, the days of fairies are not over. I thought they were, but I was mistaken," said Rotha joyously. "I do not think there is anything much pleasanter, than to have a good fairy come and visit you."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that. Good bye--the girls are going out to walk, and I must get ready to go along."

She tripped up the stairs, leaving Antoinette mystified and crestfallen. Under pretence of collecting her books, she lingered in one of the class rooms in the lower story, waiting to see the girls pass out, which they always did, she knew, by the lower door. They came presently in long file. The families that sent their daughters to Mrs. Mowbray's were generally of the wealthier portions of society; and it was a well dressed set that defiled before Antoinette's eyes; too well, for many of them were unbecomingly fine. Antoinette did not recognize her cousin until she was quite out upon the street and turned her face casually to speak to some one behind her. The new cloak, of dark green stun 7, was as handsome as Antoinette's own; and there was no old grey plush hat above it. No such matter; a neat little green hat, perfectly simple, but new and well made and well fitting, shaded a face full of merry sparkle, totally unlike the depressed, cloudy expression Antoinette had been used to despise at home. She told her mother with an injured air what she had seen. Mrs. Busby said nothing. It was vexatious; at the same time she reflected that the credit of all this would redound to herself Nobody but Mrs. Mowbray and Rotha herself knew whence came the dresses and bonnet, and they would not tell, naturally. On the whole the gain was as great as the loss.

But to Rotha now-a-days it was all gain. That walk with the girls; how pleasant it was, to go with free step, conscious that there was nothing in her appearance to draw remark or provoke pity. At Rotha's age, perhaps as much as ever, such an immunity is prized and enjoyed. It was such a walk as till then she had never taken in the streets of New York; for even when, two or three years ago, she had gone with her mother, it was with a feeling of being classed with the multitude of the poor and struggling and ill-dressed. So the walking had been mainly in streets where such classes were lodged and at home. Now Rotha went where the buildings were fine and the ways broad, and where the passers-by were gay and splendid. Her breath came freer, her step grew more elastic, the colour rose in her cheeks; and when the little procession returned home, Miss Parsons, who had been in charge of it, remarked to Mrs. Mowbray that she had no idea before what a very handsome girl Miss Carpenter was. And Mrs. Mowbray, when they all gathered to dinner, cast a keen glance at the new member of the company. She was reassured; not a particle of self-consciousness was to be traced in the fine, bright, spirited lace, though the beauty was unquestioned.

That was the first time Rotha had met the family at table. It was a new and highly interesting experience for her. The table was very long; and the mere sight of so many fresh young faces together was inspiriting of itself; of greatest interest to Rotha because these were her companions, fellow pupils, sharers in work and play together. But apart from its living surroundings, the board excited Rotha's keenest attention. The delicacy and order of its arrangements, the beauty of its appointments, the abundance of the supply, the excellence of the material. Everything there was of the best; everything was well cooked and appetizing; it was a simple table, as it should be, but no provision for health or comfort was wanting. Rotha felt herself at home in surroundings that suited her.

Then it was a lively meal; not a bit of stagnation. At Mrs. Busby's the talk at table was about nothing to stir the slightest interest, to any one whose soul was not in a condition to be fed with the very dryest of social husks; the only exceptions being when Mr. and Mrs. Busby got into a debate. A debate always has some elements of interest, if there is any wit on either side of it. Here, the first thing, after the carving was well begun, was the reciting of French anecdotes or sayings or quotations, by each of the scholars in turn; the exercise being superintended by the French teacher, a very imposing person in Rotha's eyes, to whom she had just that day been introduced. It was very amusing to her to hear the differing accent, the varying voices, and to watch the different air and manner of the girls, as Mme. Bonton's voice, uttering "Suivante"--"Suivante"--called them up one after another. She herself, of course, had no little speech prepared. Then the conversation became general, as the business of dining went on its way, and Mrs. Mowbray made part of it very interesting. Altogether, it was a time of delight to Rotha.

Not less so were the hours of study that followed. It was one of her good properties, that she could easily concentrate all her attention on the one thing she happened to have in hand. So study was study to her; deep, absorbing, conquering, and of course triumphing. And when the bell summoned the family to tea, she came fresh for new pleasure to assemble with the rest.

The parlours were cleared of the long table now; only enough of it being left to accommodate the younger scholars who might not be trusted to hold a cup of tea safely. The girls brought their various pieces of fancy work; the rooms were well lighted, well furnished, the walls hung with engravings and paintings, the mantelpieces full of pretty things; it was not like a school, but like a large, elegant family gathering. Here the tea was handed round, with rolls and excellent cake and biscuits. Mrs. Mowbray presently called Rotha to her side, by the big table; and held a little quiet talk with her about the course of the day, introducing her at the same time to several of her schoolmates. I can never tell how the girl's whole nature opened and expanded, like a suddenly blossoming rose, under the genial, kindly atmosphere and culture into which she now came.

Study? She studied with a consuming kind of intensity. Not a teacher that she had to do with, but took delight in her. She gave them absolutely no trouble. She was not a timid girl; so was not, like some, hindered by nervousness from making a fair presentation of herself. Her mind was opening, greedy for the food it got, and taking it in rapidly.

And happy? There was not seemingly a happier girl in the house. Crowding new interests had driven into the background, for the time, the demands of conscience; and Rotha was one of those people whose cup of life is a large one; capacities of heart and intellect alike wide in their possibilities, but if satisfied, making existence very rich. She was quiet enough in manner, never forgetting her beloved model; yet eye and lip and varying colour, and the involuntary movement of head and hand, and foot too, testified to the glad growing life of her soul. Mrs. Mowbray saw it with perpetual satisfaction; it got to be a habit with her that her eye sought and rested on that one unmistakeably honest and loyal member of her family. And Rotha's eye never met hers but there came a sparkle and a look of love into the young face.

All day was a delight now to the girl; beginning with the morning prayers, which to be sure she loved mostly because she heard Mrs. Mowbray's voice in them. Then came breakfast; bright and cheery, with the hope and the work of the day in prospect, and a lively, pretty, pleasant table and company in possession. It was not like school; it was a large family; where all arrangements and supplies were as in the best appointed private house, and the only rules that reigned were the rules of good manners. Then came the brisk walk in the bracing morning air; and then, study. Some lesson hours were particularly interesting to Rotha. Latin she did not like, but French she took to kindly; and Madame Bonton told madame with a satisfied nod of her head, that Miss Carpenter was "not a soap bubble",--high praise, which only a few of the girls ever attained.

Among her schoolmates Rotha made no particular friends. Some of them asked captiously who she was? others remarked critically that she thought herself too good looking; others declared enviously that she was a "favourite." Rotha did not take to any of them; made no confident of any of them; and was felt by most of them to be somehow uncongenial. Those who saw most of her felt this most decidedly. She presently was out of favour with all her roommates.

It was a rule of the house that lights should be all out at ten o'clock. Then one of the under teachers made a progress through the rooms to see that this was done and everybody in bed. Rotha made one of four girls who occupied a large room on the third floor. Each young lady had her own bed, her own press and drawers, and everything comfort called for; of course absolute privacy could not be given. When Rotha had been in her new quarters two or three weeks, there came a collision between her and her fellows in that room. One night Miss Jewett had been round as usual and turned off the gas. As soon as her retreating foot-steps were heard to reenter her own room, at the further end of the passage, one of the girls sprang up and lit the gas again. The burner was near the head of her bed, so that she could see pretty well to read when she was lying down; which to Rotha's great surprise she went on to do for some time-- till Rotha fell asleep. The next night the same thing happened, and the next. Rotha became uneasy, and finally could bear it no longer. The fourth time this trick was played, she lifted her voice in protest.

"Miss Entable," said she, "what you are doing is against the rules."

She spoke clearly enough, though with a moderated voice; but not the least attention was paid to her remonstrance. One of her three companions was asleep; the second giggled; the reader took no notice. Rotha grew hot. What was she to do? Not give way. To give way in the face of opposition was never Rotha's manner. She slipped out of bed and came near the one where the reader lay.

"Miss Entable, it is against rules, what you are doing."

"Mind your own business," said the other shortly.

"I am minding it," returned Rotha. "It is my business to keep Mrs. Mowbray's rules, and not to help break them; and I will not."

"Will not what? You want to curry favour with old Mowbray--that's what you do. I have no patience with such meanness!"

"You had better go and tell her what we are doing," said the third girl scornfully.

"Miss Mc Pherson," said Rotha, her voice trembling a little with wrath,
"I think Mrs. Mowbray trusts you. How can you bear to be false to trust?"

"Stuff!"

"Cant!"

"Nobody asks your opinion about it. Who are you?" said the Mc Pherson, who in her own opinion was somebody.

"Nor do I ask yours," said Rotha. "I will not help you break madame's rules. The light is one fourth part mine; and my part shall not burn after hours."

With which deliverance she turned off the gas. Words of smothered rage and scorn followed her as she went back to bed; and the next day Rotha was plainly ostracised by a large part of her school-mates.

The next evening the gas was lighted again after ten o'clock.

"Now you Carpenter," said the reader, "I am not going to stand any of your ill manners. You will let the gas alone, if you please."

"I cannot let it alone," said Rotha. "I should be a sharer in your dishonour."

"Dishonour! well, let it alone, or I'll--"

"What, Miss Entable?"

"Mc Pherson and I will put you in bed and tie you there; and Jennings will help. We are three against one. So hold your tongue."

Rotha reflected. It did not suit her feeling of self-respect to be concerned in a row. She raised herself on one elbow.

"I do not choose to fight," she said; "that is not my way. But if you do not put the gas out, I shall tell Mrs. Mowbray that she must make somebody watch to see that her orders are observed."

Now there arose a storm; rage and contempt and reviling were heaped on Rotha's head. "Informer!"--"Spy!"--"Mean tell tale!"--were some of the gentle marks of esteem bestowed on her.

"I am not an informer," said Rotha, when she could be heard; "I am not going to mention any names. I will only tell Mrs. Mowbray that she must charge somebody to see that her orders are observed."

"Orders! She is a mean, pinching, narrow-minded, low, school ma'am. You should see how it is at Mrs. De Joyce's. The girls have liberty--they receive their friends--they go to the opera--they have little dances-- they do just what they like. Mrs. De Joyce is such a lady! it is another thing. I am not going to stay in this mean house after this term is out."

"Mary Entable!" said Rotha, rising up on her elbow and speaking with blazing eyes; "are you not ashamed of yourself? Mrs. Mowbray, who has just been so kind to you! so generous! so good! How long is it since she was nursing you through a terrible sickness--nursing you night and day-- entertaining your mother and your sister for ten days, in her crowded house. Do you dare call her narrow? Answer me one thing, if you can; did your mother and sister bear the expense of their stay here, or did she? Answer me, if you have a fraction of a soul in you!--Aren't you ashamed! I should think you would cover up your face in the bedclothes, and never look at anybody again!"

Leaning on her elbow, raised so up in her bed, Rotha had delivered herself of the foregoing; in a moderated voice it is true, but with a cutting energy and directness. The other three girls were at first silent, partly with astonishment, Rotha's usual manner was so contained.

"You may do as you like," she went on more composedly, "but help you I will not in your wrong ways. If the gas is lighted again after ten o'clock, I shall take my measures. I come of an honest family."

That last cut was too much. The storm of abuse burst forth again; but Rotha wrapped herself in her coverlets and said no more. The gas was not relighted that evening. However, in the nature of the case it followed that lawless girls would not be long kept in check by the influence of one whom they regarded so lightly as these did Rotha. A fortnight later, the latter came to Mrs. Mowbray one day when she was alone in the library.

"Well, my child--what is it?" said the kind voice she had learned to love devotedly. Mrs. Mowbray was arranging some of the displaced books in the bookcases, and spoke with only a fleeting glance at the person approaching her, to see who it was.

"May I speak to you, madame?"

"Yes--speak. What is it?"

"I do not know how to say what I want to say."

"Straight out, my child. Straight out is best. What is the matter?"

"Nothing, with me, madame. But--if it would not give too much trouble--I thought I would like it very much if I could be put in another room."

"Sleeping room?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Why?"--Mrs. Mowbray's quick hands were busy all the while she was talking; putting up and pulling down. Rotha hesitated.

"Madame, before I answer I should like to ask another question. What ought I to do if I see something done which you have forbidden?"

A quick sharp glance came her way now.

"What have you seen?"

"That is just what I do not know whether I ought to tell you. I thought, perhaps it would be the best way for me to go where I could not see it."

"Why?" said Mrs. Mowbray dryly.

"Then I should not be sharing the wrong. I suppose, more than that is not my affair. I am afraid it would be troublesome to move me."

"Any change is troublesome in a house like this," the lady answered; and Rotha stood still, not knowing how to go on. Mrs. Mowbray stepped up on the library steps to arrange some books on the upper shelves; and till she came down she did not speak again.

"You are quite right to mention no names and give no stories," she said then. "I always doubt an informer. And you are quite right also in refusing to countenance what is wrong. I will give you another room, my dear." She took Rotha in her arms and kissed her repeatedly. "Have I found a friend?" she said.

"You, madame?" said Rotha. "I cannot do anything for *you*; but you have done everything for me."

"You can give me love and truth that is all we any of us can give to one another, isn't it? The ways of shewing may be different.--Where are you going to spend the holidays?" she said with a change of tone.

"I don't know, madame. I have not thought about it."

"Will you spend them with me?"

Joy flamed up in Rotha's eyes and lips and cheeks. "O madame!--if I may."

"I expect half a dozen of the young ladies will stay with me. Here is a note that came for you, from your aunt."

She gave Rotha an open note to read. It contained the request that Rotha might spend the time between Christmas and New Year's Day at her house, but not those days. Rotha read and looked up.

"Write," said Mrs. Mowbray, "and say to your aunt that I have invited you and that you have accepted the invitation, for the whole holidays."

The smile and the glance of her sweet eye were bewitching. Rotha felt as if she could have stooped down and kissed her very garments.

CHAPTER XVII.

BAGS AND BIBLES.

Those holidays were a never-to-be-forgotten time in Rotha's life. Christmas eve, and indeed a day before, there was a great bustle and rush of movement in the house, almost all the boarders sweeping away to their various homes. Their example was followed by the under teachers; only Miss Blodgett remained; and a sudden lull took place of the rush. A small table was drawn out in the middle room; and Mrs. Mowbray came to dinner with a face, tired indeed, but set for play. The days of the ordinary weeks were always thick set with business; the weight of business was upon every heart; now it was unmitigated holiday. Nobody knew better how to play than Mrs. Mowbray; it was in her very air and voice and words. Perhaps some of this was assumed for the sake of others; a large portion of it was unquestionably real. The table was festive, that Christmas eve; flowers dressed it; the dessert was gay with confections and bonbons, as well as ice cream; and there was a breath of promise and anticipation in Mrs. Mowbray's manner that infected the dullest spirits there. And some of the girls were very dull! But Rotha's sprang up as if she had been in paradise.

"Are you going to hang up your stocking, Miss Blodgett?"

Miss Blodgett bridled and smiled and was understood to express her opinion that she was "too old."

"Too old!" My dear Miss Blodgett! One is never too old to be happy. I intend to be as happy as ever I can. I shall hang up *my* stocking; and I expect everybody to put something in it."

"You ought to have let us know that beforehand, madame," said Miss Blodgett.

"Let you know beforehand!" said Mrs. Mowbray, while her eye twinkled mischievously: "My dear friend! I don't want any but free-will offerings. You didn't think I was going to levy black mail? did you? Miss Blodgett! I thought you knew me better."

Whether she were in jest or in earnest, Rotha could not make up her mind. She was laughing at Miss Blodgett, that Rotha saw; but was it all nonsense about the stocking and the gifts? Mrs. Mowbray's sweet eyes were dancing with fun, her lips wreathed with the loveliest archness; whatever she meant, Rotha was utterly and wholly bewitched. She ran on for some little time, amusing herself and the girls, and putting slow Miss Blodgett in something of an embarrassment, she was so much too quick for her.

"Are you going to hang up your stocking, Miss Emory?"

Miss Emory in her turn smiled and bridled, and seemed at a loss how to answer.

"Miss Eutable?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Certainly. We will all hang up our stockings. Do you think by the chimney is the best place, Louisa?"

The girl addressed was a little girl, left in Mrs. Mowbray's care while her parents were in Europe. She dimpled and declared she supposed one place was as good as another.

"But you believe Santa Claus comes down the chimney?"

"I always knew better, Mrs. Mowbray."

"You did! You knew better! She knew better, Miss Blodgett. We are growing so wise in this generation. Here's little Miss Farrar does not believe in Santa Claus. I think that's a great loss. Miss Carpenter, what do you think about it? Do you think it is best to let the cold daylight in upon all our dreams?"

"The sun is not cold, madame."

"But the sun leaves no mystery."

"I do not like mystery, madame?"

"You don't? I think the charm of the stocking hung up, is the mystery. To listen for the sound of the reindeers' feet on the roof, to hear the rustle of the paper packages as Santa Claus comes down the chimney--there is nothing like that! I used to lie and listen and cover up my eyes for fear I should look, and be all in a tremble of delight and mystery."

"I should have looked," said Rotha.

"You must never look at Santa Claus. He don't like it."

"But I always knew it was no Santa Claus."

"Do you think you, and Miss Farrar here, are the happier for being so wise?"

"I do not know," said Rotha laughing. "I cannot help it."

"Mrs. Mowbray," said Miss Blodgett, "Miss Carpenter is the only young lady in the house who says 'do not' instead of don't; have you noticed?"

"My dear Miss Blodgett! don't you go to preaching up precision. Life is too short to round all the corners; and there are too many corners. You must cut across sometimes. I say 'don't,' myself."

She went now into a more business-like inquiry, how the several young ladies present expected to spend the next day; and as they rose from table, asked Rotha if she would like to drive out with her immediately. She had business to attend to.

The drive, and the business, of that Christmas eve remained a vision of unalloyed pure delight in Rotha's memory for ever. The city was brightly lighted, at least where she and Mrs. Mowbray went; the streets were full of a gay crowd, gay as one sees it at no other time of all the year but around the holidays; everybody was buying or had bought, and was carrying bundles done up in brown paper, and packages of all sizes and shapes; and everybody's face looked as if there were a pleasant thought behind it, for everybody was preparing good for somebody else. Mrs. Mowbray was on such errands, Rotha immediately saw. And the shops were such scenes of happy bustle; happy to the owners, for they were driving a good trade; and happy to the customers, for every one was getting what he wanted. A large grocer's was the first place Mrs. Mowbray stopped at; and even here the scene was exceedingly attractive and interesting to Rotha. It was not much like the little corner grocery near Jane Street, where she once used to buy half pounds of tea and pecks of potatoes for her mother; although the mingled scents of spices and cheese did recall that to mind; the spices and the cheese here were better, and the odours correspondingly. Rotha never lost the remembrance, nor ever entered a large house of this kind again in her life without a sweeping impression of the mysterious bustle and joy of that Christmas eve.

Mrs. Mowbray had various orders to give. Among them was one specially interesting to Rotha. She desired to have some twenty or thirty pounds of tea done up in half pound packages; also as many pounds of sugar, loaf sugar. As she and Rotha were driving off she explained what all this was for. "It is to go to my poor old people at the Coloured Home," she said. "Did you ever hear of the Old Coloured Home? I suppose not. That is an institution for the care of worn-out old coloured people, who have nobody to look after them. They expect to see me at Christmas. Would you like to go with me to-morrow, after church, when I go to take the tea to them?"

Rotha answered, most sincerely, that she would like to go anywhere with Mrs. Mowbray.

"They think all the world of tea, those poor old women; and they do not get it very good. The tea for them all is brewed in a great kettle and sweetened with molasses, without taking any account of differences of taste," Mrs. Mowbray added laughing; "and many of these old people know what is good as well as I do; and this common tea is dreadful to them. So at Christmas I always carry them a half pound of tea apiece and a pound of loaf sugar; and you have no idea how much they look forward to it."

"Half a pound of tea will last quite a good while," said Rotha.

"How do you know, my dear?"

"I used to get half a pound at a time for mother, and then I used to make it for her always; so I know it will do for a long time, if one is careful."

"So you have been a housekeeper!"

"Not much.--I used to do things for mother."

"Mrs. Busby is her sister?"

"Yes, ma'am; but not like her. O not a bit like her."

"Where was Mrs. Busby in those days?"

"Here. Just where she is now."

"Did she never come to see you?"

"She did not know where we were. Mother never let her know."

"Do you know why not, my dear?"

"She had been so unkind--" Rotha answered in a low voice.

Mrs. Mowbray thought to herself that probably there had been fault on both sides.

"You must try and forget all that, my dear, if there were old grievances. It is best to forgive and forget, and Christmas is a capital time to do it. I never dare think of a grudge against anybody at Christmas. And your aunt seems disposed to be kind to you now."

"No, ma'am, I do not think she does."

"Don't you!"

"No, ma'am. I do not"

"Why, my dear, you must not bear malice."

"What is 'malice'?"

"Well,--ill-will."

"Ill-will--I do not think I wish any harm to her," said Rotha slowly; "but I do not forgive her."

"What do you want to do to her?"

"I do not know. I should like to make her feel ashamed of herself--if I knew how."

"I do not think that lies in your power, my dear; and I would not try. That is a sort of revenge-taking; and all sorts of revenge-taking are forbidden to us. 'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord."

"I do not mean vengeance," said Rotha. "I mean, just punishment--a little bit."

"That is the meaning of the word 'vengeance' in that place;--just punishment; but in your heart, Rotha, it is revenge. Put it away, my dear. It is not the spirit of Christ. You must forgive, if you would be forgiven."

"I do not know how," said Rotha, low and steadily.

"See how Jesus did. When they were nailing him to the cross, he said, 'Father, forgive them.'"

"Yes, but he said too, Mrs. Mowbray,--'they know not what they do.'"

"My dear, nobody knows the evil he does. That does not excuse the evil, but it helps your charity for the sinner. Nobody knows the evil he does. I suppose Mrs. Busby has no notion how much she has hurt you."

Rotha thought, her aunt had as little *care*; but she did not say it. She was silent a minute, and then asked if the poor people at the Old Coloured Home were all women?

"O no!" Mrs. Mowbray answered. "There are a great many men. I give *them* a pound of tobacco each; but I prefer not to take that in the carriage with me. It is all up there now, I suppose, waiting for me and to-morrow."

With which the carriage stopped again.

Here it was a bookstore; a large and beautiful one. The light was brilliant; and on every counter and table lay spread about such treasures of printing, engraving, and the book-binder's art, as Rotha had never seen gathered together before. Mrs. Mowbray told her to amuse herself with looking at the books and pictures, while she attended to the business that brought her here; and so began a wonderful hour for Rotha. O the books! O the pictures! what pages of interest! what leaves of beauty! Her eyes were drunk with delight. From one thing to another, with careful fingers and dainty touch she went exploring; sometimes getting caught in the interest of an open page of letterpress, sometimes hanging over an engraving with wondering admiration and sympathy. It seemed any length of time, it was really not more than three quarters of an hour, when Mrs. Mowbray approached her again, having got through her errands. With cheeks red and eyes intent, Rotha was bending over something, the sense of hearing for the present gone into abeyance; Mrs. Mowbray was obliged to touch her. She smiled at Rotha's start.

"What had you there, my dear?"

"All sorts of things, Mrs. Mowbray! Just that minute, I was looking at an atlas."

"An atlas!"

"Yes, the most perfect I ever saw. O beautiful, and with so many things told and taught in it. A delightful atlas! And then, I was looking at the illustrations in the 'Arabian Nights'--I think that was the name."

"You never read it?"

"O no, ma'am. I never had many books to read;--until now."

"Are you reading anything now, in course?"

"I haven't much time, there is so much history to read. But I have begun 'Waverley'."

"Do you like it?"

"O, a great deal more than I can tell!"

"Do not let it draw you away from your studies."

"No, ma'am. There is no danger," said Rotha joyously.

Mrs. Mowbray did not speak again till the carriage stopped at Stewart's. It was the first time Rotha had ever been inside of those white walls; and this visit finished the bewitchment of the evening. At first the size of the place and the numbers of people busy there engrossed her attention; nor did either thing cease to be a wonder; but by degrees one grows accustomed even to wonders. By degrees Rotha was able to look at what was on the counters, as well as what was before them; for a while she had followed Mrs. Mowbray without seeing what that lady was doing. Mrs. Mowbray

had a good deal of business on hand. When Rotha began to attend to it, the two had come into the rotunda room and were standing at the great glove counter. Between what was going on there, and what was doing at the silk counters around her, Rotha was fully engaged, and was only recalled to herself by Mrs. Mowbray's voice asking,

"What is your number, Rotha?"

"Ma'am?" said the girl "I did not understand--"

"What is the number of the size of glove you wear?"

"I do not know, ma'am--O, I remember! six and a half."

"Six and a half," Mrs. Mowbray repeated to the shopman; and then proceeded to pull out pairs of gloves from the packages handed her. "There's a dark green, my dear; that is near the shade of your cloak. There is a good colour" throwing down upon the green a dark grey; and a brown followed the green. "Now we want some lighter--do you like that?"

"Yes, ma'am."

More than the mere affirmative Rotha could not say; she looked on bewildered and confounded, as a pair of pearl grey gloves was laid upon the green, the dark, and the brown, and then came a tan-coloured pair, and then a soft ashes of roses. Half a dozen pair of kid gloves! Rotha had never even contemplated such profusion. She received the little packet with only a half-uttered, low, suppressed word of thanks. Then the two wandered away from that room, and found themselves among holiday varieties. Here Rotha was dazzled. Not indeed by glitter; but by the combinations of use and beauty that met her eyes, look where they would. Mrs. Mowbray was making purchases, Rotha did not know of what, it did not concern her; and she was never tempted by vulgar curiosity. She indulged her eyes with looking at everything else. What fans, and dressing boxes and work boxes, and fancy baskets, and hand mirrors, and combs and brushes, and vials of perfumes, and writing cases, and cigar cases, and Japan ware, and little clocks, and standishes, and glove boxes, and paperies, and desks, and jewel cases----

"Have you a handbag for travelling, Rotha?"

The question made her start.

"No, ma'am. I never go travelling."

"You will, some time. How do you like that? Think it is too large?"

Rotha was speechless. Could Mrs. Mowbray remember that she had given her half a dozen pair of gloves that evening already?

"I always like a handbag that will carry something," Mrs. Mowbray went on. "You want room for a book, and room for writing materials; you should always have writing materials in your hand-bag, and stamps, and everything necessary. You never know what you may want in a hurry. I think that is about right; do you?"

"That" was a beautiful brown bag of Russia leather, sweet with the pungent sweetness of birch bark, or of the peculiar process of curing with such bark; and with nickel plated lock and bolts. Rotha flushed high; to speak she was incompetent just then.

"I think it will do then," said Mrs. Mowbray, herself in a high state of holiday glee; preparing, as she was, pleasure for a vast number of persons, rich and poor, young and old; she was running over with a sort of angel's pleasure in giving comfort or making glad. In Rotha's case she was doing both.

"Don't you want to take it home with you, my dear?" she went on. "There will be so many things to send from the store to-night that they will never get to their destination; and I always like to make sure of a thing when I have got it. Though you rarely make a mistake here," she added graciously to the foreman who was waiting upon her.

Rotha took the bag, without a word, for she had not a thing to say; and she dropped her package of gloves into it, for safe keeping and easy transportation. Talk of riches! The thing is comparative. I question if there was a millionaire's wife in the city that night who felt as supremely rich as did Rotha with her bag and her gloves. She tried to say a word of thanks to her kind friend when she got home; but Mrs. Mowbray stopped her.

"Go to bed, my dear," she said, with a kiss, "and don't forget to hang up your stocking. Are you comfortable up there?"

"Yes, ma'am--O yes!" Rotha answered as she went up the stairs.

Comfortable! She was alone in her room, all her roommates having gone somewhere for the holidays; the whole house was warm; and Rotha shut her door, and set her bag on a table, and sat down and looked at it; with her heart growing big. Hang up her stocking! She! Had she not had Christmas enough already?

It all worked oddly with Rotha. To the majority of natures, great pleasure is found to work adversely to the entertaining of serious thoughts or encouraging religious impressions. With her, grief seemed to muddle all her spiritual condition, and joy cleared it up. She sat looking at her treasures, looking mentally at the wonderful good things that surrounded her, contrasted with her previous unhappiness; and the whole generous truth of her nature was aroused. She ought to be such a good girl! And by "goodness" Rotha did not mean an orderly getting of her lessons. Conscience went a great deal further, enlightened by the examples she had known of what was really good. Yes, her mother would have forgiven her aunt; and Mr. Digby would never have been ill-mannerly to her; and supposing him for once to be in such a condition of wrong, he would go straight forward, she knew, to make amends, own the fault and ask pardon. Further than that; for on both their parts such feeling and action would have been but the outcome of their habitual lowly and loving obedience to God. That she ought to be like them, Rotha knew; and tears of sorrow rushed to her eyes to think she was not. "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance," was the thought working in her; although she did not clothe it in the Bible words.

What hindered?

"My ugly temper," said Rotha to herself; "my wickedness and badness."

What help?

Yes, there was help, she knew, she believed. She brought her Bible and turned to the marked passages, brushing away the tears that she might see to read them. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them--" Well, said Rotha, I will keep them from this time on.--Forgive and all? said something in her heart. Yes, forgive and all. I will forgive!--But you cannot?--Then I will ask help.

And she did. Earnestly, tearfully, ardently, for a long time. She felt as if her heart were a stone. She had to go to bed at last, feeling no better. But that she would be a true servant of God, Rotha was determined.

So came Christmas morning on; clear, cold, bright and still. Rotha awaked at the bell summons. Her first thought was of last night's determination, to which she held fast; the next thought was, that it was Christmas day, and she must look at her gloves and Russia leather bag. She sprang up, and had half dressed herself before she remarked, lying on the empty bed opposite her own, some peculiar-looking packages done up as usual in brown paper. They must belong to Mrs. Mowbray and have got there by mistake, she thought; and she went over to verify her supposition. No, to her enormous surprise she saw her own name.

More Christmas things! Rotha hurried her dressing; she dared not stop to open anything till that was done; and then an inner voice said, You will not have much time for your prayers. Her heart beating, she turned away and knelt down. And she would not cut short her prayers, either. She besought help to forgive; she asked earnestly to be made "a new creature"; for the old creature, she felt, would never forgive, to the end of time. She rose then, brushing the moisture from her eyes, and went over to look at those mysterious packages. One was light, square, and shallow; the other evidently a book, and heavy. She opened the lesser package first. Behold, a dozen cambrick handkerchiefs, and upon them a little bright blue silk neck tie. Rotha needed those articles very much; she was ready to scream for joy. The other package now; hands trembling unfolded it. Brown paper, silk paper,--and one of Bagster's octavo Bibles with limp covers was revealed. Rotha was an ardent lover of the beautiful and the perfect; her own Bible was an old volume, much worn by handling, bearing the marks of two generations' use and wear; this was the perfection of a book in every respect. Rotha was struck dumb and still, and nothing but tears could give vent to her feelings; they were tears of great joy, of repentance, of new purpose, and of very conscious inability to do anything of herself that would be good. She had sunk on her knees to let those tears have the accompaniment of prayer; she rose up again and clasped the Bible in her arms, in heartiest love to it.

Breakfast was late that morning, and she had time for examining her gifts and for getting a little composed before she had to go down stairs. She went then quite sedately to all appearance. It was to her as if the world had turned round two or three times since last night; other people, however, she observed, had not at all lost their heads and were very much as usual; except that they were dressed for going to church, and had the pleasant freedom of holiday times in

their looks and manner. Only Mrs. Mowbray was really festive. She was sparkling with spirits, and smiling with the joy of doing kindness, past and future. Rotha sat next her at the table; and there was a gleam of amusement and intelligence in her eye as she asked her, over her coffee cup, whether Santa Claus had come down her chimney? She gave Rotha no time to answer, but ran on with a question to some one else; only a few minutes after, as she put a chop upon Rotha's plate, gave her a look full of affectionate kindness which said that she understood all and no words were necessary.

It was time to go to church when breakfast and prayers were over. Immediately after church, Mrs. Mowbray and Rotha took a carriage and drove out to the Old Coloured Home; all the packages of tea and sugar going along; as also a perfect stack of sponge cakes. Arrived at the place, Mrs. Mowbray's first demand was to know whether "the milk" had been delivered, and where "the tobacco" was. Then followed a scene, a succession of scenes rather, that could never be forgotten. Mrs. Mowbray went all through the rooms, dealing out to each poor creature among the women a half pound package of tea, a pound of sugar, a half pint of milk, and a sizeable sponge cake.

"My dear," she whispered to Rotha, who attended and helped her, "they think all the world of a bit of cake! They never get it now, you know."

"Don't they get milk?"

"Some of the ladies bought a cow for them, that they might have it and have it good; but it didn't work. The matron took the cream for herself; they had only the blue watery stuff that was left; and when it was attempted to rectify that abuse, somebody discovered that it cost too much to keep a cow."

"What a shame!" cried Rotha indignantly.

"Never mind; you cannot have everything in this world; the Home is a great deal better than being in the streets."

But Rotha did not like the Home. Its forms and varieties of infirmity, disease, and decay, were very disagreeable to her. She had one of those temperaments to which all things beautiful, graceful, and lovely, speak with powerful influences, and which are correspondingly repelled and distressed by the tokens of pain or want or coarse living. All the delight of these women at the sight of Mrs. Mowbray, and all their intense enjoyment of her gifts, manifested broadly and abundantly, could not reconcile Rotha to the sight of their worn, wrinkled faces, bowed forms, bleared eyes, and dulled expression. Every one was not so; but these were the majority. Certainly Rotha had not had a very dainty experience of life during the years of her abode in New York; she had lived where the poorer classes lived and been accustomed to seeing them. But there the sick and infirm were mostly in their houses, where she did not visit them; and the exceptions were noticed one at a time. Here there was an aggregation of infirmity, which oppressed her young heart and revolted her fastidious sense. It was not pleasant; and Rotha, like most others who have no experience of life, was devoted to what was pleasant. She wondered to see the glee and enjoyment with which Mrs. Mowbray moved about among these poor people; a word, and a word of cheer, for every one; her very looks and presence coming like beams of loving light upon their darkness. She seemed to know them almost all.

"How's rheumatism, aunty?" she asked cheerily of a little, wrinkled, yellow old woman, sitting in a rocking chair and hovering near a fire.

"O missus, it's right smart bad! it is surely."

"Where is it now? in your hands, or your feet?"

"O missus, it is all places! 'Pears there aint no place where it aint. It's in my hands, and in my feet, and in my head, and in my back; and I can't sleep o' nights; and the nights is powerful long! so they be."

"Ah, yes; it makes a long night, to have to lie awake aching! I know that by experience. I had rheumatism once."

"Did you, missus! But it warn't so bad as I be?"

"No, not quite, and I was stronger to bear it. You know who is strong to help you bear it, aunty?"

"Yes, missus," said the poor creature with a long sigh;--"I does love de Lord; sartain, I do. He do help. But I be so tired some times!"

"We'll forget all that when we get to heaven, aunty."

There was a faint gleam in the old eyes, as they looked up to her; a faint smile on the withered lips. The rays of that morning light were catching the clouds already!

"Now, aunty, I've brought you some splendid tea. Shall I make you a cup, right off?"

"You wouldn't have time missus--"

"Yes, I would! Time for everything. Here, Sabrina, bring a kettle of boiling water here and put it on the fire; mind, it must boil."

And while the woman went to obey the order, Mrs. Mowbray went on round the room. There were so many to speak to, Rotha thought she would forget the kettle and the tea; but she did not. From the very door which should have let her into another ward, she turned back. The kettle was boiling; she ordered several cups; she made the tea, not out of the old woman's particular private store; and then she poured it out, sugared and creamed and gave her her cup; took one herself, and gave the rest to whosoever came for it. They held quite a little festival there round the fire; for Mrs. Mowbray brought out some cake too.

"Now," she said to Rotha as they hurried away, "they will not forget that for a year to come. I always take a cup of tea with aunty Lois."

They went now among the men, distributing the tobacco. Rotha admired with unending admiration, the grace and sweetness and tact with which Mrs. Mowbray knew how to season her gifts; the enormous amount of pleasure she gave and good she did which were quite independent of them. Bent figures straightened up, and dull faces shone out, as she talked. The very beauty which belonged to her in so rare measure, Rotha saw how it was a mighty talent for good when brought thoroughly into the service of Christ. She was a fair human angel going about among those images of want and suffering and hopelessness; her light lingered on them after she had passed on.

"How do you do, uncle Bacchus?" she said as she approached an old, gray-haired, very black man in a corner. He rose to his feet and shewed a tall, slim figure, not bent at all, though the indications of his face pointed to very advanced age. He bowed profoundly, and with dignity, before the lovely lady who had extended her hand to him, and then he took the hand.

"Nearer home, madam," he said; "a year nearer home."

The hand trembled, and the voice; yet the mental tone of it was very firm.

"You are not in a hurry to leave us?"

"It's better on de oder side, madam."

"Yes, that is true! And it is good to know there *is* an 'other side,' isn't it? Are you comfortable here, uncle Bacchus?"

"Comfortable--" he repeated. "I don' know. I'm sittin' at de gates, waitin' till de Lord say open 'em; and 'pears I'm lookin' dat way all de time. Dis yer's a waitin' place. A waitin' place."

"Yes, but I want you to be comfortable while you are waiting. What can I do for you? The dear Lord has sent me to ask you."

He smiled a little, a very sweet smile, though the lips were so withered on which it came.

"Don't want for not'ing, madam. Dis yer'll do to wait in. When I get home, I'll have all I want; but it's up *dere*."

"I thought, uncle Bacchus, you would like a very plain page to read the words in that you love. See, I have brought you this. This will almost do without spectacles, hey?"

She produced a New Testament in four thin volumes, of the very largest and clearest type; presenting a beautiful open page. The old man almost chuckled as he received it.

"Dat ar's good!" he said.

"Better than the old one, hey?"

"Dat ar certainly is good," he repeated. "De old un, de words is so torturous small, if I didn't know what dey was, 'pears

dey wouldn't be no use to me."

"Well, then I made no mistake this time. Now, uncle Bacchus, I know you take no comfort in tobacco; so I've brought you something else--something you like. Must have something to make Christmas gay, you know."

She put a paper of French bonbons in the old man's hand. He laughed, half at her and half at the sugarplums, Rotha thought; and he bowed again.

"De Lord give madam sumfin' to make *her* gay!" he said.

"Himself, uncle Bacchus!"

"Dat's so, madam!" he replied, as she took his hand to bid him good bye.

This was a much longer colloquy than usual; a few words were all there was time for, generally; and Rotha went on wondering and admiring to see how Mrs. Mowbray could make those few words tell for the pleasure and good of her beneficiaries. At last the whole round was made, the last package disposed of, and Mrs. Mowbray and Rotha found themselves in the carriage again. Rotha for her part was glad; she did not like the Home, as I have said; the sight of the people was painful to her, even with all the alleviations of pleasure. She was glad to be driving away from the place. What did they know of Bagster's Bibles and Russia covered travelling bags? Poor creatures! And Rotha's heart was leaping at thought of her own.

They went in silence for a while.

"Aren't you very tired, Mrs. Mowbray?" Rotha ventured at last.

"Tired?" said Mrs. Mowbray brightly, rousing herself. "I don't know! I don't stop to think whether I am tired. There will be plenty of time to rest, by and by."

"That does not hinder one from feeling tired now," said Rotha, who did not enjoy this doctrine.

"No, but it hinders one from minding it," said Mrs. Mowbray. "Do all you can for other people, Rotha; it is the greatest happiness you can find in this life."

"Do you think you had as much pleasure in getting those things for me, Mrs. Mowbray,--my bag and my Bible,--and all my things,--as I had, and have, in receiving them?"

Mrs. Mowbray smiled. "Do they give you pleasure?" she asked.

"More than you can think--more than I can tell. I think I am dreaming!"

"Then that gives *me* pleasure. What are you going to do with your Bible?"

"I am going to study it--" said Rotha slowly; "and I am going to live by it."

"Are you? Have you decided that point?"

"Yes, ma'am. But I am not good yet, Mrs. Mowbray. I do not forgive aunt Serena. It feels to me as if there was a stone where my heart ought to be."

"Have you found that out?" said Mrs. Mowbray without shewing any surprise. "There is help, my child. Look, when you get home, at the thirty sixth chapter of Ezekiel--I cannot tell you what verse--and you will find it there."

They had no more talk until the carriage stopped at home. And Rotha had no chance then even to open her Bible, but must make herself immediately ready for dinner.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FLINT AND STEEL.

That Christmas dinner remained a point of delight in Rotha's memory for ever. The company was small, several of the young ladies having accepted invitations to dine with some friend or acquaintance. It was most agreeably small, to Rotha's apprehension, for she could see more of Mrs. Mowbray and more informally. Everybody was in gala dress and gala humour, nobody more than the mistress of the house; and she had done everything in her power to make the Christmas dinner a gala meal. Flowers and lights were in plenty; the roast turkey was followed by ices, confections and fruits, all of delicious quality; and Mrs. Mowbray's own kind and gracious ministry made everything doubly sweet. Rotha had besides such joy in her heart, that turkey and ices had never seemed so good in her life. The whole day had been rich, full, sweet, blessed; the girl had entered a new sphere where every want of her nature was met and contented; under such conditions the growth of a plant is rapid; and in a plant of humanity it is not only rapid but blissful.

Christmas joys were not done when the dinner was over. The girls who were present, and the one or two under teachers, repaired to the library, Mrs. Mowbray's special domain; and there she exerted herself unweariedly to give them a pleasant evening. Two of them sat down to a game of chess; two of them were allowed to look over some very rare and splendid books of engravings; one or two were deep in fancy work, and one or two amused themselves with a fine microscope. Rotha received her first introduction to the stereoscope. This was no novelty to the rest, and she was left in undisturbed enjoyment; free to look as long as she liked at any view that excited her interest. Which of them did not! At Rotha's age, with her mind just opening rapidly and her intellectual hunger great for all sorts of food, what were not the revelations of the stereoscope to her! Delight and wonder went beyond all power of words to describe them. And with delight and wonder started curiosity. Rotha's first view was a gorge in the Alps.

"Where is it?" she asked. And Mrs. Mowbray told her.

"How high are those hills?"

"Really, I don't know," said her friend laughing. "I will give you a guide book to study."

Rotha thought she would like a guide book. Anything so majestic as the sweep of those mountain lines and the lift of their snowy heads, she had never imagined; nor anything so lovely as the peace of that narrow, meadowy valley at the foot of them.

"Is it as good really, Mrs. Mowbray, as it looks here?" she asked.

"It is better. Don't you think colour goes for anything? and the sound of a cowbell, and the rush of the torrents that come from the mountains?"

"I can hear cowbells and the rush of brooks here," said Rotha.

"It sounds different there."

Slowly and unwillingly and after long looking at it, Rotha laid the Swiss valley away. Her next view happened to be the ruins of the Church at Fountain's Abbey; and with that a new nerve of pleasure seemed to be stirred. This was something in an entirely new department, of knowledge and interest both. "How came people to let such a beautiful church go to ruin?"

Mrs. Mowbray went back to the Reformation, and Henry the Eighth, and the monkish orders; and the historical discussion grew into length. Then a very noble view of the Fountain's Abbey cloisters opened a new field of inquiry; and Rotha's eye gazed along the beautiful arches with an awed apprehension of the life that once was lived under them; gazed and marvelled and queried.

"That was an ugly sort of life," she said at last; "why do I like to look at these cloisters, Mrs. Mowbray?"

Mrs. Mowbray laughed. "I suppose your eye finds beauty in the lines of the architecture."

"Are they beautiful?"

"People say so, my dear."

"But do you think they are?"

"My dear, I must confess to you, I never paid much attention to architecture. I never asked myself the question."

"I do not think there is any *beauty* about them," said Rotta; "but somehow I like to look at them. I like to look at them very much."

"Here is another cloister," said Mrs. Mowbray; "of Salisbury cathedral. The arches and lines here are less severe. How do you like that?"

"Not half so well," Rotta answered, after making the comparison. "I think Fountain's Abbey *is* beautiful, compared with this."

"It is called, I believe, one of the finest ruins in England. My dear, if you want to study architecture, I shall turn you over to Mr. Fergusson's book. It is in the corner stand in the breakfast room--two octavo volumes. There you can find all your questions answered."

Which Rotta did not however find to be the case, though Fergusson in after days was a good deal studied by her in her hours of leisure. For this evening it was enough, that she went to her room with the feeling that the world is very rich in things to be seen and things to be known; a vast treasure house of wonders and beauties and mysteries; which mysteries must yet have their hidden truth and solution, delightful to search for, delightful to find. Would she some day see the Alps? and what dreadful things cloisters and the life lived in them must have been! Her eye fell on her Russia leather bag, in which she had placed her Bible for safe keeping; and her thoughts went to the Bible. That told how people should live to serve God; and it was not by shutting themselves up in cloisters. How then? That question she deferred.

But took it up again the next day. It was a rainy day; low clouds and thick beat of the rain storm against the windows and upon the street. Rotta was well pleased. Good so; yesterday had held novelty and excitement enough for a week; to-day she could be quiet, study Fergusson on architecture, perhaps; and at all events study the life question in her beautiful Bible. She had the morning to herself after breakfast, and her room to herself; the patter and beat of the rain drops made her feel only more securely safe in her solitude and opportunity. Rotta took her Bible lovingly in her hands and slowly turned over the leaves to find the thirty sixth chapter of Ezekiel. And unquestionably, the great beauty of the book, of the paper and the limp covers and the type, did help her pleasure and did give an additional zest to the work she was about. Nevertheless, Rotta was in earnest, and it *was* work. The chapter, when she found it, was an enigma to her. She read on and on, understanding but very dimly what might be meant under the words; till she came to the notable promise and prophecy beginning with the twenty fourth verse. Then her eyes opened, and lingered, slowly going over item after item of the help promised to humanity's wants, and then she read:--

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."----

It struck Rotta with a strange sort of surprise, the words meeting so exactly the thought and want of her own heart. Did He who gave that promise, long ago, know so well what she would be one day thinking and feeling? But that was the very help she needed; all she needed; if the heart of stone within her were gone, all the rest would fall into train. Rotta waited no longer, but poured out a longing, passionate prayer that this mighty change might be wrought in her. Even with tears she prayed her prayer. She had resolved to be a Christian; yet she was not one; could not be one; till a heart of flesh took the place of that impulsive induration which was where a heart should be. As she rose from her knees, she thought she would follow out this subject of a hard heart, and see what else the Bible said of it. She applied to her "Treasury of Scripture Knowledge"; found the thirty sixth chapter of Ezekiel, and the twenty sixth verse. The first reference sent her to the eleventh chapter of the same book, where she found the promise already previously given.

"And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony-heart out of their flesh, and I will give them an heart of flesh; *that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them;* and they shall be my people, and I will be their God."

That is it! thought Rotta. I knew I could not be a Christian while I felt so as I do. I could not keep the commandments either. If I had a new heart, I suppose I could forgive aunt Serena fast enough. God must be very willing to take people's stony heart away, or he would not promise it so twice over. O my dear "Scripture Treasury"! how good you are!

Following its indications, she came next to a word of the prophet Zechariah, accusing the people of obduracy:--"They refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets"--

Over this passage Rotta lingered, pondering. Could it be true that she herself was to blame for the very hardness of

heart she wanted to get rid of? Had she "refused to hearken and pulled away the shoulder and stopped her ears"? What else had she done? when those "former prophets" to her, her mother, and Mr. Digby, had set duty and truth before her? They set it before her bodily, too; and how fair their example had been! and how immoveable she! Rotta lost herself for a while here, longing for her mother, and crying in spirit for her next friend, Mr. Digby; wondering at his silence, mourning his absence; and it was when a new gush of indignation at her aunt seemed to run through all her veins, that she caught herself up and remembered the work in hand, and slowly and sorrowfully came back to it. How angry she was at Mrs. Busby this minute! what a long way she was yet, with all her wishes and resolves, from the loving tenderness of heart which would forgive everything. She went on, hoping always for more light, and willing to take the sharpest charges home to herself. Yet the next reference startled her.

"Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprang up because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched;"--

Was it possible, that she had been like that very bad ground? Yes, she knew the underlying rock too well. Then in her case there was special danger of a flash religion, taken up for the minute's sense of need or perception of advantage merely, and not rooted so that it would stand weather. Hers should not be so; no profession of being a Christian would she make, till it was thorough work; till at last she could forgive her aunt's treachery; it would be pretty thorough if she could do that! But how long first? At present Rotta thought of her aunt in terms that I will not stop to detail; in which there was bitter anger and contempt and no love at all. She knew it, poor child; she felt the difficulty; her only sole hope was in the power of that promise in Ezekiel, which she blessed in her heart, almost with tears. That way there was an outlook towards light; no other way in all her horizon. She would see what more the Bible had to say about it.

Going on in her researches, after another passage or two she came to those notable words, also in Ezekiel,--

"Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

Make herself a new heart? how could she? she could not; and yet, here the words were, and they must mean something. And to be sure, she thought, a man is said to build him a new house, who gets the carpenter to make it, and never himself puts hand to tool. But cast away her transgressions?-- *that* she could do, and she would. From that day forth. The next passage was in the fifty first psalm; David's imploring cry that the Lord would "create" in him "a new heart"; and then the lovely words in Jeremiah:-- "After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Rotta shut her book. That was the very thing wanted. When the law of God should be *in her heart* so, then all would be right, and all would be easy too. It is easy to do what is in one's heart. What beautiful words! what exquisite promises! what tender meeting of the wants of weak and sinful men! Rotta saw all this, and felt it. Ay, and she felt that every vestige of excuse was gone for persistence in wrong; if God was so ready to put in his hand of love and power to make things right. And one more passage made this conclusively certain. It was the thirteenth verse of the eleventh chapter of Luke.

The morning's work was a good one for Rotta. She made up her mind. That, indeed, she had done before; now she took her stand with a clearer knowledge of the ground and of the way in which the difficulties were to be met. By a new heart, nothing less; a heart of flesh; which indeed she could not create, but which she could ask for and hope for; and in the mean time she must "cast away from her all her transgressions." No compromise, and no delay. As to this anger at her aunt,--well, it was there, and she could not put it out; but allow it and agree to it, or give it expression, that she would not do.

She cast about her then for things to be done, neglected duties. No studies neglected were on her conscience; there did occur to her some large holes in the heels of her stockings. Rotta did not like mending; however, here was duty. She got out the stockings and examined them. A long job, and to her a hateful one, for the stockings had been neglected. Rotta had but a little yarn to mend with; she sat down to the work and kept at it until she had used up her last thread. That finished the morning, for the stockings were fine, and the same feeling of duty which made her take up the mending made her do it conscientiously.

The evening was spent happily over the stereoscope and Fergusson on Architecture. Towards the end of it Mrs. Mowbray whispered to her,

"My dear, your aunt wishes you to spend a day with her; don't you think it would be a good plan to go to-morrow? A thing is always more graceful when it is done without much delay."

Rotha could but acquiesce.

"And make the best of it," Mrs. Mowbray went on kindly; "and make the best of *them*. There is a best side to everybody; it is good to try and get at it. The Bible says 'Overcome evil with good.'"

"Can one, always?" said Rotha.

"I think one can always--if one has the chance and time. At any rate, it is good to try."

"But don't you think, ma'am, one must feel pleasant, before one can act pleasant?"

"Feel pleasant, then," said Mrs. Mowbray smiling. "Can't you?"

"You do not know how difficult it is," said Rotha.

"Perhaps I do. Hearts are alike."

"O no, Mrs. Mowbray!" said Rotha in sudden protest.

"Not in everything. But fallen nature is fallen nature, my dear; one person's temptations may be different from another's, but in the longing to do our own pleasure and have our own way, we are all pretty much alike. None of us has anything to boast of. What you despise, is the yielding to a temptation which does not attack you."

Rotha's look at her friend was intelligent and candid. She said nothing.

"And if you can meet hatred with love, it is ten to one you can overcome it. Wouldn't that be a victory worth trying for?"

Rotha knew the victory over herself was the first one to be gained. But she silently acquiesced; and after breakfast next morning, with reluctant steps, she set forth to go to her aunt's in Twenty-third Street. She had been in a little doubt how to dress herself. Should she wear her old things? or subject the new ones to her aunt's criticism? But Antoinette had seen the pretty plaid school dress; it would be foolish to make any mystery of it. She dressed herself as usual.

Mrs. Busby and her daughter were in the sitting room up stairs. Rotha had knocked, modestly, and as she went in they both lifted up their heads and looked at her, with a long look of survey. Rotha had come quite up to them before her aunt spoke.

"Well, Rotha,--so it is you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Have you come to see me at last?"

"Yes, ma'am. Mrs. Mowbray said you wished it."

"What made you choose to-day particularly?"

"Nothing. Mrs. Mowbray said--"

"Well, go on. What did Mrs. Mowbray say?"

"She said you wanted to have me come, some day, and she thought I had better do it to-day."

"Yes. Did she give no reason?"

"No. At least--"

"At least what?"

Rotha had no skill whatever in prevarication, nor understood the art. Nothing occurred to her but to tell the truth.

"Mrs. Mowbray said a thing was more graceful than was done promptly."

The slightest possible change in the set of Mrs. Busby's lips, the least perceptible air of her head, expressed what another woman might have told by a snort of disdain. Mrs. Busby's manner was quite as striking, Ratha thought. Her own anger was rising fast.

"O, and I suppose she is teaching you to do things gracefully?" said Antoinette. "Mamma, the idea!"

"It did not occur to her or you that I might like to see my niece occasionally?" said Mrs. Busby.

Ratha bit her lips and succeeded in biting down the answer.

"We have not grown very graceful *yet*," Antoinette went on. "It is usually thought civilized to answer people."

"You had better take off your things," Mrs. Busby said. "You may lay them up stairs in your room."

"Is there any reason which makes this an inconvenient day for me to be here?" Ratha asked before moving to obey this command.

"It makes no difference. The proper time for putting such a question, if you want to do things *gracefully*, is before taking your action, while the answer can also be given gracefully, if unfavourable."

Ratha went slowly up stairs, feeling that or any other place in the house better than the room where her aunt was. She went to her little cold, cheerless, desolate-looking, old room. How she had suffered there! how thankful she was to be in it no more! how changed were her circumstances! Could she not be good and keep the peace, this one day? She had purposed to be very good, and calm, like Mr. Digby; and now already she felt as if a bunch of nettles had been drawn all over her. What an unmanageable thing was this temper of hers. She went down stairs slowly and lingeringly. The two looked at her again as she entered the room; now that her cloak was off, the new dress came into view.

"Where did you get that dress, Ratha?" was her aunt's question.

"Mrs. Mowbray got it for me."

"Does she propose to send me the bill by and by?"

"Of course not! Aunt Serena, Mrs. Mowbray never does mean things."

"H'm! What induced her then to go to such expense for a girl she never saw before?"

"I suppose she was sorry for me," said Ratha, with her heart swelling.

"Sorry for you! May I ask, why?"

"You know how I was dressed, aunt Serena; and you know how the other girls in school dress."

"I know a great many of them have foolish mothers, who make themselves ridiculous by the way they let their children appear. It is a training of vanity. I should not have thought Mrs. Mowbray would lend herself to such nonsense."

"But you do not think Antoinette has a foolish mother?" Ratha could not help saying. Mrs. Busby's daughter was quite as much dressed as the other girls. That she ought not to have made that speech, Ratha knew; but she made it. So much satisfaction she must have. It remained however completely ignored.

"Who made your dress?" Mrs. Busby went on.

"A dress-maker. One of the ladies went with me to have it cut."

"What did you do Christmas?" Antoinette inquired. In reply to which, Ratha gave an account of her visit to the Old Coloured Home.

"Just like Mrs. Mowbray!" was Mrs. Busby's comment. "She has no discretion."

"Why do you say that, aunt Serena?"

"Such an expenditure of money for nothing. What good would a little tea and a little tobacco do those people? It would

not last more than a week or two; and then they are just where they were before."

"But it did not cost so very much," objected Rotha.

"Have you reckoned it up? Fifty or sixty half-pounds of tea, fifty or sixty pounds of sugar,--why, the sugar alone would be five or six dollars; and the tobacco, and the carriage hire; and I don't know what beside. All for nothing. That woman does not know what to do with money."

"But is it not something, to make so many poor people happy, if even only for a little while?"

"It would be a great deal better to give them something to do them good; a flannel petticoat, now, or a pair of warm socks. That would last. Or putting the money in the funds of the Institution, where it would go to their daily needs. I always think of that."

"*Would* it go to their daily needs? Some ladies got a cow for them once; and it just gave the matron cream for her tea, and they got no good of it."

"I don't believe that at all!" exclaimed Mrs. Busby. "I know the matron; Mrs. Bothers; I know her, for I recommended her myself. I have no idea she would be guilty of any such impropriety. It is just the gossip in the house, that Mrs. Mowbray has taken up in her haste and swallowed."

Rotha tried to hold her tongue. It was hard.

"Did Mrs. Mowbray give *you* anything Christmas?" Antoinette asked, pushing her inquiries. Rotha hesitated, but could find no way to answer without admitting the affirmative.

"What?" was the immediate next question; and even Mrs. Busby looked with ill-pleased eyes to hear Rotha's next words. It seemed like making her precious things common, to tell of them to these unkind ears. Yet there was no help for it.

"She gave me a travelling hand-bag."

"What sort?"

"Russia leather."

"There, mamma!" Antoinette exclaimed. "Isn't that Mrs. Mowbray all over? When a morocco one, or a canvas one, would have done just as well."

"As I said," returned Mrs. Busby. "Mrs. Mowbray does not know what to do with money. When are you going travelling, Rotha?"

"I do not know. Some time in my life, I suppose."

"What a ridiculous thing to give her!" pursued Antoinette.

"Yes, I think so," her mother echoed. "Do not let yourself be deluded, Rotha, by presents of travelling bags or anything else. Your future life is not likely to be spent in pleasuring. What I can do for you in the way of giving you an education, will be all I can do; then you will have to make a living and a home for, yourself; and the easiest way you can do it will be by teaching. I shall tell Mrs. Mowbray to educate you for some post in which perhaps she can put you by and by; she or somebody else. So pack up your expectations; you will not need to do much of other sorts of packing."

"You forget there is another person to be consulted, aunt Serena."

"What other person?" said Mrs. Busby raising her head and fixing her observant eyes upon Rotha.

"Mr. Southwode."

"Mr. Southwode!" repeated the lady coldly. "I am ignorant what a stranger like him has to say about our family affairs."

"He is not a stranger," said Rotha hotly. "He is the person I know best in the world, and love best. He is the person to whom I belong; that mother left me to; and it is for him, not for you, to say what I shall do, or what I shall be."

Imprudent Rotha! But passion is always imprudent.

"Very improper language!" said Mrs. Busby coldly. "When a young lady speaks so of a young gentleman, what are we to think?"

"I am not a young lady," said Rotha; "and he is not a young gentleman; at least, not very young; and you may think the truth, which is what I say."

"Do you mean that you have arranged to marry Mr. Southwode?" said the lady, fixing her keen little eyes upon Rotha's face.

Rotha's face flamed, with mingled indignation and shame; she deigned no answer.

"She doesn't speak, mamma," said Antoinette mischievously. "You may depend, that's the plan. Rotha and Mr. Southwode! I declare, that's too good! So that's the arrangement!"

"I am so ashamed that I cannot speak to you," said Rotha in her passion and humiliation. "How can you say such wicked things! I wish Mr. Southwode was here to give you a proper answer."

"What, you think he would take your part?" said her aunt.

"He always did. He would now. He will yet, aunt Serena."

"That is enough!" said Mrs. Busby, becoming excited a little on her part. "Hush, Antoinette; I will have no more of this very unedifying conversation. But you, Rotha, may as well know that you will never see Mr. Southwode again. He is engaged in England with the affairs of his father's business; he will probably soon marry; and then there is no chance whatever that he will ever return to America. So you had best consider whether it is worth while to offend the friends you have left, for the sake of one who is nothing to you any more."

"I know Mr. Southwode better than that," was Rotha's answer. But the girl's face was purple with honest shame.

"You expect he will come back and make you his wife?" said Mrs. Busby scornfully.

"I expect he will come back and take care of me. You might as well talk of his making that pussy cat his wife. I am just a poor girl, and no more. But he will take care of me. I know he will, if I have to wait ten years first."

"How old are you now?"

"Sixteen, almost."

"Then in ten years you will be twenty six. My dear, there is only one way in which Mr. Southwode could take care of you then; he must make you his wife, or leave it to somebody else to take care of you. He knows that as well as I do; and so he put you in my hands. Now let us make an end of this disgraceful scene. Before ten years are past, you will probably be the wife of somebody else. All this talk is very foolish."

Rotha thought it *was*, but also thought the fault was not in her part of it. She sat glowing with confusion; she felt as if the blood would verily start through her skin; and angry in proportion. Still she was silent, though Antoinette laughed.

"What a farce, mamma! To think of Rotha being in love with Mr. Southwode!"

"Hold your tongue, Nettie."

"To love, and to be in love, are two things," said Rotha hotly. "I do not know what being in love means; I *do* know the other."

"O mamma!--she doesn't know what it means!"

"I told you to be quiet, Antoinette."

"I didn't hear it, mamma. But I think you might reprove Rotha for saying what is not true."

"That is what I never do," said Rotha.

Mrs. Busby here interfered, and ordered Rotha to go up stairs to her room and stay there till she could command herself. Rotha went.

"Mamma," said Antoinette then, "I do believe it is earnest about her and Mr. Southwode. In her mind, I mean. Did you see how she coloured?"

"I should not be at all surprised," said, Mrs. Busby.

"When is he coming back, mamma?"

"I cannot say. I think he does not know himself. He writes that he is very busy at present."

"But he will come back, you think?"

"He says so. Antoinette, say nothing--not a word more--about him to Rotha. She has got her head turned, and it is best she should hear nothing whatever about him. I shall take good care that she never sees him again."

"Mamma, *he* don't care for her?"

"Of course not. He is too much a man of the world."

There was silence.

"Mamma," Antoinette began after a pause, "do you think Rotha is handsome?"

"She is very well," said Mrs. Busby in an indifferent tone.

"They think at school, that is, the teachers do, that she is a beauty."

"I dare say they have told her so."

"And you see how Mrs. Mowbray has dressed her up."

"I would not have sent her there, if I had known how it would be. However, I could not arrange for her so cheaply anywhere else."

"What would you do, mamma, if Mr. Southwode were coming back?"

"I should know, in that case. He will not come yet a while. Now Antoinette, let this subject alone."

"Yes, mamma. You are a clever woman. I don't believe even Mr. Southwode could manage you."

"I can manage Mr. Southwode!" said Mrs. Busby contentedly.

CHAPTER XIX.

A NEW DEPARTURE

Rotha found her room too cold to stay in, after the first heat of her wrath had passed off. The only warm place that she knew of, beside her aunt's dressing room, was the parlour; and after a little hesitation and shivering, she softly crept down the stairs. The warm, luxurious place was empty, of people, that is; and before the glowing grate Rotha sat down on the rug and looked at the situation. Or she looked at that and the room together; the latter made her incensed. It was so full of luxury. The soft plush carpet, the thick rug on which she was crouching; how they glowed warm and rich in the red shine of the fiery grate; how beautiful the crimson ground was, and how dainty the drab tints of the flowers running over it. How stately the curtains fell to the floor with their bands of drab and crimson; and the long mirror between them, redoubling all the riches reflected in it. What a magnificent extension table, really belonging in the dining room, but doing duty now as a large centre table, only it was shoved up in one corner; and upon it the gas fixture stood, with its green glass shaft and its cut glass shade full of bunches of grapes. Nothing else was on the table; not a book; not a trinket; and so all the rest of the room was bare of everything *but* furniture. The furniture was

elegant; but the chairs stood round the sides of the room with pitiless regularity and seemed waiting for somebody that would never come. Empty riches! nothing else. At Mrs. Mowbray's Rotha was in another world, socially and humanly. Books swarmed from the shelves and lay on every table; pictures hung on the walls and stood on the mantelpieces; here and there some lovely statuette delighted the eye by its beauty or the mind by its associations; flowers were sure to be in a glass or a dish somewhere; and all over there were traces of travel and of cultivation, in bits of marble, or bits of bronze, or photographs, or relics, telling of various ages and countries and nationalities. Here, in Mrs. Busby's handsome rooms, the pretty hanging lamps were exceedingly new, and they were the only bronze to be seen. Rotha studied it all and made these comparisons for a while, in a vague, purposeless reverie, while she was getting warm; but then her thoughts began to come to a point. Everything and everybody in this house was utterly unsympathetic to her; animate or inanimate; was this her home? In no sense of the word. Had not her aunt just informed her, in effect, that she had no home; that if she lived to grow up she must make her own way and earn her own bread, or have none.

Antoinette would grow up to all this luxury, and in all this luxury; while she would be penniless, and homeless. Had she brought this upon herself? Well, she might have been more conciliating; but in her heart of hearts Rotha did not wish she had been other than she had been. A home or friends to be gained only by subserviency and truckling, she did not covet. There came a little whisper of conscience here, suggesting that a medium existed between truckling and defiance; that it was a supposable case that one might be so pure and fair in life and spirit, that the involuntary liking and respect of friends and acquaintances would follow of necessity. Was not Mr. Digby such a person? did not Mrs. Mowbray win good-will wherever she appeared? and Rotha was just enough to acknowledge to herself that her own demeanour had been nothing less than love-winning. Alas, how could she help it, unless she were indeed made over new; a different creature. How else could she bear what must be borne in this house? But in this house she was an outcast; they would have nothing to do with her more than to see her through her schooling; there was no shelter or refuge here to which she could ever look. Nor did she care for it, if only Mr. Digby would come again. Was he lost to her? Had he really forgotten her? would he forget his promise? Rotha did not believe it; her faith in him was steadfast; but she did conceive it possible that business and circumstances might keep him where his promise would be rendered of little avail; and her heart was wrung with distress at the thought of this possibility. Distress, which but for Mrs. Mowbray would have been desolation. Even as it was, Rotha felt very desolate, very blank; and she remembered again what Mr. Digby had said, about a time that might come when all other help would fail her and she would be *driven* to seek God. All help had not failed yet; Mrs. Mowbray was a blessed good friend; but she was all, and Rotha had no claim upon her. I will not wait to be *driven*, she thought; I will not wait to be driven by extremity; things are bad enough as it is; I will seek God now.--I have been seeking him.--Mr. Digby said I must keep on seeking, until I found. I will. But in the mean time I choose. I choose I will be a Christian, and that means, a servant of Jesus. I will be his servant, no matter what he bids me do. From this time on, I will be his servant. And then, some time, he will keep his word and take the stony heart out of me, and give me a new heart; a heart of flesh, I wonder how I came to be so hard!----

It was a step in advance of all Rotha had made yet. It was *the* step, which introduces a sinner into the pathway of a Christian; before which that path is not entered, however much it may be looked at and thought desirable. Rotha had made her choice and given her allegiance; for she at once told it to the Lord and asked his blessing.

And then, forthwith, came the trial of her sincerity. The cross was presented to her; which the Lord says those must take up and bear daily who would follow him. People think that crosses start up in every path; it is a mistake; they are only found in the way of following Christ and in consequence of such following. They are things that may be taken up and carried along; that *must* be, if the Christian follows his Master; but that he may escape if he will turn aside from following him and go with the world. They are of many kinds, but all furnished by the world and Satan without, or by self-will within. The form which the cross took on this occasion for Rotha was of the latter kind. Conscience whispered a reminder--"If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee--" And instantly Rotha's whole soul rose up in protest. Make an apology to her aunt *now*? Humble herself to confess herself wrong, when the wrong done to her was so manyfold greater? Bend to the hardness that would crush her? Justify another's evil by confessing her own? Self-will gave her an indignant "Impossible!" And conscience with quiet persistence held forth the cross. Rotha put both hands to her face and swayed up and down, with a kind of bodily struggle, which symbolized that going on in her mind. It was hard, it was hard! Nature cried out, with a repulsion that seemed unconquerable, against taking up this cross; yet there it was before her, in the inexorable hands of conscience, and Grace said, "Do it; take it up and bear it." And Nature and Grace fought. But all the while, down at the bottom of the girl's heart, was a certain knowledge that the cross must be borne; a certain prevision that she would yield and take it up; that she must, if her new determination meant anything; and Rotha felt she could not afford to let it vanish in air. She struggled, rebelled, repined, and ended with yielding. Her will submitted, and she said in her heart, "I must, and I will."

There came a sort of tired lull over her then, which was grateful, after the battle. She considered *when* she should do this thing, which it was so disagreeable to do. She could not quite make up her mind; but at the first opportunity,

whenever that might be. Before she left the house at any rate, if even she had to make the opportunity she wanted.

Then she thought she would return to her little cold room again, before anybody found her in the parlour. She was thoroughly warmed up, she had no more thinking to do just then; and if need be she would lay herself on the bed and cover herself with blankets, and so wait till luncheon time. As she went up stairs, something happened that she did not expect; there stole into her heart as it were a rill of gladness, which swelled and grew. "Yes, Jesus *is* my King, she thought, and I am his child. O I don't care now for anything, for Jesus is my King, and He will help and take care." She went singing that Name in her heart all the way up stairs; for the first time in her life the sweetness of it was sweet to her; for the first time, the strength of it was something to lean upon. Ay, she was right; she had stepped over the narrow boundary line between the realm of the Prince of this world and the kingdom of Christ. She had submitted herself to the one Ruler; she was no longer under the dominion of the other. And with her first entrance into the kingdom of the Prince of peace, she had stepped out of the darkness into the light, and the air of that new country blew softly upon her. O wonderful! O sweet! O strange!--that such a change should be so quickly made, and yet so hard to make. Rotha had not fought all her battles nor got rid of all her enemies, but that the latter should have no more *dominion* over her she felt confident. She was a different creature from the Rotha who had fled down stairs an hour or two before in wrath and bitterness.

It was very cold up stairs. She lay down and covered herself with blankets and went to sleep.

She was called to luncheon; got up and smoothed her hair as well as she could with her hands, and thought over what she had to do. She had to set her teeth and go at it like a forlorn-hope upon a battery, but she did not flinch at all.

Mr. Busby was at luncheon, which was unusual and she had not counted upon. He was gracious.

"How do you do, Rotha? Bless me, how you have improved! grown too, I declare."

"There was no need of that, papa," said Antoinette, who was going to be a dumpy.

"What has Mrs. Mowbray done to you? I really hardly know you again."

"Fine feathers, papa."

"Mrs. Mowbray has been very kind to me," Rotha managed to get in quietly.

"She's growing handsome, wife!" Mr. Busby declared as he took his seat at the table.

"You shouldn't say such things to young girls, Mr. Busby," said his wife reprovingly.

"Shouldn't I? Why not? It is expected that they will hear enough of that sort of thing when they get a little older."

"Why should they, Mr. Busby?" asked Rotha, innocently curious.

"Yes indeed, why should they?" echoed her aunt.

"Why should they? I don't know. As I said, it is expected. Young ladies usually demand such tribute from their admirers."

"To tell them they are handsome?" said Rotha.

"Yes," said Mr. Busby looking at her. "Ladies like it. Wouldn't you like it?"

"I should not like it at all," said Rotha colouring with a little excitement. "I don't mind your saying so, Mr. Busby; you have a right to say anything you like to me; but if any stranger said it, I should think he was very impertinent."

"You don't know much yet," said Mr. Busby.

"There is small danger that Rotha will ever be troubled with that sort of impertinence," said Mrs. Busby, with that peculiar air of her head, which always meant that she thought a good deal more than she spoke out at the minute.

"Maybe," returned her husband; "but she is going to deserve it, I can tell you. She'll be handsomer than ever Antoinette will."

Which remark seemed to Rotha peculiarly unlucky for her just that day.

Mrs. Busby reddened with displeasure though she held her tongue.
Antoinette was not capable of such forbearance.

"Papa!" she said, breaking out into tears, "that is very unkind of you!"

"Well, don't snivel," said her father. "You are pretty enough, if you keep a smooth face; but don't you suppose there are other people in the world handsomer? Be sensible."

"It is difficult not to be hurt, Mr. Busby," said his wife, pressing her lips together.

"Mamma!" cried Antoinette in a very injured tone, "he called me 'pretty'?"

"Aint you?" said her father, becoming a little provoked. "I thought you knew you were. But Rotha is going to be a beauty. It is no injury to you, my child."

"You seem to forget it may be an injury to Rotha, Mr. Busby."

Whether Mr. Busby forgot it, or whether he did not care, he made no reply to this suggestion.

"I never tell Antoinette she will be a beauty," Mrs. Busby went on severely.

"Well, I don't think she will. Not her style."

"Is it my style to be ugly, papa?" cried the injured daughter.

"Where will you see such a skin as Antoinette's?" asked the mother.

"Skin isn't everything. My dear, don't be perverse," said Mr. Busby, in his husky tones which sounded so oddly. "Nettie's a pretty little girl, and I am glad of it; but don't you go to making a fool of her by making her think she is more. You had just as fine a skin when I married you; but that wasn't what I married you for."

Rotha wondered what her aunt had married Mr. Busby for! However, if there had once been a peach-blossom skin at one end of the table, perhaps there had been also some corresponding charm at the other end; a sweet voice, for instance. Both equally gone now. Meantime Antoinette was crying, and Mrs. Busby looking more annoyed than Rotha had ever seen her. Her self-command still did not fail her, and she pursed up her lips and kept silence. Rotha wanted a potatoe, but the potatoes were before Mrs. Busby, and she dared not ask for it. The silence was terrible.

"What's the matter, Nettie?" said her father at length. "Don't be silly.
I don't believe Rotha would cry if I told her her skin was brown."

"You've said enough to please Rotha!" Antoinette sobbed.

"And it is unnecessary to be constantly comparing your daughter with some one else," said Mrs. Busby. "Can't we talk of some other subject, more useful and agreeable?"

Then Rotha summoned up her courage, with her heart beating.

"May I speak of another subject?" she said. "Aunt Serena, I have been wanting to tell you--I have been waiting for a chance to tell you--that I want to beg your pardon."

Mrs. Busby made no answer; it was her husband who asked, "For what?"

"To-day, sir, and a good while ago when I was here--different times--I spoke to aunt Serena as I ought not; rudely; I was angry. I have been wanting to say so and to beg her pardon."

"Well, that's all anybody can do," said Mr. Busby. "Enough's said about that. It's very proper, if you spoke improperly, to confess it and make an apology; that's all that is necessary. At least, as soon as Mrs. Busby has signified that she accepts the apology."

But Mrs. Busby signified no such thing. She kept silence.

"My dear, do you want Rotha to say anything more? Hasn't she apologized sufficiently?"

"I should like to know first," Mrs. Busby began in constrained tones, "what motive prompted the apology?"

"Motive!--" Mr. Busby began; but Rotha struck in.

"My motive was, that I wanted to do right; and I knew it was right that I should apologize."

"Then your motive was not that you were sorry for what you said?" Mrs. Busby inquired magisterially.

Rotha was so astonished at this way of receiving her words that she hesitated.

"I am sorry, certainly, that I should have spoken rudely," she said.

"But not sorry for what you said?"

"You are splitting hairs, my dear!" said Mr. Busby impatiently.

"Let her answer--" said his wife.

"I do not know how to answer," said Rotha slowly, and thinking how to choose her words. "I am sorry for my ill-manners and unbecoming behaviour; I beg pardon for that. Is there anything else to ask pardon for?"

"You do not answer."

"What else can I say?" Rotha returned with some spirit. "I am not apologizing for thoughts or feelings, but for my improper behaviour. Shall I not be forgiven?"

"Then your *feeling* is not changed?" said the lady with a sharp look at her.

Rotha thought, It would be difficult for her feeling to change, under the reigning system. She did not answer.

"Pish, pish, my dear!" said the master of the house,--"you are splitting straws. When an apology is made, you have nothing to do but to take it. Rotha has done her part; now you do yours. Has Santa Claus come your way this year, Rotha?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did he bring you, hey?"

"Mrs. Mowbray gave me a Bible."

"A Bible!" Mrs. Busby and her daughter both exclaimed at once; "you said a bag?"

"I said true," said Rotha.

"She gave you a Bible and a bag too?"

"Yes."

"What utter extravagance! Had you no Bible already?"

"I had one, but an old one that had no references."

"What did you want with references! That woman is mad. If she gives to everybody on the same scale, her pocket will be empty enough when the holidays are over."

"But she gets a great deal of pleasure that way--" Rotha ventured.

"You do, you mean."

"Well, I am not so rich as Mrs. Mowbray," Mr. Busby said; "but I must remember you, Rotha." And he rose and went to a large secretary which stood in the room; for that basement room served Mr. Busby for his study at times when the table was not laid for meals. Three pair of eyes followed him curiously. Mr. Busby unlocked his secretary, opened a drawer, and took out thence a couple of quires of letter paper. 'sought out then some envelopes of the right size, and

put the whole, two quires of paper and two packages of envelopes, into Rotha's astonished hands.

"There, my dear," said he, "that will be of use to you."

"What is she to do with it, papa?" Antoinette asked in an amused manner.

"Rotha has nobody to write letters to."

"That may be. She will have writing to do, however, of some kind. You write themes in school, don't you?"

"But then, what are the envelopes for, papa? We don't put our compositions in envelopes."

"Never mind, my dear; the envelopes belong to the paper. Rotha can keep them till she finds a use for them."

"They won't match other paper, papa," said Antoinette. But Rotha collected her wits and made her acknowledgments, as well as she could.

"Has Nettie shewn you her Christmas things?"

"No, sir."

"Well, it will please you to see them. You are welcome, my dear."

Rotha carried her package of paper up stairs, wondering what experiences would till out the afternoon. Her aunt and cousin seemed by no means to be in a genial mood. They all went up to the dressing room and sat down there in silence; all, that is, except Mr. Busby. Rotha's thoughts went with a spring to her bag and her books at Mrs. Mowbray's. Two o'clock, said the clock over the chimney piece. In three hours more she might go home.

Mrs. Busby took some work; she always had a basket of mending to do. Apologies did not seem to have wrought any mollification of her temper. Antoinette went down to the parlour to practise, and the sweet notes of the piano were presently heard rumbling up and down. Rotha sat and looked at her aunt's fingers.

"Do you know anything about mending your clothes, Rotha?" Mrs. Busby at last broke the silence.

"Not much, ma'am."

"Suppose I give you a lesson. See here--here is a thin place on the shoulder of one of Mr. Busby's shirts; there must go a patch on there. Now I will give you a patch--"

She sought out a piece of linen, cut a square from it with great attention to the evenness of the cutting, and gave it to Rotha.

"It must go from here to here--see?" she said, shewing the place; "and you must lay it just even with the threads; it must be exactly even; you must baste it just as you want it; and then fell it down very neatly."

Rotha thought, as she did not wear linen shirts, that this particular piece of mending was rather for her aunt's account than for her own. Lay it by the threads! a good afternoon's work.

"I have no thimble,--" was all she said.

Mrs. Busby sought her out an old thimble of her own, too big for Rotha, and it kept slipping off.

The rest of the history of that afternoon is the history of a patch. How easy it is, to an unskilled hand, to put on a linen patch by a thread, let anyone who doubts convince herself by trying. Rotha basted it on, and took it off, basted it on again and took it off again; it would not lie smooth, or it would not lie straight; and when she thought it would do, and shewed it to her aunt, Mrs. Busby would point out that what straightness there was belonged only to one side, or that there was a pucker somewhere. Rotha sighed and began again. She did not like the job. Neither had she any pleasure in doing it for her aunt. Her impatience was as difficult to straighten out as the patch itself, but Rotha thought it was only the patch. Finally, and it was not long first, either, she began to grow angry. Was her aunt trying her, she questioned, to see if she would not forget herself and be ill-mannerly again? And then Rotha saw that the cross was presented to her anew, under another form. Patience, and faithful service, involving again the giving up of her own will. And here she was, getting angry already. Rotha dropped her work and hid her face in her hands, to send up one silent prayer for help.

"You won't get your patch done that way," said Mrs. Busby's cold voice.

Rotha took her hands down and said nothing, resolved that here too she would do what it was right to do. She gave herself to the work with patient determination, and arranged the patch so that even Mrs. Busby said it was well enough. Then she received a needle and fine thread and was instructed how to sew the piece on with very small stitches. But now the difficulty was over. Rotha had good eyes and stitched away with a good will; and so had the work done, just before the light failed too much for her to see any longer. She folded up the shirt, with a gleeful feeling that now the afternoon was over. Antoinette came up from her practising, or whatever else she had been doing, just as Rotha rose.

"Aunt Serena," said the girl, and she said it pleasantly, "my stockings some of them want mending, and I have no darning cotton. If you would give me a skein of darning cotton, I could keep them in order."

"Do you know how?"

"Yes, ma'am, I know how to do that. Mother taught me. I can darn stockings."

Mrs. Busby rummaged in her basket and handed to Rotha a ball of cotton yarn.

"This is too coarse, aunt Serena," Rotha said after examining it.

"Too coarse for what?"

"To mend my stockings with."

"It is not too coarse to mend mine."

"But it would not go through the stitches of mine," said Rotha looking up. "It would tear every time."

"How in the world did you come to have such ridiculous stockings? Such stockings are expensive. I do not indulge myself with them; and I might, better than your mother."

"Poor people always think they must have things fine, I suppose," said Antoinette. "I wonder what sort of shoes she has, to go with the stockings?"

The blood flushed to Rotha's face; and irritation pricked her to retort sharply; yet she did not wish to speak Mr. Digby's name again. She hesitated.

"Whose nonsense was that?" asked Mrs. Busby; "yours, or your mother's? I never heard anything equal to it in my life. I dare say they are Balbriggans. I should not be at all surprised!"

"I do not know what they are," said Rotha, striving to hold in her wrath, "but they are not my mother's nonsense, nor mine."

"Whose then?" said Mrs. Busby sharply.

Rotha hesitated.

"Mrs. Mowbray's!" cried Antoinette. "It is Mrs. Mowbray again! Mamma, I should think you would feel yourself insulted. Mrs. Mowbray is ridiculous! As if you could not get proper stockings for Rotha, but she must put her hand in."

"I think it is very indecorous of Mrs. Mowbray; and Rotha is welcome to tell her I say so," Mrs. Busby uttered with some discomposure. Rotha's discomposure on the other hand cooled, and a sense of amusement got up. It is funny, to see people running hard after the wrong quarry; when they have no business to be running at all. However, she must speak now.

"It is not Mrs. Mowbray's nonsense either," she said. "Mr. Southwode got them for me."

"Mr. Southwode!"--Mrs. Busby spoke out those two words, and the rest of her mind she kept to herself.

"Mamma," said Antoinette, "Mr. Southwode is as great a goose as other folks. But then, gentlemen don't know things--how should they?"

"You are a goose yourself, Antoinette," said her mother.

"Have you no cotton a little finer? I mean a good deal finer?" said Rotha, going back to the business question.

"There are no stockings in my house to need it."

"Then what shall I do? There are two or three little holes in the toes."

"I will tell you. I will get you some stockings fit for you; and you may bring those to me. I will take care of them till you want them, which will not be for a long time."

Rotha turned cold with dismay. This was usurpation and oppression at once; against both which it was in her nature to rebel furiously. She was fond of the stockings, as of everything which Mr. Southwode had got for her; moreover they suited her, and she liked the delicate comfort of them. And though nothing less than suspicious, Rotha had a sudden feeling that the time for her to see her stockings again would never come; they would be put to other use, and Mrs. Busby would think it was a fair exchange. *She* would wear the coarse and Antoinette would have the fine. There was a terrible tempest in Rotha's soul, which nevertheless she did not suffer to burst out. She would appeal to Mrs. Mowbray. She took leave somewhat curtly, carrying her two quires of paper with her, but leaving the coarse darning cotton which she did not intend to use.

CHAPTER XX.

STOCKINGS.

Rotha went home in a storm of feelings, so tumultuous and conflicting that her eyes were dropping tears all the way. All the strength there was in her rose against this new injury; while a feeling of powerlessness made her tremble lest after all, she would be obliged to submit to it. She writhed under the bonds of circumstance. Could Mrs. Mowbray protect her? and if not, must her fine stockings go, to be worn upon her cousin's feet, or her aunt's? The up-rising surges of Rotha's rage were touched and coloured by just one ray of light; she had entered a new service, she had therewith got a new Protector and Helper. That thought made the tears come. She was no longer a hopeless slave to her own passions; there was deliverance. "Jesus is my King now! he will take care of me, and he will help me to do right." So she thought as she ran along. For precisely what Adam and Eve lost by disobedience, in one respect, their descendants regain as soon as they return to their allegiance and become obedient. The riven bond is united again; the lost protection is restored; they have come "from the power of Satan, to God"; and under his banner which now floats over them, the motto of which is "Love," they are safe from all the wiles and the force of the enemy. Rotha was feeling this already; already rejoicing in the new peace which is the very air of the kingdom she had entered; glad that she was no longer to depend on herself, to fight her battles alone. For between her aunt and her own heart, the battle threatened to be hot.

It was dinner-time when she got home, and no time to speak to Mrs. Mowbray. And Rotha had to watch a good while before she could find a chance to speak to her in private. At last in the course of the evening she got near enough to say in a low tone,

"Mrs. Mowbray, can I see you for a minute by and by?"

"Is it business?" the lady asked in the same tone, at the same time opening a Chinese puzzle box and putting it before another of her pupil-guests.

"It is business to me," Rotha answered.

"Troublesome business?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"We cannot talk it over here, then. I will come to your room by and by."

Which indeed she did. She came when the work of the day was behind her; and what a day! She had entertained some of her girls with a visit to the book-making operations of the American Bible Society; she had taken others to a picture gallery; she had packed a box to send to a poor friend in the country; she had looked over a bookseller's stock to see what he had that could be of service to her in her work; she had paid two visits to relations in the city; she had kept the

whole group of her pupils happily entertained all the evening with pictures and puzzles; and now she came to be a sympathizing, patient, helpful friend to one little tired heart. She came in cheery and bright; looked to see if the room were comfortable and entirely arranged as it should be, and then took a seat and an air of expectant readiness. Was she tired? Perhaps—but it did not appear. What if she were tired? if here was more work that God had given her to do. She did not shew fatigue, in look or manner. She might have just risen after a night's sleep.

"Are you comfortable here, my dear?"

"O very, ma'am, thank you."

"Now what is the business you want to speak about?"

"I want you to tell me what I ought to do!"

"About what? Have you had a pleasant day?"

"Not at all pleasant."

"How happened that?"

"It was partly my fault."

"Not altogether?" Mrs. Mowbray asked with a smile that was very kindly.

"I do not think it was all my fault, ma'am. Partly it was. I lost my temper, and got angry, and said what I thought, and aunt Serena banished me. Then at luncheon I apologized and asked pardon; I did all I could. But that wasn't the trouble. Aunt Serena told me to bring her all my nice stockings, and she would get me coarser and commoner ones. Must I do it?" And Rotha's eyes looked up anxiously into the lace of her oracle.

"What made her give you such an order?"

Rotha hesitated, and said at last she did not know.

"Are your stockings too fine for proper protection to your feet in cold weather?"

"O, no, ma'am! nothing was said about *that* at all; only I am a poor girl, and have no business to have fine stockings."

"How came you to have them so fine?"

"They were given to me. They were got for me; by a friend who was not poor. Are they not mine now?"

"And you say your aunt wants them?"

"Says I must bring them to her, and she will get me some more fit for me."

"What does she want with them?" cried Mrs. Mowbray sharply.

"She says *she* has none so fine, and she will keep them till I want them; but when would that be?"

"What did you say?"

"I said nothing. I was too terribly angry. I got out of the house without saying anything. It all came from asking her for some darning cotton to mend them; and what she gave me was too coarse."

"I have got fine darning cotton," said Mrs. Mowbray. "I will give you some."

"Then you do not think I need let her have them? Dear Mrs. Mowbray, has she any *right* to take my things from me?"

"I should say not," Mrs. Mowbray answered.

"Then you think I may refuse when she asks me for them?" said Rotha, joyfully.

"What is your rule of action, my dear?"

"My rule?" said Rotha, growing grave again. "I think, Mrs. Mowbray, I want to do what is right."

"There is a further question. Do you want to do what I think right, or what you think right, or--what God thinks right?"

"I want to do *that*," said Rotha, with her heart beating very disagreeably. "I want to do what God thinks right."

"Then I advise you, my dear, to ask him."

"Ask him what, madame?"

"Ask what you ought to do in the circumstances. I confess I am not ready with the answer. My first feeling is with you, that your aunt has no right to take such a step; but, my dear, it is sometimes our duty to suffer wrong. And you are under her care; she is the nearest relative you have; you must consider what is due to her in that connection. She stands to you in the place of your parents--"

"O no, ma'am!" Rotha exclaimed. "Never! Not the least bit."

"Not as entitled to affection, but as having a right to respect and observance. You cannot change that fact, my dear. Whether you love her or not, you owe her observance; and within certain limits, obedience. She stands in that place with regard to you."

"But my own mother gave me to Mr. Southwode."

"He could not take care of you properly; as he shewed that he was aware when he placed you under the protection of your aunt."

"She will never protect me," said Rotha. "She will do the other thing."

"Well, my dear, that does not change the circumstances," said Mrs. Mowbray rising.

"Then you think"--said Rotha in great dismay--"you think I ought to pray, to know what I ought to do?"

"Yes. I know no better way. If you desire to do the will of the Lord, and not your own."

"But how shall I get the answer?"

"Look in the Bible for it. You will get it. And now, good night, my dear child! Don't sit up to-night to think about it; it is late. Start fresh to-morrow. You have a good time for that sort of study, now in the holidays."

She gave a kind embrace to Rotha; and the girl went to bed soothed and comforted. True, her blood boiled when she thought of her stockings; but she tried not to think of them, and soon was beyond thinking of anything.

The next day was filled with a white snow storm; with flurries of wind and thick, driving atoms of frost, that chased everybody out of the streets who was brought thither by anything short of stern business. A lovely day to make the house and one's own room seem cosy and cheery. It was positive delight to hear the sharp crystals beat on the window panes and to see the swirling eddies and gusts of them as the wind carried them by, almost in mass. It made quiet and warmth and comfort feel so much the more delicious. Rotha had retreated to her room after breakfast and betaken herself to her appointed work.

Her Bible had a new look to her. It was now not simply a book Mrs. Mowbray had given her; that was half lost in the feeling that it was a book God had given her. As such, something very dear and reverent, precious and wonderful, and most sweet. Not any longer an awesome book of adverse law, with which she was at cross purposes; but a letter of love, containing the mind and will of One whom it was her utter pleasure to obey. The change was so great, Rotha lingered a little, in admiring contemplation of it; and then betook herself to the business in hand. How should she do? She thought the best way would be to ask earnestly for light on her duty; then to open the Bible and see what she could find. She prayed her prayer, honestly and earnestly, but she hoped, quite as earnestly, that it would not be her duty to let her aunt have her fine stockings.

And here lies the one great difficulty in the way of finding what the Bible really says on any given subject which concerns our action. Looking through a red veil, you do not get the right colour of blue; and looking through blue, you will easily turn gold into green. Or, to change the figure; if your ears are filled with the din of passion or the clamour of

desire, the soft, fine voice of the Spirit in the word or in the heart is easily drowned and lost. So says F?nelon, and right justly--"O how rare a thing is it, to find a soul still enough to hear God speak!"

The other supposed difficulty, that the Bible does not speak directly of the subject about which you are inquiring, does not hold good. It may be true; nevertheless, as one or two notes, clearly heard, will give you the whole chord, even so it is with this heavenly music of the Lord's will. Rotha did not in the least know where to look for the decision she wanted; she thought the best thing therefore would be to go on with that same chapter of Matthew from which she had already got so much light. She had done what in her lay to be "reconciled to her brother," alias her aunt; she was all ready to go further. Would the next saying be as hard?

She read on, for a number of verses, without coming to anything that touched her present purpose. Then suddenly she started. What was this?

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain."--

Rotha stared at the words first, as if they had risen out of the ground to confront her; and then put both hands to her face. For there was conflict again; her whole soul in a tumult of resistance and rebellion. Let her aunt do her this wrong! But there it stood written--"That ye resist not evil." "O why, thought Rotha, why may not evil be resisted? And people *do* resist it, and go to law, and do everything they can, to prevent being trampled upon? Must one let oneself be trampled upon? Why? Justice should be done; and this is not justice. I wish Mrs. Mowbray would come in, that I might ask her! I do *not* understand it."

At the moment, as if summoned by her wish, Mrs. Mowbray tapped at the door; she wanted to get something out of a closet in that room, and apologized for disturbing Rotha.

"You are not disturbing--O Mrs. Mowbray, are you *very* busy?" cried the girl.

"Always busy, my dear," said the lady pleasantly. "I am always busy. What is it?"

"Nothing--if you are *too* busy," said Rotha.

"I am never too busy when you want my help. Do you want help now?"

"O very much! I can not understand things."

"Well, wait a moment, and I will come to you."

Rotha straightened herself up, taking hope; set a chair for Mrs. Mowbray, and received her with a face already lightened of part of its shadow of care.

"It is this, Mrs. Mowbray. I was looking, as you told me, to see what I ought to do; and look here,--I came to this:--'That ye resist not evil.' Why? Is it not right to resist evil?"

"Read the passage; read the whole passage, to the end of the chapter."

Rotha read it; the verses she had been studying, and then, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven."--Rotha read on to the end of the chapter.

"My dear," said Mrs. Mowbray then, "do you think you could love your enemies and pray for them, if you were busy fighting and resisting them?"

"I do not know," said Rotha. "Perhaps not. I do not think it would be easy any way."

"It is not easy. Do you not see that it would be simply impossible to do the two things at once? You must take the one course or the other; either do your best to repel force with force, resist, struggle, go to law, give people what they deserve; or, you must go with your hands full of forgiveness and your heart full of kindness, passing by offence and even suffering wrong, if perhaps you may conquer evil with good, and win people with love, and so save them from

great loss. It is worth bearing a little loss oneself to do that."

"But is it *right* to let people do wrong things and not stop them? Isn't it right to go to law?"

"Sometimes, where the interests of others are at stake. But if it is only a little discomfort for you or me at the moment, I think the Bible says, Forgive,--let it pass,--and love and pray the people into better behaviour, if you can."

"I never can, aunt Serena," said Rotha low.

"My dear, you cannot tell."

"Then I ought to let her have my stockings?" Rotha said again after a pause.

"That is a question for you to judge of. But can you forgive and love her, and resist her at the same time? You could, if what she asks demanded a wrong action from you; but it is only a disagreeable one."

"Is it only because it is so disagreeable, that it seems to me so wrong?"

"I think it *is* wrong in your aunt; but that is not the question we have to deal with."

"And if one man strikes another man--do you think he ought to give him a chance to strike him again?"

"What do the words *say*?"

Rotha looked at the words, as if they ought to mean something different from what they said.

"I will tell you a true story," Mrs. Mowbray went on. "Something that really once happened; and then you can judge. It was in a large manufacturing establishment, somewhere out West. The master of the establishment--I think he was an Englishman?--had occasion to reprove one of his underlings for something; I don't know what; but the man got into a great rage and struck him a blow flat in the face. The master turned red, and turned pale; stood still a moment, and then offered the man the other side of his face for another blow. The man's fist was already clenched to strike,--but at seeing that, he wavered, his arm fell down, and he burst into tears. He was conquered.--

"What do you think?"

"He was a very extraordinary man!" said Rotha.

"Which?" said Mrs. Mowbray smiling.

"O I mean the master."

"But what do you think of that plan of dealing with an injury?"

"But does the Bible really mean that we should do so?"

"What does it *say*, my dear? It is always quite safe to conclude that God means what he says."

"People don't act as if they thought so."

"What then?"

"Mrs. Mowbray, I don't see how a man *could*."

"By the grace of God."

"I suppose, by that one could do anything," said Rotha thoughtfully.

Silence fell, which Mrs. Mowbray would not break. She watched the girl's face, which shewed thoughts working and some struggle going on. The struggle was so absorbing, that Rotha did not notice the silence, nor know how long it lasted.

"Then--you think--" she began,--"according to--that I ought--"

The words came slowly and with some inner protest. Mrs. Mowbray rose.

"It is no matter what I think. The decision must be made by yourself independently. Study it, and pray over it; and I pray you may decide rightly."

"But if *you* thought, Mrs. Mowbray--" Rotha began.

"It is not I whom you have to obey, my child. I think your case is not an easy one; it would not be for me; I believe it would rouse all the wickedness there is in me; but, as you said, by the grace of God one can do anything. I shall pray for you, my dear."

She left the room, though Rotha would fain have detained her. It was much easier to talk than to act; and now she was thrown back upon the necessity for action. She sat leaning over the Bible, looking at the words; uncompromising, simple, clear words, but so hard, so hard, to obey! "If he compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." And then Rotha's will took such a hold of her stockings, that it seemed as if she never could let them go. It was injustice! it was oppression! it was extortion! it was more, something else that Rotha could not define. Yes, true, but--"if he take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also."

A long while Rotha worried over those words; and then stole into her mind another thought, coming with the subtlety and the peace of a sunbeam.--It is not for aunt Serena; it is for Christ; you are his servant, and these are his commands.--It is true! thought Rotha, with a sudden casting off of the burden that was upon her; *I am* his servant; and since this is his pleasure, why, it is mine. Aunt Serena may have the things; what does it signify? but I have a chance to please God in giving them up; and here I have been trying as hard as I could to fight off from doing it. A pretty sort of a Christian I am! But--and O what a joy came with the consciousness--I think the Lord is beginning to take away my stony heart.

The feeling of being indeed a servant of the Lord Christ seemed to transform things to Rotha's vision. And among other things, the words of the Bible, which were suddenly become very bright and very sweet to her. The question in hand being settled, and no fear of the words any longer possessing her, it occurred to her to take her "Treasury of Scripture Knowledge" and see what more there might be about this point of not resisting evil. She found first a word back in Leviticus----

"Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."--Lev. xix. 18.

It struck Rotha's conscience. This went even further than turning the cheek and resigning the cloak; (or she thought so) for it forbade her withal to harbour any grudge against the wrong doer. Not have a grudge against her aunt, after giving up the stockings to her? Yet Rotha saw and acknowledged presently that only so could the action be thoroughly sound and true; only so could there be no danger of nullifying it by some sudden subsequent action. But bear *no grudge*? Well, by the grace of God, perhaps. Yes, that could do everything.

She went on, meanwhile, and read some passages of David's life; telling how he refused to take advantage of opportunities to avenge himself upon Saul, who was seeking his life at the time. The sweet, noble, humble temper of the young soldier and captain, appeared very manifest and very beautiful; at the same time, Rotha thought she could easier have forgiven Saul, in David's place, than in her own she could forgive Mrs. Busby. Some other words about not avenging oneself she passed over; *that* was not the point with her; and then she came to a word in Romans----

"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

That confirmed her decision, and loudly. If she would live peaceably with Mrs. Busby, no doubt she must do her will in the matter of the stockings. But "with all men," and "as much as lieth in you"; those were weighty words, well to be pondered and laid to heart. Evidently the Lord would have his servants to be quiet people and kindly; not so much bent on having their own rights, as careful to put no hindrance in the way of their good influence and example. And I am one of his people, thought Rotha joyously. I will try all I can. And it is very plain that I must not bear a grudge in my heart; for if it was there, I could never keep it from coming out.

Then she read a verse in 1 Corinthians vi. 7. "Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. *Why do ye not rather take wrong?* why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" It did not stumble her now. Looking upon all these regulations as opportunities to make patent her service of Christ and to please him, they won quite a pleasant aspect. The words of the hymn, so paradoxical till one comes to work them out, were already verified in her experience--

"He always wins who sides with God;

To him no chance is lost.

God's will is sweetest to him when

It triumphs at his cost."

Ay, for then he tastes the doing of it, pure, and unmixed with the sweetness of doing his own will.

And then came,--"Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing."--1 Peter iii. 9.

"Contrariwise, *blessing.*" According to that, she must seek out some way of helping or pleasing her aunt, as a return for her behaviour about the stockings. And strangely enough, there began to come into her heart, for the first time, a feeling of pity for Mrs. Busby. Rotha did not believe she was near as happy, with all her money, as her little penniless self with her Bible. No, nor half as rich. What could she do, to shew good will towards her?

There was nobody at the dinner table that evening, who looked happier than Rotha; there was nobody who enjoyed everything so well. For I am the servant of Christ she said to herself. A little while later, in the library, whither they all repaired, she was again lost in the architecture of the 13th and 14th centuries, and in studying Fergusson. She started when Mrs. Mowbray spoke to her.

"How did you determine your question, my dear?"

Rotha lifted her head, threw back the dark masses of her hair, and cleared the arches of Rivaulx out of her eyes.

"O,--I am going to let her have them," she said.

"What she demanded?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"How did you come to that conclusion?"

"The words seemed plain, madame, when I came to look at them. That about letting the cloak go, you know; and, 'If it be possible, . . . live peaceably with all men.' If I was going to live peaceably, I knew I must."

"And you are inclined now to live peaceably with the person in question?"

"O yes, ma'am," said Rotha. She smiled frankly in Mrs. Mowbray's face as she said it; and she was puzzled to know what made that lady's eyes swiftly fill with tears. They filled full. Rotha went back to her stereoscope.

"What have you there, my dear?"

"O this old abbey, Mrs. Mowbray; it is just a ruin, but it is so beautiful! Will you look?"

Mrs. Mowbray put the glass to her eye.

"It is a severe style--" she remarked.

"Is it?"

"And it was built at a severe time of religious strictness in the order to which it belonged. They were a colony from Clairvaux; and the prior of Clairvaux, Bernard, was the most remarkable man of his time; remarkable through his goodness. In all Europe there was not another man, crowned or uncrowned, who had the social and political power of that man. Yet he was a simple monk, and devoted to God's service."

"I do not know much about monks," Rotha remarked.

"You can know a good deal about them, if you will read that work of Montalembert on the monks of the Middle Ages. Make haste and learn to read French. You must know that first."

"Is it in French?"

"Yes."

Rotha thought as she laid down Rivaulx and took up Tintern abbey, that there was a good deal to learn. Pier next word was an exclamation.

"O how beautiful, how beautiful! It is just a door, Mrs. Mowbray, belonging to Tintern abbey, a door and some ivy; but it is so pretty! How came so many of these beautiful abbeys and things to be in ruins?"

"Henry the Eighth had the monks driven out and the roofs stripped off. When you take the roof off a building, the weather gets in, and it goes to ruin very fast."

Henry the Eighth was little more than a name yet to Rotha. "What did he do that for?" she asked.

"I believe he wanted to turn the metal sheathing of the roofs into money.
And he wanted to put down the monastic orders."

"Mrs. Mowbray, this abbey was pretty old before it was made a ruin."

"How do you know?"

"Because, I see it. Only half of the door was accustomed to be opened; and the stone before the door on that side is ever so much worn away. So many feet had gone in and out there."

Mrs. Mowbray took the glass to look. "I never noticed that before," she said.

So went the days of the vacation, pleasantly and sweetly after that. Rotha enjoyed herself hugely. She had free access to the library, which was rich in engravings and illustrations, and in best works of reference upon every subject that she could wish to look into. Sometimes she went driving with Mrs. Mowbray. Morning, evening, and day were all pleasant to her; the leisure was busily filled up, and the time fruitful. With the other young ladies remaining in the house for the holidays, she had little to do; little beyond what courtesy demanded. Their pleasures and pursuits were so diverse from her own that there could be little fellowship. One was much taken up with shopping and visits to her mantua-maker; several were engrossed with fancy work; some went out a great deal; all had an air of dawdling. They fell away from Rotha, quite naturally; all the more that she was getting the name of being a favourite of Mrs. Mowbray's. But Rotha as naturally fell away from them. None of them cared for the stereoscope, or shared in the least her pleasure in the lines and mouldings and proportions of glorious architecture. And Rotha herself could not have talked of lines or mouldings; she only knew that she found delight; she did not know why.

CHAPTER XXI.

EDUCATION.

"My dear," said Mrs. Mowbray, the last day of December, "would you like to have the little end room?"

Rotha looked up. "Where Miss Jewett sleeps?"

"That room. I am going to place Miss Jewett differently. Would you like to have it?"

"For myself?"--Rotha's eyes brightened.

"It is only big enough for one. You may have it, if you like. And move your things into it to-day, my dear. The young ladies who live in this room will be coming back the day after to-morrow."

With indescribable joy Rotha obeyed this command. The room in question was one cut off from the end of a narrow hall; very small accordingly; there was just space for a narrow bed, a wardrobe, a little washstand, a small dressing table with drawers, and one chair. But it was privacy and leisure; and Rotha moved her clothes and books and took possession that very day. Mrs. Mowbray looked in, just as she had finished her arrangements.

"Are you going to be comfortable here?" she said. "My dear, I thought, in that other room you would have no chance to study your Bible."

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Mowbray! I am so delighted."

"There is a rule in Miss Manners' school at Meriden, that at the ringing of a bell, morning and evening, each young lady should go to her room to be alone with her Bible for twenty minutes. The house is so arranged that every one can be alone at that time. It is a good rule. I wish I could establish it here; but it would do more harm than it would good in my family. My dear, your aunt has sent word that she wishes to see you."

Rotha's colour suddenly started. "I suppose I know what that means!" she said.

"The stockings?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What are you going to do?"

"O I am going to take them."

"And, my dear," said Mrs. Mowbray, kissing Rotha, "pray for grace to do it *pleasantly*."

Yes, that was something needed, Rotha felt as she went through the streets. Her heart was a little bitter.

She found her aunt's house in a state of preparation; covers off the drawing-room furniture, greens disposed about the walls, servants busy. Mrs. Busby was in her dressing-room; and there too, on the sofa, in mere wantonness of idleness, for she was not sick, lay Antoinette; a somewhat striking figure, in a dress of white silk, and looking very pretty indeed. Also looking as if she knew it.

"Good morning, Rotha!" she cried. "This is the dress I am to wear to-morrow. I'm trying it on."

"She's very ridiculous," Mrs. Busby remarked, in a smiling tone of complacency.

"What is to be to-morrow?" Rotha inquired pleasantly. The question brought Antoinette up to a sitting posture.

"Why don't you know?" she said. "*Don't* you know? Mamma, is it possible anybody of Rotha's size shouldn't know what day New Year's is?"

"New Year's! O yes, I remember; people make visits, don't they?"

"Gentlemen; and ladies receive visits. It is the greatest day of all the year, if you have visitors enough. And I eat supper all day long. We have a supper table set, and hot oysters, and ice cream, and coffee, and cake; and I never want any dinner when it comes."

"That is a very foolish way," said her mother. "Did you bring the stockings, Rotha?"

Silently, she could not say anything "pleasantly" at the moment, Rotha delivered her package of stockings neatly put up. Mrs. Busby opened and examined, Antoinette running up to look too.

"Mamma! how ridiculously nice!" she exclaimed. "You never gave me any as good as those."

"No, I should hope not," said her mother. "Here are eleven pair, Rotha."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Were there not twelve?"

"Yes, ma'am. The other pair I have on."

"They are a great deal too thin for this time of year. Here are some thicker I have got for you. Sit down and put a pair of these on, and let me have those."

Every fibre of her nature rebelling, Rotha sat down to unbutton her boot. It was hard to keep silence, to speak "pleasantly" impossible. Tears were near. Rotha bent over her boot and prayed for help. And then the thought came, fragrant and sweet,—I am the servant of Christ; this is an opportunity to obey and please him.

And with that she was content. She put on the coarse stockings, which felt extremely uncomfortable. But then she could not get her boot on. She tugged at it in vain.

"It is no use," she said at last. "It will not go on, aunt Serena. I cannot wear my boots with these stockings."

"The boots must be too small," said Mrs. Busby. She came herself, and pushed and pinched and pulled at the boot. It would not go on.

"What do you get such tight-fitting boots for?" she said, sitting back on the floor, quite red in the face.

"They are not tight; they fit me perfectly."

"They won't go on!"

"That is the stockings."

"Nonsense! The stockings are proper; the boots are improper. What did you pay for them?"

"I did not get them."

"What did they cost, then? I suppose you know."

"Six and a half."

"I can get you for three and a half what will do perfectly," said Mrs. Busby, rising up from the floor. But she sat down, and did not fetch any boots, as Rotha half expected she would.

"What are you going to do to-morrow, Rotha?" her cousin asked.

"I don't know. What I do every day, I suppose," Rotha answered, trying to make her voice clear.

"What is Mrs. Mowbray going to do?"

"I do not know."

"I wonder if she receives? Mamma, do you fancy many people would call on
Mrs. Mowbray?"

"Why not?" Rotha could not help asking.

"O, because she is a school teacher, you know. Mamma, do you think there would?"

"I dare say. Your father will go, I have no doubt."

"O, because she teaches me. And other fathers will go, I suppose. What a stupid time they will have!"

"Who?" said Rotha.

"All of you together. I am glad I'm not there."

"I shall not be there either. I shall be up stairs in my room"

"Looking at your Russia leather bag. Why didn't you bring it for us to see? But your room means three or four other people's room, don't it?"

It was on Rotha's lips to say that she had a room to herself; she shut them and did not say it. A sense of fun began to mingle with her inward anger. Here she was in her stockings, unable to get her feet into her boots.

"How am I to get home, ma'am?" she asked as demurely as she could.

"Antoinette, haven't you a pair of old boots or shoes, that Rotha could get home in?"

"What should I do when I got there? I could not wear old boots about the house. Mrs. Mowbray would not like it."

"Nettie, do you hear me?" Mrs. Busby said sharply. "Get something of yours to put on Rotha's feet."

"If she can't wear her own, she couldn't wear mine--" said Miss Nettie, unwilling to furnish positive evidence that her foot was larger than her cousin's. Her mother insisted however, and the boots were brought. They went on easily enough.

"But these would never do to walk in," objected Rotha. "My feet feel as if each one had a whole barn to itself. Look, aunt Serena. And I could not go to the parlour in them."

"I don't see but you'll have to, if you can't get your own on. You'll have worse things than that to do before you die. I wouldn't be a baby, and cry about it."

For Rotha's lips were trembling and her eyes were suddenly full. Her neat feet transformed into untidy, shovelling things like these! and her quick, clean gait to be exchanged for a boggling and clumping along as if her feet were in loose boxes. It was a token how earnest and true was Rotha's beginning obedience of service, that she stooped down and laced the boots up, without saying another word, though tears of mortification fell on the carpet. She was saying to herself, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." She rose up and made her adieu, as briefly as she could.

"Are you not going to thank me?" said Mrs. Busby. A dangerous flash came from Rotha's eyes.

"For what, aunt Serena?"

"For the trouble I have taken for you, not to speak of the expense."

Rotha was silent, biting in her words, as it were.

"Why don't you speak? You can at least be civil."

"I don't know if I can," said Rotha. "It is difficult. I think my best way of being civil is to hold my tongue. I must go--Good bye, ma'am!--" and she staid for no more, but ran out and down the stairs. She paused as she passed the open parlour door, paused on the stairs, and then went on and took the trouble to go a few steps back through the hall to get the interior view more perfectly. The grate was heaped full of coals in a state of vivid glow, the red warm reflections came from, crimson carpet and polished rosewood and gilding of curtain ornaments. Antoinette's piano gave back the shimmer, and the thick rug before the hearth looked like a nest of comfort. So did the whole room. A feeling of the security and blessedness of a home came over Rotha. This was home to Antoinette. It was not home to herself, nor was any other place in all the earth. Not Mrs. Mowbray's kind house; it was kind, but it was not *home*; and a keen wish crept into the girl's heart. To have a home somewhere! Would the time ever be? Must she perhaps, as her aunt foretold, be a houseless wanderer, teaching in other people's homes, and having none? Rotha looked and ran away; and as her feet went painfully clumping along the streets in Antoinette's big boots, some tears of forlornness dropped on the pavement. They were hot and bitter.

But I am a servant of Christ--thought Rotha,--I *am* a servant of Christ; I have been fighting to obey him this afternoon, and he has helped me. He will be with me, at any rate; and he can take care of my home and give it me, if he pleases. I needn't worry. I'll just let him take care.

So with that the tears dried again, and Rotha entered Mrs. Mowbray's house more light-hearted than she had left it. She took off her wrappings, and sought Mrs. Mowbray out.

"Madame," she said, looking at her feet, "I wanted you to know, that if I do not look nice as I should, it is not my fault."

Mrs. Mowbray's eyes likewise went to the boots, and staid there. She had a little struggle with herself, not to speak what she felt.

"What is the matter, Rotha?"

"You see, Mrs. Mowbray. My boots would not go on over the thick stockings; so I have had to put on a pair of Antoinette's boots. So if I walk queerly, I want you to know I cannot help it."

"You have more stockings than that pair, I suppose?"

"Yes, ma'am; enough to last a good while."

"Let me see them."

Mrs. Mowbray examined the thick web.

"Did you and your aunt have a fight over these?"

"No, madame," said Rotha softly.

"How was it then? You put them on quietly, and without remonstrance?"

"Not exactly without remonstrance. But I didn't say much. I did not trust myself to say much. I knew I should say too much."

"What made you fear that?"

"I was so angry, ma'am."

There came some tears again, dropping from Rotha's eyes. Mrs. Mowbray drew her down with a sudden movement, into her arms, and kissed her over and over again.

"My dear," she said with a merry change of tone, "thick stockings are not the worst things in the world!"

"No, ma'am."

"You don't think so."

"No, ma'am."

"It will be a good check to your vanity, eh?"

"Am I vain, Mrs. Mowbray?"

"I don't know! most people are. Isn't it vanity, that makes you dislike to see your feet in shoes too large for them?"

"Is it?" said Rotha. "But it is right to like to look nice, Mrs. Mowbray, is it not?"

"It is right to like to see everything look nice, therefore of course oneself included."

"Then that is not vanity."

"No,--but vanity is near. It all depends on what you want to look nice for."

Rotha looked an inquiry.

"What *do* you want to look nice for?" Mrs. Mowbray asked smiling.

"I suppose," Rotha said slowly, "one likes to have people like one."

"And you think the question of dress has to do with that?"

"Yes, ma'am, I do."

"Well, so do I. But then--*why* do you want people to like you? What for?"

"One cannot help it," said Rotha, her eyes opening a little at these self-evident questions.

"Perhaps that is true. However, Rotha, there are two reasons for it and lying back of the wish; one is one's own pleasure or advantage simply. The other is--the honour and service of God."

"How, ma'am? I do not see."

"Just using dress like everything else, as--a means of influence. I knew a lady who told me that since she was a child, she had never dressed herself that she did not do it for Christ."

Rotha was silent and pondered. "Mrs. Mowbray, I think that is beautiful," she said then.

"So do I, my dear."

"But that would not make me like these boots any better."

"No," said Mrs. Mowbray laughing. "Naturally. But I think nevertheless, in the circumstances, it would be better for you to wear them, at least during some of this winter weather, than to discard them and put on others. You shall judge yourself. What would be the effect, if, being known to have plenty of shoes and stockings to cover your feet, you cast them aside, and I procured you others, better looking?"

"O you could not do that!" cried Rotha.

"If I followed my inclinations, I should do it. But what would the effect be?"

Rotha considered. "I suppose,—I should be called very proud; and you, madame, very extravagant, and partial."

"Not a desirable effect."

"No, madame. O no! I must wear these things." Rotha sighed.

"Especially as we are both called Christians."

"Yes, madame. There are a good many right things that are hard to do,
Mrs. Mowbray!"

"Else there would be no taking up the cross. But we ought to welcome any occasion of honouring our profession, even if it be a cross."

Rotha went away much comforted. Yet the clumsy foot gear remained a constant discomfort to her, every time she put them on and every time she felt the heavy clump they gave to her gait. Happily, she had no leisure to dwell on these things.

The holidays were ended, and the girls came trooping back from their various homes or places of pleasure. They came, as usual, somewhat disorganized by idleness and license. Study went hard, and discipline seemed unbearable; tempers were in an uncertain and irritable state. Rotha hugged herself that she had her own little corner room, in which she could be quite private and removed from all share in the dissensions and murmurings, which she knew abounded elsewhere. It was a very little room; but it held her and her books and her modest wardrobe too; and Rotha bent herself to her studies with great ardour and delight. She knew she was not popular among the girls; the very fact of her having a room to herself would almost have accounted for that; "there was no reason on earth why she should have it," as one of them said; and Mrs. Mowbray was accused of favouritism. Furthermore, Rotha was declared to be "nobody," and known to be poor; there was no advantage to be gained by being her adherent; and the world goes by advantage. Added to all which, she was distancing in her studies all the girls near her own age, and becoming known as the cleverest one in the house. No wonder Rotha had looks askance and frequently the cold shoulder. Her temperament, however, made her half unconscious of this, and when conscious, comfortably independent. She was one of those natures which live a concentrated life; loving deeply and seeking eagerly the good opinion of a few; to all the rest of the world careless and superior. She was polite and pleasant in her manners, which was easy, she was so happy; but she was hardly winning or ingratiating; too independent; and too outspoken.

The rule was that at the ringing of a bell in the morning all the girls should rise; and at the ringing of a second bell everybody should repair to the parlours for prayers and reading the Bible. The interval between the two bells was amply sufficient to allow the most fastidious dresser to make her toilette. But the hour was early; and the rousing bell an object of great detestation; also, it may be said, the half hour given to the Scriptures and prayer was a weariness if not to the flesh to the spirit, of many in the family. So it sometimes happened that one and another was behind time, and came into the parlour while the reading was going on, or after prayers were over. Mrs. Mowbray remarked upon this once or twice. Then came an outbreak; which allowed Rotha to see a new side of her friend's character, or to see it more plainly than heretofore. It was one morning a week or two after school had begun again; a cold morning in January. The gas was lit in the parlours; Mrs. Mowbray was at the table with her books; the girls seated in long lines around the rooms, each with a Bible.

"Where is Miss Bransome?" Mrs. Mowbray asked, looking along the lines of faces. "And Miss Dunstable?"

Nobody spoke.

"Miss Foster, will you have the kindness to go up to Miss Bransome and Miss Dunstable, and tell them we are waiting for them?"

The young lady went. Profound silence. Then appeared, after some delay, the missing members of the family; they came in and took their seats in silence.

"Good morning, young ladies!" said Mrs. Mowbray. "Have you slept well?"

"Quite well, madame,"--one of them answered, making an expressive facial sign to her neighbours on the other side, which Rotha saw and greatly resented.

"So well that you did not hear the bell?" Mrs. Mowbray went on.

Silence.

"Answer, if you please. Did you hear the bell?"

"I did, madame," came in faint tones from one of the young ladies; and a still more smothered affirmative from the other.

"Then why were you late?"

Again silence. Profound attention in all parts of the rooms; nobody stirring.

"It has happened once or twice before. Now, young ladies, please take notice," said Mrs. Mowbray, raising her voice somewhat. "If any young lady is not in her place here at seven o'clock, I shall go up for her myself; and if I go up for her, she will have to come down with me, just as she is. I will bring you down in your nightgown, if you are not out of it before I come for you; you shall come down in your night dress, here, to the parlour. So now you know what you have to expect; and remember, I always keep my promises."

The silence was awful, Rotha thought. It was unbroken, even by a movement, until Mrs. Mowbray turned round to her book and took up the interrupted reading. Very decorously the reading went on and ended; in subdued good order the girls came to the table and eat their breakfast; but there were smouldering fires under this calm exterior; and it was to be expected that when the chance came the fire would break forth.

The chance came that same evening before tea. The girls were gathered, preparatory to that ceremony, in the warm, well lighted rooms; and as the custom was, each one had her favourite bit of ornamental work in hand. It was a small leisure time. No teacher, as it happened, was in the front parlour where Rotha sat, deep in a book; and a conversation began near her, in under tones to be sure, which she could not but hear. Several new scholars had come into the family at the New Year. One of these, a Miss Farren, made the remark that Mrs. Mowbray had "showed out" that morning.

"Didn't she!" said another girl. "O that's what she is! You'll see.
That's *just* what she is."

"She is an old cat!"

This last speaker was Miss Dunstable, and the spitefulness of the words brought Rotha's head up from her book, with ears pointed and sharpened.

"I thought she looked so sweet," the new comer, Miss Farren, remarked further. "I was quite taken with her at first. I thought she looked so pleasant."

"Pleasant! She's as pleasant as a mustard plaster, and as sweet as cayenne pepper. I'll tell you, Miss Farren; you're a stranger; you may as well know what you have to expect--"

"Hush, girls!"

"What's the matter?" said the Dunstable, looking round. "There's nobody near. Jewett has gone off into the other room. No, it is a work of charity to let Miss Farren into the secrets of her prison house, 'cause there are two sides to every game. Mrs. M. is a tyrannical, capricious, hypocritical, domineering, fiery old cat. O she's fiery; you have got to take care how you rise up and sit down; and she's stiff, she thinks there's only one way and that's her way; and she's unjust, she has favourites--"

"They all have favourites!" here put in another.

"She has ridiculous favourites. And she is pious, you'll be deluged with the Bible and prayers; and she's sanctimonious, you won't get leave to go to the opera or the theatre, or to do anything lively; and she's stingy, you'll learn that you must take all the potatoes you want the first time the dish is handed you, for it won't come a second time; and she's prudish, she won't let you receive visitors; and she's passionate, she'll fly out like a volcano if you give her a chance; and she's obstinate, she'll be as good--or as bad--as her word."

By this time Rotha had sprung to her feet, with ears tingling and cheeks burning, and stood there like Abdiel among the fallen angels, only indeed that is comparing great things with small She was less patient and prudent than Abdiel might have been.

"Miss Farren," she said, speaking with the calmness of intensity, "there is not one bit of truth in all that Miss Dunstable has been saying to you."

The young lady addressed looked in surprise at the new speaker. Rotha's indignant eyes were sending out angry fires. The other girls looked on too, in scorn and anger, but some awe.

"Miss Carpenter is polite!" said one.

"Her sort," said another, "What you might expect from her family."

"She is a favourite herself," cried a third. "Of course, Mrs. M. is smooth as butter to her."

"You may say what you like of me," said Rotha; "but you shall not tell a stranger all sorts of false things about Mrs. Mowbray, without my telling her that they are false."

"Don't speak so loud!" whispered a stander-by; but Rotha went on, overpowering and silencing her opponents for the moment by the moral force of her passionate utterance,--

"She is as kind as it is possible to be. She is kinder than ever you can think. She is as generous as a horn of plenty, and there is not a small thread in all her composition. She knows how to govern, and she will govern you, if you stay in her house; and she will keep her promises, as you will find to your cost if you break her laws; but she is good, and sweet, and bountiful, as a goddess of mercy. And whoever says anything else of her, you may be sure is not worthy of her Kindness; and speaks not true, but meanly, falsely, ungratefully, and mischievously!"

Rotha stood and blazed at them; and incensed and resentful as they were, the others were afraid now to say anything; for Mrs. Mowbray herself had come into the centre room, and other ears were near, which they did not wish to arouse. It passed for the time; but the next day another of her companions attacked Rotha on the subject.

"You made Miss Dunstable awfully angry at you last evening, Rotha."

"I suppose so."

"What did you do it for?"

"Because she was telling a pack of lies!" said Rotha. "I'm not going to sit by and hear anybody talk so of Mrs. Mowbray. And you ought not; and nobody ought."

"Miss Dunstable will hate you, I can tell you. She'll be your enemy after this."

"That is nothing to me."

"Yes, it's all very well to say that, but you won't think so when you come to find out. She belongs to a very rich family, and she is worth having for a friend."

"A girl like that?" cried Rotha. "A low spirited, false girl? Worth having for a friend? Not to anybody who is worth anything herself."

"But she is ever so rich."

"What's that to me? Do you think I am going to sit by and hear Mrs. Mowbray slandered, or anybody else, because the

story teller has plenty of money? What is her money to me?"

"Well, I don't know," said the other deprecatingly. "It puts things in her power. Her family is one of the best in New York."

"Then the other members of it are much superior to this one!--that's all I have got to say."

"But Rotha, she can hurt you."

"How?"

"She can make the other girls treat you ill."

"I can bear as much as that for Mrs. Mowbray, I guess."

"What makes you like her so much?"

Rotha's eyes gave a wondering, very expressive, glance at her interlocutor.

"Because she is so unspeakably good, and beautiful, and generous. She is a kind of a queen!"

"She likes to rule."

"She *has* to rule. What sort of a place would the house be, if she did not rule?"

"But, Julia Dunstable could do you good, if she liked."

"Could she? How?" said Rotha drily.

"O she could put pleasant things in your way. She gave some of us a lovely invitation to a Christmas party; we had a royal time; and she asks the girls every now and then."

"And you would have me be a traitor for the sake of an invitation? Bell Savage, I do not want invitations from such people."

"La, Rotha, the world is full of such people; you cannot pick and choose."

"But I will. I will pick and choose those whom I honour with my friendship. And I can assure you of one thing; *my* family would be very much ashamed of such a one belonging to it, as the one you want me to court. I court nobody. And I will expose a lie wherever I find it, if it's my business."

I think Rotha forgot at the moment that Mrs. Busby belonged to "her family." However, Miss Savage was not wrong in supposing that her interference with Miss Dunstable would come back upon her own head. She was made to feel that a large number of the girls looked down upon her and that they refused all community with her. Even from people one does not care for, this sort of treatment is more or less painful; and it certainly made Rotha's school days less joyous in some respects than they might otherwise have been. From one reason and another, the greater proportion of her companions turned her the cold shoulder. Some for partisanship, some for subserviency, some to be in the fashion, and others again for pure envy.

For Rotha sprang forward in her learning and surpassed all who were associated with her, in their mutual studies. Her partial isolation contributed, no doubt, to this end; having little social distraction, no home outside her school walls, and no delight in the things which occupied most of the minds within them, she bent to her books; drank, and drank deep, of the "Castalian spring," and with ever increasing enjoyment. She studied, not to get and keep a high position, or to gain distinction, or to earn praise or prizes, but for pure pleasure in study and eagerness to increase knowledge and to satisfy Mrs. Mowbray. So her progress was not only rapid but thorough; what she gained she kept; and her mental growth was equal to her physical.

The physical was rapid and beautiful. Rotha shot up tall, and developed into a very noble-looking girl; intelligent, spirited, sweet and strong at once. Her figure was excellent; her movement graceful and free, as suited her character; colour clear and brunette, telling of flawless health; and an eye of light and force and fire and honesty, which it was at all times a pleasure to meet, speaking of the active, brave and true spirit to which it belonged. By degrees, as all this became manifest, shewed itself also the effect of culture, and the blessing of real education. Refinement touched every

line of Rotha's face, and marked every movement and every tone. She gained command over her impetuous nature, not so but that it broke bounds occasionally; yet the habit became moderation, and something of the beautiful quiet of manner which Rotha had always admired in Mr. Southwode, did truly now belong to herself. Mrs. Mowbray had perpetual delight in her. Was it wonderful, when so many faces were only carelessly obtuse, or stupidly indifferent, or obstinately perverse, that the mistress should turn to the bright eye which was sure to have caught her meaning, and watch for the answer from lips which were sure to give it with rare intelligence.

Those lessons from her beloved teacher were beyond all other lessons prized and delighted in by Rotha. They gave incentive to a vast deal of useful reading, more or less directly connected with the subject in hand. Some of the girls followed out this 'reading extensively; and no one so much as Rotha. Her great quickness and diligence with her regular lessons made this possible.

Meanwhile, it is not to be supposed that Rotha's feet remained permanently in their coarse habiliments. When the cold and the snows were gone, and lighter airs and warmer weather came in with spring, Mrs. Mowbray exchanged the uncomely boots and thick stockings for others which better suited Rotha's need and comfort. No more animadversions were heard on the subject from Mrs. Busby, who indeed seemed rather inclined to let Rotha alone.

And so went by two years; two years of growth and up-building and varied developement; years of enjoyment and affection and peace. The short intervals during which she was an inmate of her aunt's family served only as enhancement of all the rest; foils to the brightness of Mrs. Mowbray's house, and sharpeners of the appetite that was fed there. Nothing was ever heard of Mr. Digby, not by Rotha at least; and this was her only grief. For Rotha was true to her affections; and where she had loved once, did not forget Once she asked Mrs. Mowbray if it was not strange she never got any word from Mr. Southwode? "Why should you, my dear?" Mrs. Mowbray replied, with an impenetrable face.

"Because--I suppose, because I loved him so much," said Rotha innocently; "and I think he is true."

"He has done a friend's part by you; and now there is nothing more for him to do. I see no reason why he should write to you."

I do!--thought Rotha; but Mrs. Mowbray's tone did not invite her to pursue the subject; and she let it thenceforth alone.

CHAPTEK XXII.

A CHANGE

The two years of smooth sailing along the stream of life, were ended. What was coming next? But how should the sailor learn navigation, if he had never anything but calm weather and quiet airs?

It was spring, late in May; when one evening Mrs. Mowbray came into Rotha's little room, shut the door, and sat down. Rotha looked up from her book and smiled. Mrs. Mowbray looked down at the book and sighed. A heavy sigh, it seemed to Rotha, and her smile died away.

"You want to speak to me, madame?" she said, and laid her book away.

"I am going to send you home--" said the lady abruptly.

"Home!--" the word was but half uttered. What was this? The term was not near at an end.

"You must go, my dear," Mrs. Mowbray went on more softly; for the first word had been spoken with the sternness of pain. "I must send you all away from me."

"Whom?"

"All of you! It has pleased heaven to visit me with a great calamity. You must all go."

"What is it, Mrs. Mowbray?" said Rotha, trembling with a fear to which she could give no form.

"I do not know, but I think it too probable, that a contagious disease has broken out in my family. The little Snyders are

both ill with scarlet fever."

"They are at home."

"But Miss Tremont is taken in just the same way, and Miss de Forest is complaining. I have isolated them both; but I have no choice but to send all the rest of you away, till I shall know how the thing will go."

Rotha looked terribly blank.

"It is hard, isn't it?" said Mrs. Mowbray, noticing this with a faint smile; "but it is not best for us to have things go too smooth. I have had no rubs for two years or more."

That this was a hard "rub" was evident. Mrs. Mowbray sat looking before her with a troubled face.

"Why is it best for us that things should not go smooth?" Rotha ventured. To her sense the possible good of this disturbance was not apparent, while the positive evil was manifold.

"The Lord knows!" said Mrs. Mowbray. "He sees uses, and needs, which we do not suspect. I am sorry for you, my dear child."

"And I am sorry you are troubled, dear Mrs. Mowbray!"

"I know you are. Your sympathy is very sweet to me.--We have had a pleasant two years together, have we not?"

"Oh so pleasant!" echoed Rotha, almost in tears. "But--this sickness will pass over; and then we may come back again, may we not?"

"It is too near the end of term, to come back this spring. It cannot be before next September now; and that is a long way off. One never knows what will happen in so many months!"

Rotha had never seen Mrs. Mowbray look or speak so despondently. She was too utterly downhearted herself to say another word of hope or confidence. Four months of interval and separation! Four months with her aunt! What would become of her? What might happen in the mean time?

"When must I go, Mrs. Mowbray?" she asked sadly.

"To-night. Yes, my child, I must send you away from me. You have been a comfort to me ever since you came into my house; and now I must send you away." She folded Rotha in her arms and kissed her almost passionately. Then let her go, and spoke in business tones again.

"Put up whatever you wish to take with you. The carriage will be at the door at half past eight. I shall go with you."

With which words she departed.

The tears came now, which had been carefully kept back until Mrs. Mowbray was gone; and it was under a very shower of heavy drops that Rotha folded and stowed away all her belongings.

Stowed them in her trunk, which Mrs. Mowbray had at once sent up to her room. Amidst all her tears, Rotha worked like a sprite; she would leave nothing on her kind friend's hands to do for her, not even anything to think of. She packed all away, wondering the while why this sudden interruption to her prosperous course of study and growth should have been allowed to come; wondering when and how the interrupted course would be allowed to go on again. Happily she did not know what experiences would fill the next few months, in which Mrs. Mowbray's fostering care would not help her nor reach her; nor what a new course of lessons she would be put upon. Not knowing all this, Rotha shed bitter tears, it is true, but not despairing. And when the summons came, she was ready, and joined Mrs. Mowbray in the carriage with calm self-possession restored.

The drive was almost silent. Once Mrs. Mowbray asked if there was anything Rotha had left to be done for her in her room or in the house? Rotha said "Nothing; all was done"; and then the carriage rolled on silently as before; the one of its occupants too busy with grave thoughts to leave her tongue free, the other sorrowfully wishing she would talk, yet not daring to ask it. Arrived at the door, however, Mrs. Mowbray folded the girl in her arms, giving her warm kisses and broken words of love, and ending with bidding her write often.

"I may be unable to answer you, but do not let that stop you. Write always; I shall want to hear everything about you."

And Rotha answered, it would be the greatest joy to her; and they parted.

She went in at a somewhat peculiar moment. Half an hour sooner, Antoinette had returned from a friend's house where she had been dining, and burst into the parlour with news.

"Mamma!" she exclaimed, before the door was shut behind her,--"Guess what is coming."

"What?" said her mother calmly. She was accustomed to Antoinette's superlatives.

"Mr. Southwode is coming back--"

Now Mrs. Busby did prick up her ears. "How do you know?"

"There was a Mr. Lingard at dinner--a prosy old fellow, as tiresome as ever he could be; but he is English, and knows the Southwodes, and he told lots about them."

"What?"

"O I don't know!--a lot of stuff. About the business and the property, and how old Mr. Southwode left it all to this son; and he carries it on in some ridiculous way that I didn't understand; and the uncle tried to break the will, and there has been a world of trouble; but now Mr. Digby Southwode is coming back to New York."

"When?"

"O soon; any day. He may be here any day. And then, mamma--"

"And was the will broken?"

"No, I believe not. At any rate, Mr. Southwode, our Mr. Southwode, has it all. But he's absurd, mamma; he pays people, workmen, more than they ought to have; and he sells, or makes them sell, for less; less than the market price; and he gives away all his income. So Mr. Lingard says."

"He will learn better," said Mrs. Busby.

"Well, mamma, he's coming back; and what will you do?"

"Welcome him," said her mother. "I always liked Mr. Southwode."

"Yes, yes, but I mean, about Rotha. He will look her up, the first thing; and she will fly ecstatically to meet him--I remember their parting salute two years ago, and their *meeting*. I don't doubt, will be equally tender. Mamma, are you prepared to come down with something handsome in the way of wedding presents?"

"Nonsense!"

"It's *not* nonsense!" said Antoinette vehemently. "It will be the absurd truth, before you know where you are; and papa, and you, and I, we shall all have the felicity of offering congratulations and holding receptions. If you don't prevent it, mamma! *Can't* you prevent it? *Won't* you prevent it? O mamma! won't you prevent it?"

"Get up, Antoinette"--for the young lady had thrown herself down on the floor in her urgency, at her mother's feet. "Get up, and take off your things; you are extremely silly. I have no intention of letting them meet at all."

"Mamma, how are you going to help it? He will find out where she is at school--he will go straight there, and then you may depend Rotha will snap her fingers at you. So will he; and to have two people snapping their fingers at us will just drive me wild."

Mrs. Busby could not help laughing. At the same time, she as well as Antoinette regarded the matter from a very serious point of view. She knew Rotha had grown up very handsome; and all her mother's partiality did not make her sure that men like Mr. Southwode might not prefer the sense and grace and spirit which breathed from every look and motion of Rotha's, to the doll beauty of her own daughter. Yet it was not insipid beauty either; the face of Antoinette was exceedingly pretty, the smile very captivating, and the white and peach-blossom very lovely in her cheeks. But for sense, or dignity, or sympathy with any thoughts high and noble, if one looked to Antoinette one would look in vain. No matter; hers was just a style which captivates men, Mrs. Busby knew; even sensible men,--the only danger as in

possible comparison or contrast. That danger should be avoided.

"Nobody will snap fingers at me," she complacently remarked.

"But how will you help it?"

"I dare say there is no danger. Get up, Antoinette! there is the door bell."

And then in walked Rotha.

It struck her that her aunt and cousin were a little more than ordinarily stiff towards her; but of course they had no reason to expect her then, and the surprise was not agreeable. So Rotha dismissed the matter with a passing thought and an unbathed sigh; while she told the cause of her unlooked-for appearance. Mrs. Busby sat and meditated.

"It is very unfortunate!" she said at last, with her eyebrows distressingly high.

"What?" said Rotha. "My coming? I am sorry, aunt Serena; as sorry as you can be. Is my being here *particularly* inconvenient just at this time?"

"Yes!" said Mrs. Busby, with the same deeply considerative air. "I am thinking what will be the best way to manage. We have a plan of going to Chicago--Mr. Busby's family is mostly there, and he wants us to visit them; we should be gone all June and part of July, for I know Mr. Busby wants to go further, if once he gets so far; and we may not be back till the end of July. I don't know what to do with Rotha."

Not a word of this plan had Antoinette ever heard before, but she kept wise silence; only her small blue eyes sparkled knowingly at the fire. Rotha was silent too at first, with vexation.

"I am very sorry--" she repeated.

"Yes," said Mrs. Busby. "I thought I could leave you in safe quarters with Mrs. Mowbray for a week or two after school broke up; now that possibility is out of the question. Well, we will sleep upon it. Never mind, Rotha; don't trouble yourself. I shall find some way out of the difficulty. I always do."

These words were spoken with so much kindness of tone that they quite comforted Rotha as to the immediate annoyance of being in the way. She went up to her little third-story room, threw open the blinds, to let the stars look in, and remembered that neither she nor yet her aunt Busby was the guide of her fortunes. Yet, yet,--what a hard change this was! All the pursuits in which she had taken such delight, suddenly stopped; her peaceful home lost; her best friend separated from her. It was difficult to realize the fact that God knew and had allowed it. Yet no harm, no real harm, comes to his children, unless they bring it upon themselves; so this change could not mean harm. How could it mean good? Sense saw not, reason could not divine; but faith said "yes"; and in the quietness of that confidence Rotha went to sleep.

At breakfast the ladies' faces had regained their wonted brightness.

"I have settled it all!" Mrs. Busby announced, when her husband had left the breakfast table and the room. Rotha looked up and waited; Antoinette did not look up; therefore it may be presumed she knew what was coming.

"I am going to send Rotha to the country while we are gone."

"Where in the country?" asked the person most concerned.

"To my place in the country--my place at Tanfield. *I have a place in the country.*"--Mrs. Busby spoke with a very alert and pleased air.

"Tanfield--" Rotha repeated with slow recollection. "O I believe I know. I think I have heard of Tanfield."

"Of course. It is the old place where I lived when I was a girl; and a lovely place it is."

"And just think!" put in Antoinette. "Isn't it funny? I have never seen it."

"Who is there?" Rotha asked.

"O the old house is there, and the garden; and somebody who will make you very comfortable. I will take care that she makes you comfortable. I shall see about that."

"Who is that? old Janet?" asked Antoinette.

"No. Janet is not there?"

"Who then, mamma?"

"Persons whom I have put in charge."

"Do I know them?"

"You know very little about them--not enough to talk."

"Mamma! As if one couldn't talk without knowing about things! Who is it, mamma? I want to know who will have the care of Rotha."

"It is not necessary you should know at present. Rotha can tell you, when she has tried them."

"I suppose I shall have the care of myself," said Rotha; to whom all this dialogue somehow sounded unpromising. To her remark no answer was made.

"Mamma, what will Rotha do there, all by herself?"

"She will have people all round her."

"She don't know them. You mean the Tanfield people?"

"Who else should live at Tanfield. I was one of the Tanfield people myself once."

"What sort of people are they, mamma?"

"Excellent people."

"Country people!--"

"Country people can be a very good sort. You need not sneer at them."

"I remark that you have not been anxious to go back and see them, mamma."

Rotha was dumb meanwhile, and during a longer continuance of this sort of talk; with a variety of feelings at work in her, among which crept a certain flavouring of suspicion. Was she to be *alone* in her mother's old home at Tanfield? Alone, with companions that could not be companions? Was it any use to question her aunt further? She feared not; yet the questions would come.

"What sort of persons are those in the house, aunt Serena?"

"Quite sufficient to take good care of you. A man and his wife. Honest people, and kind."

"Servants!"

"In so far as they are serving me."

Antoinette again pressed to be told who they were, was again put off. From the little altercation resulting, Mrs. Busby turned to Rotha with a new theme.

"You will not want your New York wardrobe there,--what will you do? Leave your trunk here? That will be best, I think, till you come back again."

"O no," said Rotha hastily. "I will take it with me."

"You will not want it, my dear. Summer is just here; what, you need up there is some nice calico dresses; those will be just the thing. I will get some for you this very day, and have them cut out; and then you can take them and make them

up. It will give you something to do. Your winter wardrobe would be of no service to you there, and to carry it back and forward would be merely trouble and risk."

"To leave it here would be risk."

"Not at all. There will be somebody in charge of the house."

"I prefer to have the charge of my own clothes myself."

"My dear, I am not going to take it from you; only to guard the things for you while you are away. They would be out of place in the summer and at Tanfield."

"Some would; but they are all mixed up," said Rotha, trying to keep her patience, though the blood mounted into her cheeks dangerously.

"They can be separated," said Mrs. Busby coolly. "When your trunks come, I will do that for you."

Not if I am alive! thought Rotha; but she remembered the old word--"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably--" and she held her tongue. However, later in the day when Mrs. Busby came in after buying the calicos, the proposition was renewed. She came to Rotha and demanded the keys of the boxes.

"Thank you, aunt Serena--I would rather do what I want done, myself."

"Very well," said Mrs. Busby pleasantly; "but if you will give me the keys, I will see what I think ought to be done. I can judge better than you can."

"I would rather not," said Rotha. "If you please, and if you do not mind, ma'am, I would rather nobody went into my trunk but myself."

"Don't be a child, Rotha!"

"No, aunt Serena. I remember that I am one no longer."

"But I wish to have your keys--do you understand?"

"Perfectly; and I do not wish to give them. You understand that."

"Your wish ought to give way to mine," said Mrs. Busby severely.

"Why?" said Rotha, looking at her with a frank face.

"Because you are under my care, and I stand in the place of a mother to you."

Hot words sprang to Rotha's lips, hot and passionate words of denial; but she did not speak them; her lips opened and closed again.

"Do you refuse me?" Mrs. Busby asked, after waiting a moment.

"Entirely!" said Rotha looking up again.

"Then you defy me!"

"No, I mean nothing of the kind. You are asking a thing which no one has a right to ask. I am simply holding my rights; which I will do."

"So shall I hold mine," said Mrs. Busby shortly; "and you do not seem to know what they are. Your trunk will not leave this house; you may make such arrangements as it pleases you. And I shall give myself no further trouble about one who is careless what annoyance she makes me. I had intended to accompany you myself and see you comfortably settled; but it appears that nothing I could do would be of any pleasure to you. I shall let you go without me and make your own arrangements."

With which speech Mrs. Busby ended the interview; and Rotha was left to think what she would do next.

Her trunk must be left behind. It was too plain that here power was on the side of her aunt. Without coming to downright fighting, this point could not be carried against her. Rotha longed to go and talk to Mrs. Mowbray; alas, that was not to be thought of. Mrs. Mowbray's hands and head were full, and her house was a forbidden place. How swiftly circumstances can whirl about in this world! Yesterday a refuge, to-day a danger. Rotha must leave her trunk. But many things in it she must not leave. What to do? I will not deny that her thoughts were bitter for a while. A little matter! Yes, a little matter, compared with Waterloo or Gravelotte; but *not* a little matter to a girl in every day life and having a girl's every day liking for being neat and feeling comfortable. And right is right; and the infringing of right is hard to bear, perhaps equally hard, whether it concerns a nation's boundaries or a woman's wardrobe. If Rotha had been more experienced, perhaps the wisdom of doing nothing would have suggested itself; but she was young and did not know what to do. So she laid out of her trunk certain things; her Bible and Scripture Treasury; her writing materials; her underclothes; and her gloves. If Rotha had a weakness, it was for neat and *suitable* gloves. The rest of her belongings she locked up carefully, and sat down to await the course of events.

It was swift, as some intuition told her it would be. There was no more disputing. Mrs. Busby let the subject of the trunk drop, and was as benign as usual; which was never benign except exteriorly. She was as good as her word in purchasing calicos; brought home what seemed to Rotha an unnecessary stock of them; and that afternoon and the next day kept a dress-maker cutting and basting, and Rotha at work to help. These cut and basted dresses, as they were finished, Mrs. Busby stowed with her own hands in a little old leather trunk. Then, when the last one went in, she told Rotha to bring whatever she wished to have go with her.

"To put in that?" Rotha asked.

"Certainly. It will hold all you want."

Rotha struggled with herself with the feeling of desperate indignation which came over her; struggled, grew red and grew pale, but finally did go without another word; and brought down, pile by pile, her neat under wardrobe. Mrs. Busby packed and packed. Her trunk was leather, and strong, but its capacities were bounded by that very strength.

"All these!" she exclaimed in a sort of despair. "There is no use whatever in having so much linen under wear."

Rotha was silent.

"It is *much* better to have fewer things, and let them be washed as often as necessary. A family would want a caravan at this rate."

"This is Mrs. Mowbray's way," said Rotha.

"Mrs. Mowbray's way is not a way to be copied, unless you are a millionaire. She is the most extravagant woman I ever met, without exception."

"But aunt Serena, it costs no more in the end, whether you have a dozen things for two years, and comfort, or half a dozen a year, and discomfort."

"You don't know that you will live two years to want them."

"You don't know that you will live one, for that matter," said Antoinette, who always spoke her mind, careless whom the words touched. "At that rate, mamma, we ought to do like savages,--have one dress and wear it out before getting another; but it strikes me that would be rather disagreeable."

"You will not find anybody at Tanfield to do all this washing for you,"
Mrs. Busby went on.

"I shall have no more washing done than if I had fewer things," Rotha said.

"Then there is no sort of use in lugging all these loads of linen up there just to bring them back again. The trunk will not hold them. Here, Rotha--take back these,--and these, and these--"

Rotha received them silently; silently carried them up stairs and came down for more. She was in a kind of despair. Her Bible and most precious belongings she had put carefully in her travelling bag, rejoicing in its beauty and security.

"Mamma," said Antoinette now, "does Rotha know when she is going?"

"I do not know."

"Well, that's funny. I should think you would tell her. Why it's almost time for her to put on her bonnet."

Rotha's eyes went from one to the other. She was startled.

"I am going to send you off by the night train to Tanfield,"--Mrs. Busby said without looking up from the trunk.

"The *night* train!" exclaimed Rotha.

"It is the best you can do. It brings you there by daylight. The night train is as pleasant as any."

"If you have company"--said Rotha.

"And if the cars don't run off nor anything," added Antoinette. "All the awful accidents happen in the night."

"I would not have Rotha go alone," said Mrs. Busby grimly; "but she don't want my companionship."

Rotha would have been glad of it; however, she did not say so. She stood confounded. What possible need of this haste?

"Put your things away, Rotha," said Mrs. Busby glancing up,--"and come down to dinner. You must leave at seven o'clock, and I have had dinner early for you."

The dinner being early, Mr. Busby was not there; which Rotha regretted. From him she hoped for at least one of his dry, sensible remarks, and possibly a hint of sympathy. She must go without it. Dinner had no taste, and the talk that went on no meaning. Very poor as this home was, it was better than an unknown country, and uncongenial as were her companions, she preferred them to nobody. Gradually there grew a lump in her throat which almost choked her.

Meantime she was silent, seemed to eat, and did quietly whatever she was told. She put up sandwiches in a paper; accepted an apple and some figs; looked curiously at the old basement dining room, which she had never liked, but which had never seemed to her so comfortable as now; and at last left it to get herself ready. Taking her Russia bag in her hand, she seemed to grasp Mrs. Mowbray's love; and it comforted her.

Her aunt and she had a silent drive through the streets, already dark and lamp-lit. All necessary directions were given her by the way, and a little money to pay for her drive out from Tanfield. Then came the confusion of the Station--not the Grand Central by any means; the bustle of getting her seat in the cars; her aunt's cold kiss. And then she was alone, and the engine sounded its whistle, and the train slowly moved away into the darkness.

For a while Rotha's mind was in a tumult of confusion. If Mrs. Mowbray knew where she was at that minute! She had had no chance to write to her. If she only knew! What then? she could not help matters. O but she could! Mrs. Mowbray could always find help. Love that would not rest, energy that would not tire, a power of will that would not be denied, and a knowledge and command of men and things which enabled her always to lay her hand on the right means and apply them; all this belonged to Mrs. Mowbray, and made her the most efficient of helpers. But just now, doubtless, the affairs of her own house laid full claim to all her energies; and then, she did not know about Rotha's circumstances. How strange, thought Rotha, that she does not--that things should have come together so that she cannot! I seem to be cut off designedly from her, and from everybody.

There crept slowly into her heart the recollection that there was One who did know the whole; and if there were design in the peculiar collocation of events, as who could doubt, it was *His* design. This gave a new view of things. Rotha looked round on the dingy car, dingy because so dimly lighted; filled, partly filled, with dusky figures; and wondered if one there were so utterly alone as she, and marvelled greatly why she had been brought into such a strange position. Separated from everything! Then her Russia bag rebuked her, for her Bible was in it. Not separated from God, whose message was there; perhaps, who knows? she was to come closer to him, in the default of all other friends. She remembered the words of a particular psalm which not long ago had been read at morning prayers and commented on by Mrs. Mowbray; it came home to her now.

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

If he made heaven and earth, he surely can manage them. And Mrs. Mowbray had said, that whoever could honestly adopt and say those first words of the psalm, might take to himself also all the following. Then how it went on!--

"He will not suffer thy foot to be moved; he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

The tears rushed into Rotha's eyes. So he would watch the night train in which she journeyed, and let no harm come to it without his pleasure. The words followed,--

"The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand; the sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil, he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore."

It was to Rotha as if she had suddenly seen a guard of angels about her. Nay, better than that. She was a young disciple yet, she had not learned all the ins and outs of faith; but this night her journey was sweet to her. The train rumbled along through the darkness; but "darkness and the light are alike to him," she remembered. Now and then the cars stopped at a village or wayside station; and a few lights shone upon boards and platforms and bits of wall; sometimes shone from within a saloon where refreshments were set out; there were switches to be turned on or off; there was a turn-out place where the train waited three quarters of an hour for the down train. All the same! Rotha remembered that switches and turnouts made no manner of difference, no more than the darkness, if the Lord was keeping her. It was somehow a sweet kind of a night that she had; not alone nor unhappy; faith, for the moment at least, laying its grasp on the whole wide realm of promise and resting satisfied and quiet in its possessions. After a while she slept and dozed, waking up occasionally to feel the rush and hear the rumble of the cars, to remember in whose hand she was, and then quietly to doze off again.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TANFIELD.

The last time she awoke, the rush and the roar had ceased; the train was standing still in the darkness. Not utterly in the dark, for one or two miserable lamps were giving a feeble illumination; and there was a stir and a hum of voices. Another station, evidently. "What is it?" she asked somebody passing her.

"Tanfield."

Tanfield! and this darkness still. "What o'clock is it, please?" she asked the conductor, who just then appeared.

"Three o'clock in the morning. You stop here, don't you?"

"Yes; but how can I get to the hotel?"

"It's just by; not a dozen steps off. Here, give me your bag--I'll see you there. We don't go on; change cars, for whoever wants to go further. You don't go further?"

"No."

"Then come on."

Half awake, and dazed, Rotha gratefully followed her companion; who piloted the way for her out of the train and through the station house and across a street, or road rather, for it was not paved. A hotel of some pretension faced them on the other side of the street. The kind conductor marched in like one at home, sent for the sleepy chambermaid, and consigned Rotha to her care.

"You would like a room and a bed, ma'am?"

"A room, yes, and water to wash the dust off, but I do not want a bed.
How early can you give me breakfast?"

"Breakfast? there's always breakfast full early, ma'am, for the train that goes out at half past six. You'll get breakfast then. Going by the half past six train, ma'am?"

"No. I shall want some sort of a carriage by and by, to drive me out to Mrs. Busby's place; do you know where that is?
And can I get a carriage here?"

"You can get carriages enough. I don't know about no places. Then you'll take breakfast at six, ma'am? You'll be called."

With which she shewed Rotha into a bare little hotel room, lit a lamp, and left her.

Rotha refreshed herself with cold water and put her hair in order. It must be half past three then. She went to the window, pulled up the shade and opened the sash and sat down. At half past three in the morning, when the season is no further advanced than May, the world is still nearly dark. Yet two cocks were answering each other from different roosts in the neighbourhood, and announcing that morning was on its way. The sky gave little token yet, however; and the stars sparkled silently out of its dark depths. The rush and the roar of the train, and of life itself, seemed to be left behind; the air had the fresh sweetness which it never can have where human beings do greatly congregate; there was a spice in it which Rotha had not tasted for a long while. That sort of spice is enlivening and refreshing; there is a good tonic in it, which Rotha felt and enjoyed; at the same time it warned her she was in new circumstances. She had an uneasy suspicion, or intuition rather, that these new circumstances were not intended, so far as her aunt's intentions affected them, to be of transient duration. It was all very well to talk of July or the beginning of August; truth has a way of making itself known independent of words and even athwart them; and so it had been now; and while Mrs. Busby talked of the middle of summer, some subtle sense in Rotha's nature translated the words and made them signify an indefinite and distant future, almost as uncertain as indefinite. Rotha could not help feeling that it might be long before she saw New York or Mrs. Mowbray again; and anew the wondering thought arose, why Mrs. Mowbray should have been incapacitated for helping her precisely at this juncture? It was mysterious. It was evident that a higher rule than Mrs. Busby's was taking effect here; it was plain that not her aunt alone had willed to put her away from all she trusted and delighted in, and bring her to this strange place; where she would be utterly alone and uncared-for and shut off from all her beloved pursuits. But why?

It is the vainest of questions; yet one which in such circumstances mortals are terribly tempted to ask. If they could be told, *then*, the design of the movement would be lost upon their mental and spiritual education; and ten to one the ulterior developments would be hindered also which are meant to turn to their temporal advantage. It is in the nature of things, that the "why" should be hidden in darkness; without being omniscient we cannot see beforehand the turns that things will take; and so now is Faith's time to be quiet and trust and believe. And somehow faith is apt to find it hard work. Most of us know what it is to trust a human fellow creature absolutely, implicitly; with so full a trust that we are not afraid nor doubtful nor unwilling; but with one hand in the trusted one's hand are ready to go blindly anywhere, or to dare or to do gladly, counting with certainty that there is no hazard about it. So children can trust their father or their mother; so friends and lovers can trust one another. But it is very hard, somehow, to trust God so. Precisely such trust is what he wants of us; but--we do not know him well enough! "*They that know thy name will put their trust in thee.*" Yet it is rare, rare, to find a Christian who can use Faber's words--

"I know not what it is to doubt;
My mind is ever gay;
I run no risk, for come what will,
Thou always hast thy way."

Rotha at any rate had not got so far. Her mind was in a troubled state, as she sat at the window of the Tanfield hotel and stared out into the dewy dusk of the morning. It was indignant besides; and that is a very disturbing element in one's moods. She felt wronged, and she felt helpless. The sweet trust of the night seemed to have deserted her. A weary sense of loneliness and forlornness came instead, and at last found its safest expression in a good hearty fit of weeping. That washed off some of the dust from her tired spirit.

When she raised her head again and looked out, the dawn was really coming up in the sky. Things were changed. There was a sweeter breath in the air; there was an indefinable stir of life in all nature. The grey soft light was putting out the stars; the tops of the trees swayed gently in a morning breeze; scents came fresher from flowers and fields; scents so rarely spicy and fragrant as dwellers in towns never know them, as all towns of men's building banish them. Birds were twittering, cocks were crowing; and soon a stir of humanity began to make itself known in the neighbourhood; a soft, vague stir and movement telling of the awaking to life and business and a new day. Feet passed along the corridor within doors, and doors opened and shut, voices sounded here and there, horses neighed, dogs barked. Rotha sat still, looking, watching, listening, with a growing spring of life and hope in herself answering to the movement without her. And then the light broadened; dusky forms began to take colour; the eastern sky grew bright, and the sun rose.

Now Rotha could see about her. She was in a well-built village. Well-to-do looking house tops appeared between the leafy heads of trees that were much more than "well-to-do"; that were luxuriant, large, and old, and rich in their growth

and thriving. The road Rotha could not see from her window; however, what she did see shewed that the place was built according to the generous roomy fashion of New England villages; the houses standing well apart, with gardens and trees around and between them; and furthermore there was an inevitable character of respectability and comfort apparent everywhere. Great round elm heads rose upon her horizon; and the roof trees which they shadowed were evidently solid and substantial. This town, to be sure, was not Rotha's place of abode; yet she might fairly hope to find that, when she got to it, of the like character.

She sat at the window almost moveless, until she was called to her early breakfast. It was spread in a very large hall-like room, where small tables stood in long rows, allowing people to take their meals in a sort by themselves. Rotha placed herself at a distance from all the other persons who were breakfasting there, and was comfortably alone.

She never forgot that meal in all her life. She wanted it; that was one thing; she was faint and tired, with her night journey and her morning watch. The place was brilliantly clean; the service rendered by neat young women, who went back and forth to a room in the rear whence the eatables were issued. And very excellent they were, albeit not in the least reminding one of Delmonico's; if Delmonico had at that day existed to let anybody remember him. No doubt, it might have been difficult to guess where the coffee was grown; but it was well made and hot and served with good milk and cream; and Rotha was exhausted and hungry. The coffee was simply nectar. The corn bread was light and sweet and tender; the baked potatoes were perfect; the butter was good, and the ham, and the apple sauce, and the warm biscuit. There was a pleasant sensation of independence and being alone, as Rotha sat at her little table in the not very brightly lit room; and it seemed as if strength and courage came back to her heart along with the refitting of her physical nature. She was not in a hurry to finish her breakfast. The present moment was pleasant, and afforded a kind of lull; after it must come action, and action would plunge her into she could not tell what. The lull came to an end only too soon.

"Do you know where Mrs. Busby's place is?" she inquired of the girl that served her.

"Place? No, I don't. Is it in Tanfield?"

"It is near Tanfield."

"You are not going by the train, then?"

"No. I am going to this place. Can I get a carriage to take me there?"

"I'll ask Mr. Jackson."

Mr. Jackson came up accordingly, and Rotha repeated her question. He was a big, fat, comfortable looking man.

"Busby?" he said with his hand on his chin--"I don't seem to recollect no Busbys hereabouts. O, you mean the old Brett place?"

"Yes, I believe I do. Mrs. Busby owns it now."

"That's it. Mrs. Busby. She was the old gentleman's daughter. The family aint lived here this long spell."

"But there is somebody there? somebody in charge?"

"Likely. Somebody to look arter things. You're a goin' there?"

"If I can get a carriage to take me."

"When'll you want it?"

"Now. At once."

"There aint no difficulty about that, I guess. Baggage?"

"One small trunk."

"All right I'll have the horse put to right away."

So a little before eight o'clock Rotha found herself in a buggy, with her trunk behind her and a country boy beside her for a driver, on the way to her aunt's place.

Eight o'clock of a May morning is a pleasant time, especially when May is near June. All the world was fresh and green and dewy; the very spirit of life in the air, and the very joy of life too, for a multitude of birds were filling it with their gleeful melody. How they sang! and how utterly perfumed was every breath that Rotha drew. She sniffed the air and tasted it, and breathed in full long breaths of it, and could not get enough. Breathing such air, one might put up with a good deal of disagreeableness in other things. The country immediately around Tanfield she found was flat; in the distance a chain of low hills shut in the horizon, blue and fair in the morning light; but near at hand the ground was very level. Fields of springing grain; meadows of lush pasture; orchards of apple trees just out of flower; a farmhouse now and then, with its comfortable barns and outhouses and cattle in the farmyard. Every here and there one or two great American elms, lifting their great umbrella-like canopies over a goodly extent of turf. Barns and houses, fences and gateways, all in order; nothing tumble-down or neglected to be seen anywhere; an universal look of thrift and business and comfort. The drive was inexpressibly sweet to Rotha, with her Medwayville memories all stirred and quickened, and the contrast of her later city life for so many years. She half forgot what lay behind her and what might be before; and with her healthy young spirit lived heartily in the present. The drive however was not very long.

At the end of two miles the driver stopped and got down before a white gate enclosed in thick shrubbery. Nothing was to be seen but the gate and the green leafage of trees and shrubs on each side of it. The boy opened the gate, led his horse in, shut the gate behind him, then jumped up to his seat and drove on rapidly. The road curved in a semi-circle from that gate to another at some distance further along the road; and midway, at the point most distant from the road, stood a stately house. The approach was bordered with beds of flowers and shrubbery; a thick hedge of trees and shrubs ran along the fence that bordered the road and hid it from the house, sheltering the house also from the view of passers-by; and tall trees, some of them firs, increased the bowery and bosky effect. The house was well shut in. And the flower borders were neglected, and the road not trimmed; so that the impression was somewhat desolate. All windows and blinds and doors moreover were close and fastened; the look of life was entirely wanting.

"Is there anybody here?" said Rotha, a little faint at heart.

"I'll find out if there aint," said her boy companion, preparing to spring out of the wagon.

"O give me the reins!" cried Rotha. "I'll hold them while you are gone."

"You can hold 'em if you like, but he won't do nothin'," returned Jehu. And dashing round the corner of the house, he left Rotha to her meditations. All was still, only the birds were full of songs and pouring them out on all sides; from every tree and bush came a warble or a twitter or a whistle of ecstasy. The gleeful tones half stole into Rotha's heart; yet on the whole her spirit thermometer was sinking. The place had the neglected air of a place where nobody lives, and that has always a depressing effect. Her charioteer's absence was prolonged, too; which of itself was not cheering. At last he came dashing round the corner again.

"Guess it's all right," he said. "But you'll have to git down, fur's I see; I can't git you no nearer, and she won't come to the front door. They don't never open it, ye see. So they says."

Rotha descended, and bag in hand followed the boy, who piloted her round the corner of the house and along a weedy walk overhung with lilacs and syringas and overgrown rosebushes, until they were near another corner. The house seemed to be square on the ground.

"There!" said he,--"you go jist roun' there, and you'll see the kitchen door--leastways the shed; and so you'll git in. Mrs. Purcell is there."

"Who is Mrs. Purcell?" said Rotha stopping.

"I d'n' know; she's the woman what stops here; her and Joe Purcell. She's Joe Purcell's wife. I'll git your trunk out, but you must send some un roun' to fetch it, you see."

Rotha turned the second corner, while the boy went back; and a few steps more brought her round to the back of the house, where there was a broad space neatly paved with small cobble stones. An out-jutting portion of the building faced her here, and a door in the same. This must be the "shed," though it had not really that character. Rotha went in. It seemed to be a small outer kitchen. At the house side an open ladder of steps led up to another door. Going up, Rotha came into the kitchen proper. A fire was burning in the wide chimney, and an old-fashioned dresser opposite held dishes and tins. Between dresser and fire stood a woman, regarding Rotha as she came in with a consideration which was more curious than gracious. Rotha on her part looked eagerly at her. She was a tall woman, very well formed; not very neatly dressed, for her sleeves were worn at the elbows, and a strip torn from her skirt and not torn off, dangled on the floor. The dress was of some dark stuff, too old to be of any particular colour. But what struck Rotha

immediately was, that the woman was not a white woman. Very light she was, undoubtedly, and of a clear good colour, but she had not the fair tint of the white races. Red shewed in her cheeks, through the pale olive of them; and her hair, black and crinkly, was not crisp but long, and smoothly combed over her temples. She was a very handsome woman; a fact which Rotha did not perceive at first, owing to a dark scowl which drew her eyebrows together, and under which her eyes looked forth fiery and ominous. They fixed the new-comer with a steady stare of what seemed displeasure.

"Good morning!" said Rotha. "Are you Mrs. Purcell?"

"Who wants Mrs. Purcell?" was the gruff answer.

"I was told that Mrs. Purcell is the name of the person who lives here?"

"There's two folks lives here."

"Yes," said Rotha, "I understood so. You and your husband work for Mrs. Busby, do you not?"

"No," said the woman decidedly. "Us don't work for nobody. Us works for our own selves;"--with an accent on the word "own."

"This is Mrs. Busby's house?"

"Yes, this is her house, I reckon."

"And she pays you for taking care of it."

"Who told you she does?"

"Nobody told me; but I supposed it, of course."

"She don't pay nothin'. Us pays her; that's how it is. Us pays her, for all us has; the land and the house and all."

"I am Mrs. Busby's niece. Did she send you any word about me?"

"Sent Joseph word--" said the woman muttering. "He said as some one was comin'. I suppose it's you. I mean, Mr. Purcell."

"Then you expected me. Did Mrs. Busby tell you what you were to do with me?"

"I didn't read the letter," said the woman, turning now from her examination of Rotha to take up her work, which had been washing up her breakfast dishes. "Joseph didn't tell me nothin'."

"I suppose you know where to put me," said Rotha, getting a little out of patience. "I shall want a room. Where is it to be?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Purcell, whose fingers were flying among her pots and dishes in a way that shewed laziness was no part of her character. "There aint no room but at the top o' the house. Joseph and me has the only room that's down stairs. I s'pose you wouldn't like one o' the parlours. The rest is all at the top."

"Can I go to the parlour in the mean time, till my room is ready?--if it is not ready."

"It aint ready. I never heerd you was comin', till last night. How was I to have the room ready? and I don't know which room it's to be."

"Then can I go to the parlour? where is it?"

"It's all the next floor. There's nothin' but parlours. You can go there if you like; but they aint been opened in a year. I never was in 'em but once or twice since I lived here."

Rotha was in despair. She set her bag on one chair and placed herself on another, and waited. This was far worse even than her fears. O if she had but a little money, to buy this woman's civility! perhaps it could be bought. But she was thrown from one dependence to another; and now she was come to depend on this common person. She did not know what more to say; she could not do anything to propitiate her. She waited.

"Have you had any breakfast?" said Mrs. Purcell, after some ten minutes had passed with no sound but that of her cups and plates taken up and set down. This went on briskly; Mrs. Purcell seemed to be an energetic worker.

"Yes, thank you. I took breakfast at the hotel in Tanfield."

"I didn't know but I had to cook breakfast all over again."

"I will not give you any more trouble than I can help--if you will only give me a room by and by."

"There's nothin' fur I to *give*--you can pick and choose in the whole house. Us has only these rooms down here; there's the whole big barn of a house overhead. Folks meant it to be a grand house, I s'pose; it's big enough; but I don't want no more of it than I can take care of."

"You can take care of my room, I suppose?" said Rotha.

The woman gave a kind of grunt, which was neither assent nor denial, but rather expressed her estimation of the proposal. She went on silently and rapidly with her kitchen work; putting up her dishes, brushing the floor, making up the fire, putting on a pot or two. Rotha watched and waited in silence also, trying to be patient. Finally Mrs. Purcell took down a key, and addressing herself to Rotha, said,

"Now I'm ready. If you like to come, you can see what there is."

She unlocked a door and led the way up a low flight of steps. At the top of them another door let them out upon a wide hall. The hall ran from one side of the house to the other. With doors thrown open to let in the air and light this might have been a very pleasant place; now however it was dark and dank and chilly, with that dismal closeness and rawness of atmosphere which is always found in a house long shut up. Doors on the one hand and on the other hand opened into it, and at the end where the two women had entered it, ran up a wide easy staircase.

"Will you go higher?" said Mrs. Purcell; "or will you have a room here?"

Rotha opened one of the doors. Light coming scantily in through chinks in the shutters revealed dimly a very large, very lofty apartment, furnished as a drawing-room. She opened another door; it gave a repetition of the same thing, only the colour of the hangings and upholsteries seemed to be different. A third, and a fourth; they were all alike; large, stately rooms, fit to hold a great deal of company, or to accommodate an exceedingly numerous family with sitting and dining and receiving rooms. The four saloons took up the entire floor.

"There is no bedroom here," said Rotha.

"The folks that lived here didn't make no 'count o' sleepin', I guess. They put all the house into their parlours. I suppose the days was longer than the nights, when they was alive."

"But there must be bedrooms somewhere?"

"You can go up and see. *Us* wouldn't sleep up there for nothin'. Us could ha' took what we liked when us come; but I said to Mr. Purcell,--I said,--I wasn't goin' to break my back runnin' up and down stairs; and if he wanted to live up there, he had got to live without I. So us fixed up a little room down near the kitchen. These rooms is awful hot in summer, too. I can dry fruit in 'em as good as in an oven."

They had reached the top story of the house by this time, after climbing a long flight of stairs. Here there were a greater number of rooms, and indeed furnished as bedrooms; but they were low, and immediately under the roof. The air was less dank than in the first story, but excessively close.

"Is this all the choice I have?" Rotha asked.

"Unless us was to give you our room."

"But nobody else sleeps in all this part of the house!"

"No," said Mrs. Purcell, with an action that answered to a Frenchman's shrug of the shoulders; "you can have 'em all, and sleep in 'em all, one after the other, if you like. There's nobody to object."

"But suppose I wanted something in the night?" said Rotha, who did not in the least relish this liberty.

"You'd have to holler pretty loud, if you wanted I to do anything for you. I guess you'll have to learn to wait on yourself."

"O it isn't that," said Rotha; "I can wait on myself; but if I wanted-- something I couldn't do for myself--if I was frightened--"

"What's to frighten you?"

"I do not know--"

"If you got frightened, all you'd have to do would be to take your little feet in your hand and run down to we; that's all you could do."

Rotha looked somewhat dismayed.

"I could ha' told you, it wasn't a very pleasant place you was a comin' to," Mrs. Purcell went on. "Sick o' your bargain, aint ye?"

"What bargain?"

"I don' know! Which o' these here rooms will you take? You've seen the whole now."

Rotha was very unwilling to make choice at all up there. Yet a thought of one of those great echoing drawing rooms was dismissed as soon as it came. At last she fixed upon a room near the head of the stairs; a corner room, with outlook in two directions; flung open the windows to let the air and the light come, in; and locked up her bag in a closet.

"There aint nobody to meddle with your things," observed Mrs. Purcell, noticing this action,--"without it's me; and I've got enough to do down stairs. There's nothin' worse than rats in the house."

"Have you some sheets and towels for me?" said Rotha. "And can you give me some water by and by?"

"I've got no sheets and towels but them as us uses," replied Mrs. Purcell. "Mrs Busby haint said nothin' about no sheets and towels. Those us has belongs to we. They aint like what rich folks has."

"I have brought none with me, of course. Mrs. Busby will pay you for the use of them, I have no doubt."

"Mrs. Busby don't pay for nothin'," said the woman.

"Will you bring me some water?"

"I'll give you a pail, and you can fetch some for your own self. I can't go up and down them stairs. It gives me a pain in my back. I'll let you have some o' us's sheets, if you like."

"If you please," said Rotha.

"But I can't come up with 'em. I'd break in two if I went up and down there a few times. I'll let you have 'em whenever you like to come after 'em."

And therewith Mrs. Purcell vanished, and her feet could be heard descending the long stair. I think in all her life Rotha had never felt much more desolate than she felt just then. She let herself drop on a chair and buried her face in her hands. Things were worse, a hundred fold, than ever she could have imagined them. She was of rather a nervous temperament; and the idea of being lodged up there at the top of that great, empty, echoing house, with nobody within call, and neither help nor sympathy to be had if she wanted either, absolutely appalled her. True, no danger was to be apprehended; not real danger; but that consideration did not quiet fancy nor banish fear; and if fear possessed her, what sort of consolation was it that there was no cause? The fear was there, all the same; and Rotha thought of the yet distant shades of night with absolute terror. After giving way to this feeling for a little while, she began to fight against it. She raised her head from her hands, and went and sat down by the open window. Soft, sweet, balmy air was coming in gently, changing the inner condition of the room by degrees; Rotha put her head half out, to get it unmixed. It was May, May in the country; and the air was bringing May tokens with it, of unseen sweetness. There were lilies of the valley blooming somewhere, and daffodils; and there was the smell of box, and spice from the fir trees, and fragrance from the young leaf of oaks and maples and birches and beeches. There was a wild scent from not distant woods, given out from mosses and wild flowers and turf, and the freshness of the upturned soil from ploughed fields. It was May,

and May whispering that June was near. The whisper was so unspeakably sweet that it stole into Rotha's heart and breathed upon its disturbance, almost breathing it away. For June means life and love and happiness.

"Everything is happy now;
Everything is upward striving;
'Tis as easy now for the heart to be true,
As for grass to be green or skies to be blue;
'Tis the natural way of living!"

June was coming, and May was here; more placid and more pensive, but hardly less fair; that is, in her good moods; and Rotha insensibly grew comforted. *This* delight would remain, whatever she had or had not within the house; there was all out of doors, and the Spring! and Rotha's heart made a great bound to meet it. She could live out of doors a great deal; and in the house--well, she would make the best of things.

She drew in her head to take a survey. Yes, it was a snug room enough, once in nice order; and the first thing to do, she decided, was to put it in nice order. She must do it herself. O for one of those calicos, lying at present cut and basted in her trunk. She must make them up as fast as possible. With the feeling of a good deal of business on hand, Rotha's spirits rose. She went down to the kitchen again, and begged the loan of a big apron. Mrs. Purcell silently gave it. Then Rotha desired brushes and a broom and dusters, and soap and water and towels. One after another Mrs. Purcell placed these articles, such as she had, at her disposal.

"My trunk is in the road by the front steps," she remarked. "Can you get it taken up for me?"

"A trunk?" said Mrs. Purcell, knitting her brows again into the scowl which had greeted Rotha at the first. A very black scowl the latter thought it.

"Yes, my trunk. It's a little one. Not much for anybody to carry."

"Whatever did you want of a trunk?"

"Why, to hold my things," said Rotha quietly.

"Are you goin' to stay all summer?"

"I hope not; but I do not know how long. My aunt is going on a journey; I must stay till she comes back."

"Why didn't she let you go along?"

"I suppose it was not convenient."

A grunt from Mrs. Purcell. "Rich folks only thinks what's convenient for their own selves!"

"But she will pay you for your trouble."

"She'll pay Mr. Purcell, if she pays anybody. It don't come into *my* pocket, and the trouble don't go into his'n."

"I shall not be much trouble."

"Where is you goin' to eat? You won't want to eat along o' we?"

No, certainly, that was what Rotha did not want. She made no reply.

"Mis' Busby had ought to send folks to take care o' her company, when she sends company. *I* haint got no time. And us hasn't got no place. There's no place but us's kitchen--will you like to eat here? I can't go and tote things up to one o' them big parlours."

"Do the best you can for me," said Rotha. "I will try and be content." And staying no further parley, which she felt just then unable to bear, she gathered together her brushes and dusters and climbed up the long stairs again. But it was sweet when she got to her room under the roof. The May air had filled the room by this time; the May sunshine was streaming in; the scents and sounds of the spring were all around; and they brought with them inevitably a little bit of hope and cheer into Rotha's heart. Without stopping to let herself think, she set about putting the place in order; brushed and dusted everything; washed up the furniture of the washstand; made up the bed, and hung towels on the

rack. Then she drew an old easy chair to a convenient place by one of the windows; put a small table before it; got out and arranged in order her writing materials, her Bible and Scripture Treasury; put her bonnet and wrappings away in a closet; and at last sat down to consider the situation.

She had got a corner of comfort up there, private to herself. The room was large and bright; one window looked out into the top of a great tulip tree, the other commanded a bit of meadow near the house, and through the branches and over the summits of firs and larches near at hand and apple trees further off, looked along a distant stretch of level country. No extended view, and nothing remarkable; but sweet, peaceful nature, green turf, and leafy tree growths; with the smell of fresh vegetation and the spiciness of the resinous evergreens, and the delicious song and chirp and warble of insects and birds. It all breathed a breath of content into Rotha's heart. But then, she was up here alone at the top of the house; there was all that wilderness of empty rooms between her and the rest of the social world; and at the end of it, what? Mrs. Purcell and her kitchen; and doubtless, Mr. Purcell. And what was Rotha to do, in the midst of such surroundings? The girl grew almost desperate by the time she had followed this train of thought a little way. It seemed to her that her pleasant room was a prison and Mr. and Mrs. Purcell her jailers; and her term of confinement one of unknown duration. If she had only a little money, then she would not be so utterly helpless and dependent; even money to buy Mrs. Purcell's civility and good-will; or if she had a little more than that, she might get away. Without any money, she was simply a prisoner, and at the mercy of her jailers. O what had become of her friends! Where was Mr. Southwode, and how could he have forgotten her? and how was it that Mrs. Mowbray had been taken from her just now, just at this point when she was needed so dreadfully? Rotha could have made all right with a few minutes' talk to Mrs. Mowbray; to write and state her grievances, she justly felt, was a different thing, not so easy nor so manifestly proper. She did not like to do what would be in effect asking Mrs. Mowbray to send for her and keep her during her aunt's absence. No, it was impossible to do that. Rotha could not better bear anything. But then,--here she was with no help!

It all ended in some bitter weeping. Rotha was too young yet not to find tears a relief. She cried herself tired; and then found she was very much in need of sleep. She gave herself up to it, and to forgetfulness.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PURCELLS.

Rotha's sleep had not lasted two hours when it was interrupted. There came a pounding at her door. She jumped up and unlocked it.

"Joseph said, he guessed you'd want some dinner. I told him, I didn't know as you'd care for the victuals us has; but it's ready, if you like to come and try."

The extreme rudeness of the woman acted by way of a counter irritant on Rotha, and gave her self-command and composure. She answered civilly; waited to put her hair and dress in order, wisely resolving to lose no means of influence and self-assertion that were within her reach; and went down.

A small table was set in the kitchen, coarsely but neatly, as Rotha saw at a glance. It was set for three; and the third at the table was the hitherto unseen Mr. Purcell. He was a white man; not so good-looking as his wife, but with a certain aspect of sense and shrewdness that was at least not unkindly. He nodded, did not trouble himself to rise as Rotha came in; indeed he was busily occupied in supplying himself with such strength and refreshment as viands can give; and to judge by his manner he needed a great deal of such strength and was in a hurry to get it. He nodded, and indicated with a second nod the place at table which Rotha was expected to take.

"It's an unexpected pleasure," he said. "Prissy and me doesn't often have company. Hope you left Mis' Busby well?"

Rotha had an instant's hesitation, whether she should accept the place in the household thus offered her, or claim a different one. It was an instant only; her sense and her sense of self-respect equally counselled her not to try for what she could not accomplish; and she quietly took the indicated seat, and answered that Mrs. Busby was well.

"Now, what'll you eat?" Mr. Purcell went on. "We're plain folks--plainer 'n you're accustomed to, I guess; and we eat what we've got; sometimes it's one thing and sometimes it's another. Prissy, she gen'lly fixes it up somehow so's it'll do, for me, anyhow; but I don't know how it'll be with you. Now to-day, you see, we've got pork and greens; it's sweet pork, for I fed it myself and I know all about it; and the greens is first-rate. I don't know what they be; Prissy picked 'em; but

now, will you try 'em? If you're hungry, they'll go pretty good."

"They's dandelions--" said Mrs. Purcell.

Pork and dandelions! Rotha was at first dumb with a sort of perplexed dismay; then she reflected, that to carry out her propitiating policy it would be best not to shew either scorn or disgust. She accepted some of the greens and the pork; found the potatoes good, and the bread of capital quality, and the butter sweet; and next made the discovery that Mr. Purcell had not overrated his wife's abilities in the cooking line; the dinner was really, of its kind, excellent. She eat bread and butter, then conscious that two pair of eyes were covertly watching her, nibbled at her greens and pork; found them very passable, and ended by making a good meal.

"You was never in these parts before?" Mr. Purcell asked meanwhile.

"No," said Rotha. "Never."

"Mis' Busby comin' along, some o' these days?"

"No, I think not. I have not heard anything about her coming here."

"Spect she likes grand doings. Does she live very fine, down to New York?"

"How do you mean?"

"All the folks does, in the City o' Pride," remarked Mrs. Purcell.

"Do Mis' Busby?" persisted her husband. "Be they all highflyers, to her house?"

"I do not know what you mean by 'highflyers.'"

"Folks that wears heels to their shoes," put in Mrs. Purcell. "They can't set foot to the ground, like common folks. And they puts their hair up in a bunch on the top."

"Anybody can do that," said Mr. Purcell, sticking his knife in the butter to detach a portion of it.

"Anybody can't, Joe! that's where you're out. It takes one o' them highflyers. And then they thinks, when their heels and their heads is all right, they've got up above the rest of we."

"You can put your hair any way you've a mind to," returned her husband.

"There can't none of 'em get ahead o' you there."

Both parties glanced at Rotha. Her long hair was twisted up in a loose knot on the top of her head; very becoming and very graceful; for without being in the least disorderly it was careless, and without being in the least complicated or artificial it was inimitable, by one not initiated. Husband and wife looked at her, looked at each other, and laughed.

"Mis' Busby writ me about you," said Joe, slightly changing the subject.

"She said, you was one o' her family."

"She is my aunt."

"She is! I didn't know Mis' Busby never had no brother, nor sister', nor nothin'!"

"She had a sister once."

"She aint livin' then. And you live with Mis' Busby?"

"Yes."

"Well, 'taint none o' my business, but Mis' Busby didn't say, and I didn't know what to think. She said you was comin', but she didn't say how long you was goin' to stay; and we'd like to know that, Prissy and me; 'cause o' course it makes a difference."

"In what?" said Rotha, growing desperate.

"Well, in our feelin's," said Mr. Purcell, inclining his head in a suave manner, indicating his good disposition. "You see, we don't know how to take care of you, 'thout we knowed if it was to be for a week, or a month, or that. Mis' Busby only said you was comin'; and she didn't say why nor whether."

"I do not know," said Rotha. "You must manage as well as you can without knowing; for I cannot tell you."

"Very good!" said Mr. Purcell, inclining his head blandly again; "then that's one point. You don't know yourself."

"No."

"That means she aint a goin' in a hurry," said Mrs. Purcell. "There's her trunk, Joe, that you've got to tote up stairs."

"I'll do that," said Joe rising; "if it aint bigger'n I be. Where is it at?"

"Settin' out in the road."

"And where's it goin'?"

"Up to her room. She'll shew you."

Rotha mounted the stairs again, preceding Joe and her trunk, and feeling more utterly desolate than it is easy to describe. Shut up here, at the top of this great empty house, and with these associates! Her heart almost failed her.

"Well, you've got it slicked up here, nice!" was Mr. Purcell's declaration when he had come in and deposited the little trunk on the floor, and could look around him. "You find it pretty comfortable up here, don't you."

"It's very far from the kitchen--" said Rotha with an inward shudder.

"Well--'tis; but I don't know as that's any objection. Young feet don't mind runnin' up and down; and when you are here, you've got it to yourself. Well, you can take care o' yourself up here; and down stairs Prissy will see that you don't starve. I expect that's how it'll be." And with again an affable nod of his capable head, Mr. Purcell departed. Rotha locked the door, and went to her window; nature being the only quarter from which she could hope for a look or a tone of sympathy. The day was well on its way now, and the May sun shining warm and bringing out the spicy odours of the larches and firs. A little stir of the soft air lightly moved the small branches and twigs and caressed Rotha's cheek. A sudden impulse seized her, to rush out and get rid of the house and its inmates for a while, and be alone with the loveliness of the outer world. She threw a shawl round her, put on her straw bonnet, locked her door, and ran down.

The front door of the main hall was fast, and no key in the lock; Rotha must go out as she had come in, through the kitchen. Mrs. Purcell was there, but made no remark, and Rotha went out and made her way first of all round to the front of the house. There she sat down upon the steps and looked about her.

An unkept gravel road swept round from the gate by which she had entered, up to her feet, and following a similar curve on the other side swept round to another gate, opening on the same high-road. The whole sweep took in a semicircle of ground, which lay in grass, planted with a few trees. To explore this gravel sweep was the first obvious move. So Rotha walked down to the gate by which she had come in that morning, and then back and down to the corresponding gate on the other side. All along the way from gate to gate, there ran wide flower beds on both sides; the back of the flower beds being planted thick with trees and shrubbery. Old fashioned flowering shrubs stood in close and bewildering confusion. Lilac bushes held forth brown bunches where the flowers had been. Syringas pushed sweet white blossoms between the branches of other shrubs that crowded them in. May roses were there, with their bright little red faces, modest but sweet; and Scotch roses, aromatic and wild-looking. There was a profusion of honeysuckle, getting ready to bloom; and laburnums hung out tresses of what would be soon "dropping gold." And Rotha stood still once before the snowy balls of a Guelder rose, so white and fresh and fair that they dazzled her. She went on, down to the gate furthest from Tanfield, and spent a little while there, looking up and down the road. A straight, well-kept country road it was, straight and empty. Not a house was in sight, and only farm fields on the other side of the bordering fences. Rotha would have gone out, and walked at least a rod or two, but that gate was locked. There was no traffic or intercourse in any direction but with Tanfield. The empty highway seemed very lonely and desolate to the gazer at the gate. How shut off from the world she was! shut off in one little corner where nobody would ever look for her. If Rotha had put any faith in her aunt's promises, of course she would not have minded a month's abode in this place; but she put no faith in her aunt, and had a sort of instinct that she had been sent here for no good reason, and would be allowed, or forced, to remain here for an indeterminate and possibly quite protracted length of time. The mere feeling of being imprisoned makes one long to break bounds; and so Rotha longed,

impatiently, passionately; but she saw no way. A little money would enable her to do it. Alas, she had no money. Her aunt had taken care of that. After paying for her breakfast and drive, she had only a very few shillings left; not even enough to make any impression upon the good will of her guardians, or jailers. Somehow they seemed a good deal more like that than like servants.

Rotha turned despairingly away from the gate and retraced her steps, examining the old flower beds more minutely. They were terribly neglected; choked with weeds, encroached upon by the bordering box, the soil hard and unstirred for many a day. Yet there were tokens of better times. Here there was a nest of lilies of the valley; there a mat of moss pink, so bright and fresh that Rotha again stood still to admire. Daffodils peeped out their yellow faces from tufts of encumbering weeds; and stooping down, Rotha found an abundance of polyanthus scattered about among the other things, and periwinkle running wild. Nothing was seen to advantage, but a great deal was there. If I stay here, thought Rotha, I will get hold of a hoe and rake, and put things to rights. The flowers would be good friends, any way.

Coming up towards the house again, Rotha saw a road which branched off at right angles from the sweep and went straight on, parallel to the side of the house but at a good distance from it. She turned into this road. Between it and the house was one mass of thick shrubbery, thick enough and high enough to hide each from the other. Following on, Rotha presently saw at a little distance on her right hand, the house being to the left, a black board fence with a little gate in it. The garden perhaps, she thought; but for the present she passed it. Further along, the shrubbery ceased; a few large trees giving pleasant shade and variety to the ground about the barns, which stood here in numbers. Stables, carriage house, barn, granary; there was a little settlement of outhouses. Rotha had a liking for this neighbourhood, dating from old Medwayville associations; her feet lingered; her eyes were gladly alive to notice every detail; her ears heard willingly even a distant grunting which told of the presence of the least amiable of farm-yard inhabitants, somewhere. Rotha opened a door here and there, but saw neither man nor beast. Wandering about, she found her way finally to a huge farmyard back of the barn. It was tramped with the feet of cattle, so cattle must be there at times. On one side of the farmyard she found the pig pen. It was so long since she had seen such a sight, that she stood still to watch the pigs; and while she stood there a voice almost at her elbow made her start.

"Them pigs is 'most good enough to belong to Mis' Busby, aint they?"

Mr. Purcell was coming at long strides over the barnyard, which Rotha had not ventured to cross; she had picked her way carefully along a very narrow strip of somewhat firm ground by the side of the fence. The man seemed disposed to be at least not unkindly, and Rotha could not afford to do without any of the little civility within her reach. So she answered rather according to her policy than her feeling, which latter would have bade her leave the spot immediately.

"I am no judge."

"Never see a litter o' piggies afore?"

"I suppose I have, sometime."

"Them's first-rate. Like to eat 'em?"

"Eat them!" cried Rotha. "Such young pigs?"

"Just prime now," said the man, looking at them lovingly over the fence, while grunting noses sniffing in his direction testified that the inmates of the pen knew him as well as he knew them. "Just prime; they's four, goin' on five, weeks old. Prissy's at me to give her one on 'em; and maybe I will, now you've come. I telled her it was expensive, to eat up a half a winter's stock for one dinner. I aint as extravagant as Prissy."

"How 'half a winter's stock?'" said Rotha, by way of saying something.

"Bless you, don't you see? Every one o' them fellers'd weigh two hundred by next Christmas; and that'd keep Prissy and me more'n half the winter. I s'pose you won't be here to help us eat it then?"

"Next Christmas! No," said Rotha. "I shall not be here so long as that."

"Summer's got to come first, hain't it? Well, you might be in a wuss place."

Slowly Mr. Purcell and Rotha left the pig pen and the barnyard and came out into the space between the various farm buildings.

"Where does that road lead to?" Rotha asked, pointing to one which ran on from the barns with a seemingly straight

track between fields.

"That? that don't lead no wheres."

"Where should I find myself, if I followed it out to the end?"

"You'd find yourself jammed up agin the hill. Don't you see them trees? that's a hill runnin' along there."

"Running right and left? It is not high. Just a hilly ridge. What is on it?"

"Nothin's on it, but a mean little pack o' savins Aint good for nothin'; not even worth cuttin' for firewood. What ever do you s'pose hills was made for? I mean, sich hills; that haint got nothin' onto 'em but rocks. What's the use of'em?"

"If it wasn't for hills, Mr. Purcell, your low lands would have no water; or only in a pond or a ditch here and there."

"What's the reason they wouldn't? There aint no water on the hills now."

"Springs?"

"There's springs every place. I could count you a half a dozen in less'n half a mile."

"Ay, but the springs come from the hills; and if it were not for the hills they would not be anywhere."

"O' course it's so, since you say it," said Mr. Purcell, scratching his head with a comic expression of eye;--"but I never see the world when there warn't no hills on it; and I reckon you didn't."

Rotha let the question drop.

"I s'pose you'd say, accordin' to that, the rocks made the soft soil?"

"They have made a good deal of it," said Rotha smiling.

"Whose hammer broke 'em up?"

"No hammer. But water, and weather; frost and wet and sunshine."

"Sunshine!" cried Mr. Purcell.

"They are always wearing away the rocks. They do it slowly, and yet faster than you think."

"But I'll tell you. You forget. The soil aint up there--it's down here."

"Yes, I know. I do not forget. Water brought it down."

Here Mr. Purcell went off into an enormous guffaw of laughter, amused to the last degree, and probably in doubt whether to think of his informant as befooled or befooling. He went off laughing; and Rotha returned slowly homeward. Half way towards the drive, she struck a walk which led obliquely through the tangled shrubbery to the kitchen door.

Her room, when she reached it, looked cheerful and pleasant enough. The open windows let in the air and the sunshine, and the top of the tulip tree was glittering in the warm light. At the same time the slantness of the rays shewed that the afternoon was on its way. Night was coming. And a spasm of dread seized Rotha at the thought of being up there, quite alone, away from anybody, and without guardianship or help in any occasion of need or alarm. Rotha was of a nervous and excitable temperament, a coward physically, unaccustomed to being alone or to taking care of herself. She looked forward now to the darkness with positive dread and dismay. O for her little corner room at Mrs. Mowbray's, where she was secure, and in the midst of friends! O for even her cheerless little room at her aunt's, where at least there were people below her to guard the house! Here, quite alone through the long, still nights, and nobody within even calling distance, how should she ever stand it! For a little while Rotha's wits were half paralyzed with terror. Reason then began slowly to assert herself, and the girl's natural force of character arose to struggle with the incubus of fear. She reminded herself that nothing was more unlikely than a night alarm; that the house was known to be empty of all that might tempt thieves, and that furthermore also it was in the highest degree unlikely that the neighbourhood of Tanfield harboured such characters. Probably she was safer from disturbance up here, than either at Mrs. Mowbray's or at Mrs. Busby's. But of what use was the absence of disturbance, when there was the presence of fear? Rotha reasoned in vain. She had a lively imagination; and this excellent property now played her some of the arch tricks of

which it is capable. Possible disturbances occurred to her; scenes of distress arose upon her vision, so sharp and clear that she shrank from them. Probable? No, they were not; but who should say they were not possible? Had not everything improbable happened in this world, as well as the things which were reasonably to be expected? And if only possible, if they were possible, where were comfort and security to be found? Without some degree of both, Rotha felt as if she must quit the place, set out and walk to the hotel at Tanfield; only she had no money to pay her charges with if she were there.

Distress, and be it that it was unreasonable, it was very real distress, drove her at last to the refuge we all are ready to seek when we can get no other. She took her Bible and sat down with it, to try to find something that would quiet her there. Opening it aimlessly at first; then with a recollection of certain words in it, she turned to the third psalm.

"I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah. I laid me down and slept; I awaked, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about."

David had more than fancied enemies to fear; he was stating an actual, not a problematical case; and yet he could say "*I will not be afraid*"! How was that ever possible? David was one of the Lord's people; true; but do not the Lord's people have disagreeable things happen to them? How can they, or how should they, "not be afraid"? Just to reach that blessed condition of fearlessness was Rotha's desire; the way she saw not. There was a certain comfort in the fact that other people had seen it and found it; but how should she? Rotha had none to ask beside her Bible, so she went to that Query, do the books and helps which keep us from applying to the Bible, act as benefits or hindrances?

Rotha would have been greatly at a loss, however, about carrying on her inquiry, if it had not been for her "Treasury of Scripture Knowledge."

Turning to it now as to a most precious friend, she took the words in the psalm she had been reading for her starting place. And the very first next words she was directed to were these:--

"I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety." Ps. iv. 8.

Rotha stopped and laid down her face in her hands. O if she could quietly say that! O what a life must it be, when any one can simply and constantly say that! "Lay me down and sleep"; give up the care of myself; feel secure. But in the midst of danger, how can one? Rotha thought she must be a poor, miserable fraction of a Christian, to be so far from the feeling of the psalm; and probably she was right. "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed," the Lord used to say to his disciples; so apparently in his view they had scarce any faith at all. And who of us is better? How many of us can remove mountains? Yet faith as big as a grain of mustard seed can do that. What must our faith be? Not quite a miserable sham, but a miserable fraction. Rotha felt self-reproved, convicted, longing; however she did not see how she was at once to become better. She lifted her eyes, wet with sorrowful drops, and went on. If there were help, the Bible must shew it. Her next passage was the following:--

"It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so he giveth his beloved sleep." --Ps. cxxvii. 2.

Studying this a good while, in the light of her fears and wants, Rotha came to a sense of the exquisite beauty of it; which wiser heads than hers, looking at the words merely in cool speculation, do fail to find. She saw that the toiling and moiling of men passes away from the Lord's beloved; that what those try for with so much pains and worry, these have without either; and in the absolute rest of faith can sleep while the Lord takes care. His people are quiet, while the world wear themselves out with anxiety and endeavour.

"His beloved." --I cannot have got to that, thought Rotha. I am not one of them. But I must be. That is what I want to be.

The next thing was a promise to the Israelites, as far back as Moses' time; that if they kept the ways of the Lord, among other blessings of peace should be this: that they should lie down and none should make them afraid; but Rotha thought that hardly applied, and went further. Then she came to the word in the third of Proverbs, also spoken to the man who should "keep wisdom":--

"When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid; yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet." --Prov. iii. 24.

It set Rotha pondering, this and the former passage. Is it because I am so far from God, then? because I follow and obey him so imperfectly? that I am so troubled with fear. Quite reasonable, if it is so. Naturally, the sheep that are nearest the shepherd, feel most of his care. What next? It gave her a stir, what came next: It was in the time of the early

church; James, the first martyr among the apostles, had been beheaded by Herod's order; and seeing that this was agreeable to the fanatical Jews, he had apprehended Peter also and put him in ward; waiting only till the feast of the Passover should be out of the way, before he brought him forth to execution. And it was the night preceding the day which should be the day of execution; "and the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains." Chained to a Roman soldier on one side of him, and to another on the other side of him, on no soft bed, and expecting a speedy summons to death, *Peter was sleeping*. All sorts of characters do sleep, it is said, the night before the day when they know they are to be put to death; in weariness, in despair, in stolid indifference, in stoical calmness, in proud defiance. But Rotha knew it was upon no such slumbers that the "light shined in the prison," and to no such sleeper that the angel of the Lord came, or ever does come. That was the sleep of meekness and trust.

The list of passages given by the "Treasury" on that clause of the third psalm here came to an end. Rotha had not enough, however; she took up the words in the 6th verse--"I will not be afraid," etc. And then she came to the burst of confident triumph in the 27th psalm. And then,

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."--Ps. xlvi. 1, 2.

Here was a new feature. Trouble might come, yea, disaster; and yet the children of God would not fear. How that? Such absolute love, such perfect trust, such utter devotion to the pleasure of their Father, that what was his will became their will, and they knew no evil could really touch them? It must be so. O but this is a step further in the divine life. Or does this devotion lie also at the bottom of all those declarations of content and peace she had been reading? Rotha believed it must, after she had studied the question a little. O but what union with God is here; what nearness to him; what consequent lofty and sweet elevation beyond the reach of earthly trouble. Rotha got no further. She saw, in part at least, what she wanted; and falling on her knees there by the open window, she prayed that the peace and the life and the sweetness of the May might come into her heart, by the perfecting of love and faith and obedience there. She prayed for protection in her loneliness, and for the trust which saves from fear of evil. A great asking! but great need makes bold. She prayed, until it seemed as if she could pray no longer; and then she went back to her Bible again. But gradually there began to grow up a feeling in Rotha, that round the walls of her room there was an invisible rampart of defence which nothing evil could pass. And when one of her Bible references took her to the story of Elisha, shut up in a city enclosed by an army of enemies, but whose servant's eyes in answer to his prayer were opened to see "the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha"--her faith made a sort of spring. She too seemed to have a sight of the invisible forces, mostly undreamed of because unseen, which keep guard around the Lord's people; and she bowed her head in a sort of exulting gladness. Why this was even better than to need no defence, to know that such defence was at hand. Without danger there could be no need of guard; and is not such unseen ministry a glorious companionship? and is it not sweeter to know oneself safe in the Lord's hand, than to be safe, if that could be, anywhere else?

I have learned one thing, said Rotha to herself, as she rose to make some final arrangements for the evening. I wonder if I came here partly to learn this? But what can I have been brought here for, indeed? There is some reason. There is the promise that everything shall work for good to them that love God; so according to that, my coming here must work good for me. But how possibly? What am I to do, or to learn, here? It must be one thing or the other. My learning in general seems to be stopped, except Bible learning. Well, I will carry that on. I shall have time enough. What else in all the world can I do?

Her unfinished calico dresses occurred to her. There was work for some days at least. Perhaps by that time she would know more. For the present, with a glad step and a lightened heart she went about her room, arranging certain things in what she thought the prettiest and most convenient way; got out some clothes, and even work; and then wished she had a book. Where was she to get books to read? and how could she live without them? This question was immediately so urgent that she could not wait to have it settled; she must go down without delay to Mrs. Purcell, and see if any information respecting it was to be had in that quarter.

CHAPTER XXV.

ROTHA'S REFUGE

The kitchen was all "redd up," as neat as wax; everything in its place; and at the table stood Mrs. Purcell with her sleeves rolled up to her elbows and her arms in a great pan, hard at work kneading bread. She looked clean too, although her dress was certainly dilapidated; perhaps that was economy, though a better economy would have mended

it. So Rotha thought. She did not at once start the business she had come upon; she stood by the table watching the bread-making operation. Mrs. Purcell eyed her askance. This woman had most remarkable eyes. Black they were, as sloes, and almond shaped; and they could look darker than black, and fiery at the same time; and they could look keen and sly and shrewd, and that is the way they looked out of their corners at Rotha now, with an element of suspicion. A little while without speech. She was kneading her dough vigorously; the large smooth mass rolling and turning under her strong wrists and fingers with quick and thorough handling.

"Isn't that rather hard work?" Rotha said.

"I think all work's hard," was the morose-sounding answer.

"Do you? But it would be harder not to do any."

"That's how folks looks at it. I'd rather eat bread than make it. There aint no fun in work. I'd like to sit down and have somebody work for me. That's what you've been doin' all your life, aint it?"

"Not quite," said Rotha gravely.

"Can you make bread?"

"No."

"Then I s'pose you think I'll make your bread for you while you are here?"

"I do not think about it," said Rotha with spirit. "I have nothing to do with it. My aunt sent me here. If you cannot keep me, or do not wish to keep me, that is your affair. I will go back again."

"What did you come for?"

"I told you; my aunt was leaving home."

"Joe says, there's fish in the brook that'll jump at a fly made o' muslin--but I aint that sort o' fish. I didn't engage to make no bread for Mis' Busby when I come here."

"Shall I write to my aunt, then, that it is not convenient for me to stay here."

"You can if you like, for it *aint* convenient; but it's no use; for Mr. Purcell don't care, and Mis' Busby don't care. I'll make all the bread you'll eat; I guess."

"What do Mrs. Busby and Mr. Purcell not care about?"

"They don't care whether I make bread all day, or not."

"I hope it will not be for long," said Rotha, "that I shall give you this trouble."

"I don't know how long it will be," said Mrs. Purcell, making out her loaves with quick dexterity and putting them in the pans which stood ready; "but I aint a fool. I can tell you one thing. Mis' Busby aint a fool neither; and when she pays anybody to go from New York here in the cars, it aint to pick her a bunch o' flowers and go back again."

Rotha was not a fool either, and was of the same opinion. This brought her back to her business.

"If I stay a while, I shall want to get at some books to read," she said.

"Are there any in the house?"

"Books?" said Mrs. Purcell. "I've never seen no books since I've been here."

"Where can I get some, then? Where are there any?"

"I don't know nothin' about books. I don't have no use for no books, my own self. I don't read none--'cept my 'little blue John.'"

"Your 'little blue John'? What is that?"

"I s'pose you have a big one."

"I do not know what you mean."

"I don't mean nothin'," said the woman impatiently. "There's my 'little blue John'--up on the mantel shelf; you can look at it if you want to."

Looking to the high shelf above the kitchen fireplace, Rotha saw a little book lying there. Taking it down, she was greatly astonished to find it a copy of the gospel of John, a little square copy, in limp covers, very much read. More surprised Rotha could hardly have been.

"Why, do you like this?" she involuntarily exclaimed.

"Sometimes I think I do,"--was Mrs. Purcell's ambiguous, or ironical, answer; as she carefully spread neat cloths over her pans of bread. Rotha wondered at the woman. She was handsome, she had a good figure and presence; but there was a curious mixture of defiance and recklessness in her expression and manner.

"I see you have read it a good deal."

"It's easy readin',"--was the short answer.

"Do you like the gospel of John so much better than all the rest of the Bible?"

"I don' know. The rest has too many words I can't make out."

"Well, I am very fond of the gospel of John too," said Rotha. "I think everybody is,--that loves Christ."

"Do you love him?" Mrs. Purcell asked quickly and with a keen look.

"Yes, indeed. Do you?"

Mrs. Purcell laughed a little laugh, which Rotha could not understand. "I aint one o' the good folks"--she said.

"But you might love him, still," said Rotha, drawn on to continue the conversation, she hardly knew why, for she certainly believed the woman's last assertion.

"The folks that love him are good folks, aint they?"

"They ought to be," said Rotha slowly.

"Well, that's what I think. There's folks that say they love him, and I can't see as they're no better for it. *I can't.*"

"Perhaps they are trying to be better."

"Do you think Mis' Busby is?"

The question came with such sharp quickness that Rotha was at a loss how to answer.

"She says she do. I aint one o' the good folks; and sometimes I tells Joe I'm glad I aint."

"But Mrs. Purcell, that is not the way to look at it. I have seen other people that said they loved Christ, and they lived as if they did. They were beautiful people!"

Rotha spoke with emphasis, and Mrs. Purcell gave her one of her sideway glances. "I never see no such folks," she returned cynically.

"I am very glad I have," said Rotha; "and I know religion is a blessed, beautiful truth. I have seen people that loved Jesus, and were a little bit like him in loving other people; they did not live for themselves; they were always taking care of somebody, or teaching or helping somebody; making people happy that had been miserable; and giving, everywhere they could, pleasure and comfort and goodness. I have seen such people."

"Where did they live?"

"In New York."

"Was they in Mis' Busby's house?"

"Not those I was speaking of."

"When I see folks like that, I'll be good too," was Mrs. Purcell's conclusion.

"But you love this little book?" said Rotha, recurring to the thumb-worn little volume in her hand.

"I didn't tell you I did."

"No, but I see you do. I should think, anybody that liked the gospel of John, would want to be like what it says."

"I didn't tell you I didn't."

"No," said Rotha, half laughing. "I am only guessing, and wishing, you see. Mrs. Purcell, will you take some water up to my room?"

The woman's brows darkened. "What for?" she asked.

"To wash with. The water I took up this afternoon was for putting my room in order,—basin and pitcher and washstand, and wiping off dust. I want water, you know, every day for myself."

"The water's down here—just out o' that door."

"But I cannot wash down here."

"I don't know nothin' about that, whether you can or whether you can't. That's where us washes. If you want to do it up stairs, there's nothin' to hinder you."

"Except that somebody must carry up the water."

"That's not *my* business," said the woman. "You can take that pail if you want to; but you must bring it down again. That's my pail for goin' to the pump."

Rotha hesitated. Must she come to this? And to doing *everything* for herself and for her own room? For if carrying up the water, then surely all other services beside. Providing water was one of the least. Was it come to this? She must know.

"Then you will not take care of my room for me, Mrs. Purcell?" she asked quietly.

"Mis' Busby didn't write nothin' about my takin' care o' rooms," said Mrs. Purcell; "without they was empty ones. I've got you to take care of; I can't take o' your room too. You're strong and well, aint you, like other folks?"

Rotha made no reply. She stood still, silent and indignant, both at the impertinence of the woman's speech and at the hardness of her aunt's unkindness. The shadow of the prospect before her fell upon her very gloomily and chill. Mrs. Purcell it was safest not to answer. Rotha turned, took up the pail and went to the pump.

And there she stood still. She set down her pail, but instead of pumping the water, she laid hold of the pump handle and leaned upon it. What ever was to become of her? Must she be degraded not only to menial companionship but to manual labour also? Once no doubt Rotha had been familiar with such service; but that was when she was a child; and the years that had passed since then and the atmosphere of Mrs. Mowbray's house had ripened in her a love of refinement that was almost fastidious. Not only of innate refinement, which she knew would not be affected, but of refinement in all outward things; her hands, her carriage, her walk, her dress. Must she live now to do things which would harden her hands, soil her dress, bend her straight figure, and make her light step heavy? For how long? If she had known it would be only for a month, Rotha would have laughed at it, and played with it; instead of any such comforting assurance, she had a foreboding that she was to be left in Tanfield for an indefinite length of time. She tried

to reason herself out of this, saying to herself that she had really no ground for it; in vain. The sure instinct, keener than reason in taking evidence, forbade her. She stood in a sort of apathy of dismay, looking into the surrounding shrubbery and noting things without heeding them; feeling the sweet, still spring air, the burst of fresh life and the opening of fresh promise in earth and sky; hearing the birds twitter, the cocks crowing, and noticing that there was little else to even characterize, much less break, the silent peace of nature. In the midst of all this what she felt was revulsion from her present surroundings and companionship; and it was at last more to get out of Mrs. Purcell's near neighbourhood than for any other reason that she filled her pail and carried it up stairs to her room. She was half glad now that it was so far away from the kitchen. If she could but take her meals up there! She filled her pitchers; but did not immediately go back with Mrs. Purcell's pail. She sat down at the window instead, and crossing her arms on the sill, sat looking out, questioning the May why she was there?

Oddly enough, it seemed as if the May answered her after a while. The beauty, the perfectness, the loveliness, the peace, held perhaps somewhat the same sort of argument with her as was addressed by the Lord himself, once upon a time, to his servant Job. Here there was no audible voice; yet I think it is still the same blessed Speaker that speaks through his works, and partly the same, or similar, things that he says. Could there be such order, such beauty, such plain adaptation, regularity and system, in one part of the works and government of God, and not in another. And after all it was He who had sent Rotha to this place and involved her in such conditions. Then surely for some reason. As the gentleness of the spring air is unto the breaking of winter's bands, and the rising of the sap is unto the swelling of the buds and by and by the bursting leaf, must it not be so surely a definite purpose with which she had been brought here? What purpose? Were there bands to be broken in her soul's life? were buds and leafage and flower to be developed in her character, for which this severe weather was but a safe and necessary precursor? It might be; it must be; for it is written that "all things work together for good to them that love God." Rotha grew quieter, the voice of the spring was so sweet and came so clear--"Child, trust, trust! Nothing can go wrong in God's management." She heard it and she felt it; but Rotha was after all a young disciple and her experience was small, and things looked unpromising. Some tears came; however she was comforted and did trust, and resolved that she would try to lose none of the profiting she might anyway gain.

And, as she had now so few books to be busy with, might she not be meant to find one such great source of profiting in her Bible?

She drew it to her and opened her little "Treasury." What ever could she do now without that? It gave her a key, with which she could go unlocking door after door of riches, which else she would be at a loss to get at. She opened it at the eighth chapter of Romans and looked at the 28th verse.

"We know, that all things work together for good to them that love God--"

But things that come through people's wickedness?

She went on to the first reference. It was in the same chapter. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

Well, nothing, and nobody. And if so, that love standing fast, surely it was guaranty enough that no harm should come. Tears began to run, another sort of tears, hot and full, from Rotha's eyes. Shall a child of God have that love, and know he has it, and worry because he has not somewhat else? But this was not exactly to the point. She would look further.

What now? "We glory in tribulation," said the apostle; and he went on to say why; because the outcome of it, the right outcome, was to have the heart filled with the love of God, and so, satisfied. How that should be, Rotha studied. It appeared that trouble drove men to God; and that the consequence of looking to him was the finding out how true and how gracious he is; so fixing desire upon him, which desire, when earnest enough and simple enough, should have all it wanted. And cannot people have all this without trouble? thought Rotha. But she remembered how little she had sought God when her head had been full of lessons and studies and books and all the joys of life at Mrs. Mowbray's. She had not forgotten him certainly, but her life did not need him to fill any void; she was busied with other things. A little sorrowfully she turned to the next reference. Ge. 1. 20. Joseph's comforting words to the brothers who had once tried to ruin him.

"As for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good,-"

Rotha's heart made a leap. Yes, she knew Joseph's story, and what untoward circumstances they had been which had borne such very sweet fruit. Could it be, that in her own case things might work even so? Her aunt's evil intention do her no harm, but be a means of advantage? "All things shall work for good"--then, one way or the other way, but perhaps both ways. Yet she was quite unable to imagine *how* good could possibly accrue to her from all this stoppage

of her studies, separation from her friends, seclusion from all the world at the top of an empty house, and banishment to the society of Joe Purcell and his wife. To be sure, things were as dark with Joseph when he was sold for a slave. Rotha's heart was a little lightened. The next passage brought the water to her eyes again. O how sweet it ran!

"Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."--De. viii. 3, 4.

"Suffered thee to hunger." Poor Rotha! the tears ran warm from her eyes, mingled but honest tears, in which the sense of *her* wilderness and *her* hunger was touched with genuine sorrow for her want of trust and her unwillingness to take up with the hidden manna. Yet she believed in it and prayed for it, and was very sure that when she once should come to live upon it, it would prove both sweet and satisfying. Ah, this was what she had guessed; there were changes to be wrought in herself, experiences to be attained, for the sake of which she had come to this place. Well! let the Lord dispose things as seemed to him best; she would not rebel. She would hope for the good coming. The next verse was one well known.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."--Ps. xlvi. 1.

Yes, Rotha knew that. She went on, to Jeremiah's prophecy concerning a part of the captive Jews carried away to Babylon. And truly she seemed to herself in almost as bad a case.

"Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to their land; and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart."--Jer. xxiv. 5-7.

Rotha bowed her head upon her book. I am content! she said in herself. Let the Lord do even this with me, and take the way that is best. Only let me come out so!--

But the next wonderful words made her cry again. They cut so deep, even while they promised to heal so wholly.

"And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them; I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God."--Zach. xiii. 9.

If Rotha's tears flowed, her heart did not give back from its decision. Yes, she repeated,--I would rather be the Lord's tried gold, even at such cost; at any cost. Must one go through the fire, before one can say and have a right to say, "The Lord is my God"? or does one never want to say it, thoroughly, until then? But to be the Lord's pure gold I cannot miss that. I wonder if Mrs. Mowbray has been through the fire? Oh I know she has. Mr. Southwode?--I think he must. I remember how very grave his face used to be sometimes.

Here Rotha's meditations were interrupted. She heard steps come clumping up the stairs, and there was a tap at her door.

"Prissy's got supper ready," said Mr. Purcell. "I've come up to call you."

With which utterance he turned about and went down the stairs again. Rotha gave a loving look at her Bible and "Treasury," locked her door, and followed him.

"It's quite a ways to the top o' the house," remarked Mr. Purcell. "It'd be wuss 'n a day's work to go up and down every meal."

"Nobody aint a goin' up and down every meal," said his wife. "I aint, I can tell you."

"How am I to know, then, when meals are ready?" Rotha asked.

"I don' know," said Mr. Purcell; and his wife added nothing. Rotha began to consider what was her best mode of action. *This* sort of experience, she felt, would be unendurable.

The table was set with coarse but clean cloth and crockery. I might say much the same of the viands. The bread however was very good, and even delicate. Besides bread and butter there was cold boiled pickled pork, cold potatoes, and a plate of raw onions cut up in vinegar. Mr. Purcell helped Rotha to the two first-named articles.

"Like inguns?"

"Onions? Yes, sometimes," said Rotha, "when they are cooked."

"These is rareries. First rate--best thing on table. Better 'n if they was cooked. Try 'em?"

"No, thank you."

"I knowed she wouldn't, Joe," said Mrs. Purcell, setting down Rotha's cup of tea. "What us likes wouldn't suit the likes o' her. She's from the City o' Pride. Us is country folks, and don't know nothin'."

"I've a kind o'tender pity for the folks as don't know inguns," said Mr. Purcell. "It's *them* what don't know nothin'."

"She don't want your pity, neither," returned his wife. "I'd keep it, if I was you. Or you may pity her for havin' to eat along with we; it's *that* as goes hard."

"You are making it harder than necessary," said Rotha calmly, though her colour rose. "Please to let me and my likings or dislikings alone. There is no need to discuss them."

After which speech there was a dead, ominous silence, which prevailed during a large part of the meal. This could not be borne, Rotha felt. She broke the silence as Mrs. Purcell gave her her second cup of tea.

"I have been thinking over what you said about calling me to meals. I think the best way will be, not to call me."

"How'll you get down then?" inquired Mrs. Purcell sharply.

"I will come when I am ready."

"But I don't keep no table a standin'. Taint a hotel. If you'll eat when us eats, you can, as Joe and Mis' Busby will have it so; but if you aint here when us sits down, there won't be no other time. I can't stand waitin' on nobody."

"I was going to say," pursued Rotha, "that you can set by a plate for me with whatever you have, and I'll take it cold--if it is cold."

"Where'll you take it?"

"Wherever I please. I do not know."

"There aint no place but the kitchen."

Rotha was silent, trying to keep temper and patience.

"And when I've got my room cleaned up," Mrs. Purcell went on with increasing heat, "I aint a goin' to have nobody walkin' in to make a muss again. This room's my place, and Mis' Busby nor nobody else hasn't got no right in it. I aint a goin' to be nobody's servant, neither; and if folks from the City o' Pride comes visitin' we, they's got to do as us does. I never asked 'em, nor Joe neither."

"Hush, hush, Prissy!" said her husband soothingly.

"I didn't--and you didn't," returned his wife.

"But Mis' Busby has the house, and it aint as if it warn't her'n; and the young woman won't make you no trouble she can help."

"She won't make me none she *can't* help," said Mrs. Purcell. "Us has to work, and I mean to work; but us has got work enough to do already, and I aint a goin' to take no more, for Mis' Busby nor nobody. You're just soft, Joe, and you let anybody talk you over. I aint."

"You've got a soft side to you, though," responded Joe, with a calm twinkle in his eye. "I'd have a rough time of it, if I hadn't found *that* out."

A laugh answered. The sudden change in the woman's lowering face astonished Rotha. Her brows unknit, the lines of irritation smoothed out, a genial, merry, amused expression went with her laugh over to her husband; and the talk flowed over into easier channels. Mr. Purcell even tried after his manner to be civil to the stranger; but Rotha's supper choked her; and as soon as she could she escaped from the table and the onions and went to her room again.

Evening was falling, but Rotha was not afraid any more. Her corner room under the roof seemed to her now one of the safest places in the world. Not undefended, nor unwatched, nor alone. She shut and locked her door, and felt that inside that door things were pleasant enough. Beyond it, however, the prospect had grown very sombre, and the girl was greatly disheartened. She sat down by the open window, and watched the light fade and the spring day finish its course. The air was balmier than ever, even warm; the lights were tender, the shadows soft; the hues in earth and sky delicate and varied and dainty exceedingly. And as the evening closed in and the shades grew deeper, there was but a change from one manner of loveliness to another; till the outlines of the tulip tree were dimly distinguishable, and the stars were blinking down upon her with that misty brightness which is all spring mists and vapours allow them. Yes, up here it was pleasant. But how in the world, Rotha questioned, was she to get along with the further conditions of her life here? And what would she become, she herself, in these coarse surroundings of companionship and labour? Either it will ruin me, or it will do me a great deal of good, thought she. If I do not lose all I have gained at Mrs. Mowbray's, and sink down into unrefined and hard ways of acting and feeling, it will be because I keep close to the Lord's hand and he makes me gentler and purer and humbler and sweeter by all these things. Can he? I suppose he can, and that he means to do it. I must take care I put no hindrance. I had better live in the study of the Bible.

Very, very sorrowful tears and drooping of heart accompanied these thoughts; for to Rotha's fancy she was an exile, for an indefinite time, from everything pleasant in the way of home or society. When at last she rose up and shut the window, meaning to strike a light and go on with her Bible study, she found that in the disagreeable excitement of the talk at supper she had forgotten to provide herself with lamp or candle. She could not go down in the dark through the empty house to fetch them now; and with a momentary shiver she reflected that she could not get them in the night if she wanted them. Then she remembered—"The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee." What matter, whether she had a lamp or not? The chariots of fire and horses of fire that made a guard round Elisha, were independent of all earthly help or illumination. Rotha grew quiet. As she could do nothing else, she undressed by the light of the stars and went to bed; and slept as sweetly as those who are watched by angels should, the long night through.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ROTHA'S WORK.

Spring had one of her variable humours, and the next day shewed a change. When Rotha awoke, the light was veiled and a soft rain was thickly falling. Shut up by the weather now! was the first thought. However, she got up, giving thanks for her sweet, guarded sleep, and made her toilet; then, seeing it depended on her alone to take care of her room, she put it carefully in order so far as was possible. It was early still, she was sure, though Rotha had no watch; neither voice nor stir was to be heard anywhere; and turning her back upon her stripped bed, the disorder of which annoyed her, she sat down to her Bible study. It is all I have got! thought she. I must make of it all I can.—May did not give her so much help this morning; the rain drops pattered thick and fast on leaf and window pane; the air was not cold, yet it was not genial either, and Rotha felt a chill creep over her. There was no way of having a fire up there, if she had wanted one. She opened her beloved books, to try and forget other things if she could. She would not go down stairs until it was certain that breakfast would be near ready.

Carrying on the line of study broken off yesterday, the first words to which she was directed were those in 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

"Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen—"

Poor Rotha at this immediately rebelled. Nothing in the words was pleasant to her. She was wont always to live in the present, not in the future; and she would be willing to have the glory yonder less great, so it were not conditioned by the trouble here. And with her young life pulses, warm and vigorous as they were, to look away from the seen to the unseen things seemed well nigh impossible and altogether undesirable. It was comfort that she wanted, and not

renunciation. She was missing her friends and her home and her pursuits; she was in barren exile, amid a social desert; a captive in bonds that though not of iron were still, to her, nearly as strong. She wanted deliverance and gladness; or at least, manna; not to look away from all and find her solace in a distant vision of better things.

I suppose it is because I have so little acquaintance with things unseen, thought Rotha in dismal candidness. And after getting thoroughly chilled in spirit, she turned her pages for something else. The next passages referred to concerned the blessedness of being with Christ, and the rest he gives after earth's turmoil is over. It was not over yet for Rotha, and she did not wish it to be over; life was sweet, even up here in her room under the roof. How soft was the rain-drop patter on the outer world! how beautiful the glitter of the rain-varnished leaves! how lovely the tints and hues in the shady depths of the great tulip tree! how cheery the bird song which was going on in spite of everything! Or perhaps the birds found no fault with the rain. I want to be like that, said Rotha to herself; not to be out of the storm, but to be able to sing through it. And that is what people are meant to do, I think.

The words in the twelfth of Hebrews were some help to her; verses 10 and 11 especially; confessing that for the time being, trouble was trouble, yet a bitter root out of which sweet fruit might grow; in "them which are exercised thereby."

"Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees."--

Courage, hope, energy, activity; forbidding to despond or to be idle; the words did her good. She lingered over them, praying for the good fruits to grow, and forming plans for her "lifted-up" hands to take hold of. And then the first verses of the first chapter of James fairly laid a plaster on the wounds of her heart. "Count it all joy." "The trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

Rotha almost smiled at the page which so seemed to smile at her; and took her lesson then and there. Patience. Quiet on-waiting on God. That was her part; the good issues and the good fruit he would take care of. Only patience! Yes, to be anything but patient would shew direct want of faith in him and want of trust in his promise. And then the words in 1 Peter i. 6, 7, gave the blessed outcome of faith that has stood the trial; and finally came the declaration--

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent."

Rotha fell on her knees and prayed earnestly for help to act in accordance with all these words. As she rose from her knees, the thought crossed her, that already she could see some of the good working of her troubles; they were driving her to God and his word; and whatever did that must be a blessing.

She ran down stairs, quite ready now for her breakfast. Entering the kitchen, she stood still in uncertainty. No table set, no cooking going on, the place in perfect order, and Mrs. Purcell picking over beans at the end of the table. The end of the table was filled with a great heap of the beans, and as she looked them over Mrs. Purcell swept them into a tin pan in her lap. She did not pause or look up. Rotha hesitated a moment.

"Good morning!" she said then. "Am I late?"

"I don' know what folks in the City o' Pride calls early. 'Thout knowing that, I couldn't say."

"But is breakfast over?"

"Joe and me, us has had our breakfast two hours ago."

"I did not know it was so late! I had no notion what o'clock it was."

"Joe said, he guessed you was sleepin' over. That's what he said."

"Well, have you kept any breakfast for me, Mrs. Purcell?"

"I didn't set by nothin' in particular. I didn't know as you'd be down 'fore dinner. You didn't say."

Rotha waited a minute, to let patience have a chance to get her footing; she seemed to be tottering. Then she said, and she said it quietly,

"Where can I get something to eat?"

"I don' know," said the woman indifferently.

"But I must have some breakfast," said Rotha.

"Must you? Well, I don' know how you'll get it. *My* hands is full."

"You must give it to me," said Rotha firmly. "I will take it cold, or any way you please; but I must have something."

Mrs. Purcell sat silent at her bean picking, and there was a look of defiance on her handsome face which nearly put Rotha's patience to a shameful rout. She hardly knew how to go on; and was extremely glad to see Mr. Purcell come in from the lower kitchen.

"Wet mornin'!" said Mr. Purcell, with a little jerk of his head which did duty for a salutation.

"Mr. Purcell," said Rotha, "I am glad you are come; there is a question to be decided here."

"No there aint; it's decided," put in Mr. Purcell's wife. The man looked as if he would like to be left out of the question; but with a resigned air he asked, "What is it?"

"Whether, while I am in this house, I can have my proper meals, and have them properly."

"You can have your meals, if you'll come to 'em," said Mrs. Purcell, picking her beans.

Rotha was too vexed to speak again, and looked to the man.

"Well--you see," he began conciliatingly, as much towards his wife as towards her, Rotha thought, "you see, Prissy has her work, and she has a lot of it; and she likes to do it reg'lar. It kind o' puts her out, you see, to be gettin' breakfast all along the mornin'. Now she's gettin' her dinner. She's like a spider;--let her alone, and put nothin' in her way, and she'll spin as pretty a web as you'll see; but if you tangle it up, it'll never get straight again."

Mrs. Purcell kept diligently picking her beans over and sweeping them into her pan.

"You do not meet the question yet," said Rotha haughtily.

"Well, you see, the best way would be for you to be along at meal times; when they's hot and ready on the table. Then one more wouldn't make so much difference."

"I have no way of knowing when the meals are ready. If Mrs. Purcell will set by some for me on a plate, and a cup of coffee, I will take it, not good nor hot."

"My victuals aint bad when they's cold," put in Mrs. Purcell here.

"Well, Prissy, can't you do that?" asked her husband.

"You can do it if you like," she said, getting up at last from the table, whence the great heap of beans had disappeared. "It ain't nothin' to me what you do."

Mr. Purcell demanded no more of a concession from his housekeeper, but went forthwith to one cupboard after another and fetched forth a plate and cup and saucer, knife and fork and spoon, and finally bread, a platter with cold fried pork on it, and some butter. He had not washed his hands before shewing this civility; and Rotha looked on in doubtful disgust.

"Where's the coffee, Prissy?"

"The last of it went down your throat. You never leaves a drop in the coffee pot, and wouldn't if there was a half a gallon. What's the use o' askin' me, when you know that?"

"Can I have a glass of milk?" said Rotha.

The milk was furnished, and she began to make a very good breakfast on bread and milk.

"Aint there a bit o' pie, Prissy?" asked Mr. Purcell.

"You've swallowed it. There aint no chance for nothin' when you're round."

Upon which Mr. Purcell laughed and went out, glad no doubt to have the matter of breakfast disposed of without any more trouble. But Rotha eat slowly and thoughtfully. Breakfast was disposed of, but not dinner. How was she to go on? She meditated, tried to gather patience, and at last spoke.

"It is best to arrange this thing," she said. "Meals come three times a day. If you will call me, Mrs. Purcell, I will come. If you will not do that, will you set by things for me?"

"Things settin' round draws the flies. We'd be so thick with flies, we couldn't see to eat."

"What way will you take, then?"

"I don' know!"

All the while she was actively and deftly busy; putting her beans in water, preparing her table, and now sifting flour. Rotha came and stood at one end of the table.

"I should not have thought," she said, "that anybody that loved the gospel of John, would treat me so."

A metallic laugh answered her, which she could not help thinking covered some feeling. The woman's words however were uncompromising.

"I didn't say I loved no gospel of John."

"No, not in words; but the little book tells of itself that somebody has loved it."

"I'll put it away, where it won't tell nothin'."

"My aunt pays you for my board," Rotha went on, "and she expects that you will make me comfortable."

"*What* does she pay for your board?" said Mrs. Purcell, lifting up her head and flashing her black eyes at Rotha.

"I do not know what. I did not read her letter. You must know."

"She don't pay nothin' for you!" said the woman scornfully. "That's Mis' Busby! *She's* a good Christian, and that's the way she does. She'll go to church, and say her prayers regular, and be a very holy woman; but she won't pay nobody nothin' if she can help it; and she thinks us'll do it, sooner 'n lose the place, and she can put you off on us for nothin'--don't ye see? So much savin' to her, and she can put the money in the collection. I don't believe in bein' no Christian! Us wouldn't do the like o' that, and us aint no Christians; and I like our kind better 'n her kind."

Rotha stood petrified.

"You must be mistaken," she said at length. "My aunt may not have mentioned it, but it is of course that she pays you for your time and trouble, as well as for what I cost you."

"You don't cost *her* nothin'," said Mrs. Purcell. "That's all she cares for. Us knows Mis' Busby. Maybe you don't."

The last words were scornful. Rotha hardly heeded them, the facts of the case had cut her so deep. "Can it be possible!" she exclaimed in a stupefied way. Mrs. Purcell glanced at her.

"You didn't know?"

"Certainly not. Nothing would have made me come, if I had. Nothing would have made me! But I am dependent on my aunt. I have no money of my own." Two bitter tears made their way into Rotha's eyes. "Of course you do not want to take trouble for me," she went on. "I cannot much blame you."

"Me and Joe has to live and get along, as 'tis; and it takes a sight o' work to take care o' Joe. 'Taint feedin' no chicken, to feed Joe Purcell; and Prissy Purcell has a good appetite her own self; and Joe, he won't eat no bread as soon as it's beginnin' to get dry; an' I has to bake bread all along the week. An' Joe, he's always gettin' into the bushes and tearin' his things, and he won't go with no holes in 'em; and nights I has to sit up and put patches. I put patches with my eyes shut, 'cause I's so sleepy I can't hold 'em open. An' he wears the greatest sight o' clothes of any man in Tanfield. He wears three shirts; there's his red flannel one, and one o' unbleached muslin--you know that is warm, next his skin; 'cause he won't have the flannel next his skin; and then there goes a white shirt over all; and the cuffs and the collar must be starched and stiff and shiny, or he aint satisfied. I tells him it aint no use; it won't stay so over five minutes; but

anyhow, he is satisfied."

"I shouldn't think it was wholesome to wear so many clothes," said Rotha.

"He thinks 'tis."

"You should coax him out of it."

"Prissy Purcell has tried that, and she won't try it no more. There aint no coaxin' Joe. If he wants to do a thing, he'll do it his own self; and if he don't want to do it, you can't move him."

Rotha paused a minute, to let the subject of Joe Puree 11 drop.

"Well, Mrs. Purcell," she said then, "I am very sorry I am on your hands. I do not know exactly what to do. I will write to my aunt, and tell her how I am situated, and how *you* are situated; but till her answer comes, how shall we do?"

"She won't send no answer!" said Mrs. Purcell, in a much modified manner however. "Us knows her, Joe and me. She's got what she wants, and she's satisfied. She don't care for my trouble, nor for your trouble. She's great on savin', Mis' Busby is. She don't never pay nothin' she hadn't need to."

"I am very sorry," said Rotha bitterly. "I will see if I can find some way of earning the money, Mrs. Purcell, so that I can pay you for the cost and trouble I put you to. But I must have time for that; and meanwhile, what will you do?"

"Us wouldn't think so much of it," Mrs. Purcell went on, "if she didn't set up for bein' somethin' o' extras. I don't make no count o' no such Christians. Mis' Busby wouldn't miss the Communion!--" And the speaker looked up at Rotha, as if to see what she thought on the subject.

"There are different sorts of Christians," said Rotha. "Meanwhile, how shall we arrange things, Mrs. Purcell?"

"Will all sorts of Christians get to heaven," was Mrs. Purcell's response, the query put with her sharp black eyes as well as with her lips.

"Why no! Of course not. Christians are not all alike; but it is only true Christians whom the Lord will call his own."

"How aint they alike? how is they different?"

"Real Christians? Well--some of them are ignorant, and some are wise. Some have had good teachings and good helpers, and some have had none; it makes a difference."

"I thought they was all one."

"So they are, in the main things. They all love Christ, and trust in his blood, and do his will. So far as they know it, at least. 'Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.' So Jesus said, when he was upon earth."

Mrs. Purcell stopped in what she was doing and looked up at Rotha. "That aint in my 'little blue John,'" she said.

"No, I think the words are in Matthew."

"And aint no other people Christians, but them as is like that?"

"You know what is written in the fourteenth chapter of John--'He that hath my commandments and *keepeth them*, he it is that loveth me.'"

"And aint there no other sort?" inquired Mrs. Purcell, still peering into Rotha's eyes.

"Of Christians? Certainly not. Not of real Christians. How could there be?"

"Then I don't believe there aint none."

"O yes, there are! Many, many. True believers and servants of the Lord

Jesus."

"Then Prissy Purcell never see one of'em," said the woman decidedly.

It shot through Rotha's mind, how careful she must be. This woman's whole faith in Christianity might depend on how she behaved herself. She stood soberly thinking, and then came back to the immediate matter in hand.

"I will pay you, Mrs. Purcell, for my cost and trouble, if ever I can," she said. "That is all I can say. I would go away, if I could. I do not want to be here."

"It's hard on you, that's a fact," said the woman. "Well, us won't make it no harder, Joe and me. We aint starvin'. Joe, he's money laid up; and us always has victuals to eat; victuals enough; and good, what they is, for Joe won't have nothin' else. I don't know if you can like 'em. But I can't go up all them stairs."

"I will take care of my own room. Cannot you call me when dinner is ready, in some way?"

"Joe can holler at you. He can go out and holler."

"I'll have my window open, and I shall hear. And some day, Mrs. Purcell,
I will pay you."

"All right," said the woman, whose face was completely cleared up and looked pleasanter than Rotha could ever have believed possible. "Prissy Purcell will get you a good dinner."

So the storm was laid; and Rotha went slowly up stairs, feeling devoutly thankful for that, but very, very sorrowful on her own account. Her, fancy was busy, all the while she was putting her room in order, with the possible future; feeling utterly doubtful of her aunt, in every possible respect, and very sad and depressed in view of her condition and in view of the extreme difficulty of mending it. Then flashed into her mind what she had been saying down stairs; and then, what she had been reading and thinking last night. To do her work, to trust the Lord, and *to be content*, were the duties that lay nearest to hand.

The duties were far easier to see than to fulfil; however, Rotha took hold of the easiest first, and prayed her way toward the others. She got out her sewing; obviously, Mrs. Busby knew what she was about when she provided those calico dresses. The stuff was strong and troublesome to sew; the needle went through hard. Rotha sewed on it all day; and indeed for many days more. She kept at her work diligently, as I said, praying her way toward perfect trust and quiet content. In her solitude she made her Bible her companion; one may easily have a worse; and setting it open at some word of command or promise, she refreshed herself with a look at it from time to time, and while her needle flew, turned over the words in her mind and wrought them into prayer. And indeed Rotha had loved her Bible before; but after two weeks of this way of life she loved it after a new fashion, such as she had never known. It became sweet inexpressibly, and living; so that she seemed to hear the words spoken to her from heaven. And those days of solitary work grew into some of the loveliest days Rotha had ever seen. She would take her "Treasury," choose some particular thought or promise to start with, and from that go through a series of passages, explaining, elucidating, illustrating, enjoining, conditioning, applying, the original word. The care of her room, and carrying water up and down, gave her some exercise; not enough; but Rotha would not indulge herself with out of door amusement till her mantua making was done.

She hoped for some temporary release from her prison when Sunday came. She was disappointed. May sent another pouring rain, and no going out was to be thought of.

"Where do you go to church? when the sun shines," asked Rotha, as she sat at the breakfast-table and looked at the rain driving past the window. Silence answered her at first.

"Where *do* you go, Joe?" repeated his wife, with a laugh. "Us is wicked folks, Miss Carpenter. Joe, he don't like to tell on hisself; but 'taint no worse to tell 'u not to tell. So Prissy Purcell thinks."

"Warn't the Sabbath made for rest?" Joe inquired now, with a gleam in his eyes.

"For rest from our own work," said Rotha wonderingly.

"Prissy and me, we haint no other; and it's a blessin' we haven't, for we get powerful tired at that. Aint that so, Prissy?"

"Don't you go to church anywhere?"

"Aint anywherees to go!" said Joe. "Aint no church nowheres, short o' Tanfield; and there's a difficulty. Suppos'n I tackled up the bosses and went to Tanfield; by the time we got there, and heerd a sermon, and come back, and untackled, and put the hosses up and cleaned myself again, my day o' rest 'ud be pretty much nowhere. An' I don' know which sermon I'd want to hear, o' the three, if I was there. I aint no Episcopal; and I never did hold with the Methody's; and 'tother man, I'd as lieve set up a dip candle and have it preach to me. Looks like it, too."

Rotha was in silent dismay. Tanfield was too far to go on foot and alone. Not even Sunday? I am afraid a good part of that Sunday was wasted in tears.

The next morning brought a fresh difficulty. It suddenly flashed upon Rotha that she must have some clothes washed.

That she should ask Mrs. Purcell to do it, was out of the question. That she should hire somebody else to do it, was equally out of the question. There remained--her own two hands.

Her hands. Must she put them into the wash tub? Must they be roughened and reddened by hard work in hot and cold water? I am afraid pride had something to say here, besides the fastidious delicacy of refinement to which for a long while Rotha bad been accustomed, and which exactly suited the nature that was born with the girl. She went through a hard struggle and a painful one, before she could take meekly what was put upon her. But it *was* put upon her; there was no other way; and there is no mistake and no oversight in God's dealings with his children. What he does not want them to do, he does not give them to do. It cost Rotha a good while of her time that morning, but at last she did see it, and then she accepted it. If God gave it to her to do, there could be no evil in the doing of it, and no hurt, and no disgrace. What she could do for God, was therewith lifted up out of the sphere of the low and common. Even the censers of Korah's wicked company were holy, because they had been used for the Lord; much more simple service from a believing heart. After a while Rotha's mind swung quite clear of all its embarrassments, and she saw her duty clear and took it up willingly. She went down at once then to the kitchen, where Mrs. Purcell was flying about with double activity. It certainly seemed that the rest of the Sunday had added wings to her heels.

"Do you wash this morning, Mrs. Purcell?"

"Yes. I aint one o' them as likes shovin' it off till the end o' the week. If I can't wash Monday, Prissy Purcell aint good to live with."

"When will be a convenient time for me to do my washing?"

"Ha' you things to wash?"

"Yes, I am sorry to say. You will lend me a tub, and a little soap, won't you?"

"I don' know whether I will or not. Suppos'n you've got the tub, do you know how to get your things clean? I don' believe you never done it."

"No, I have never done it. But I can learn."

"I guess it'd be more trouble to learn you, than to do the things. You fetch 'em here, and I'll do 'em my own self."

"But I cannot pay you a cent for it, Mrs. Purcell; not now, at least.
You'll have to take it on trust, if you do this for me."

"All right," said Prissy. "You go fetch the things, 'cause I'm bound to have my tubs out o' the way before dinner."

Rotha obeyed, wondering and thankful. The woman was entirely changed towards her; abrupt and unconventional, certainly, in manner and address, but nevertheless shewing real care and kindness; and shewing moreover what a very handsome woman she could be. Her smile was frank and sweet; her face when at rest very striking for its fine contour; and her figure was stately. Moreover, she was an uncommonly good cook; so that the viands, though plain, were made both wholesome and appetizing. In that respect Rotha did not suffer; the exclusive companionship of two such ignorant and unrefined persons was a grievance on the other hand which pressed harder every day.

She kept herself busy. When her dresses were done, she began to spend hours a day out of doors.

The sweet things in the flower borders which were choked and hindered by wild growth and weeds, moved her sympathy; she got a hoe and rake and fork from Mr. Purcell and set about a systematic clearing of the ground. It was a

spacious curve from one gate to the other; and all the way went the flower border at one side of the road, and all the way on the other side, except where the house came in. Rotha could do but a little piece a day; but the beauty and pleasantness of that lured her on to spend as much time in the work as she could match with the necessary strength. It was so pretty to see the flowers in good circumstances again! Here a sweet Scotch rose, its graceful growth covered with wild-looking, fair blossoms; here a bed of lily of the valley; close by a carpet of lovely moss pink, which when cleared of encumbering weedy growth that half hid it, fairly greeted Rotha like a smile whenever she went out. And periwinkle also ran in a carpet over the ground, green with purple stars; daffodils were passing away, but pleasant yet to see; and little tufts of polyanthus and here and there a red tulip shewed now in all their delicate beauty, scarcely seen before. Hypericum came out gloriously, when an intrusive and overgrown lilac bush was cut away; and syringa was almost as good as jessamine, Rotha thought; little red poppies began to lift their slender heads, and pansies appeared, and June roses were getting ready to bloom. And as long as Rotha could busy herself in the garden work, she was happy; she forgot all that she had to trouble her; even when Prissy Purcell came out to see and criticise what was going on.

"What are you doin' all that for?" the latter asked one day, after standing some time watching Rotha's work. "Are you thinkin' Mis' Busby'll come by and by?"

"My aunt? No indeed!" said Rotha looking up with a flush. "I have no idea when I shall see my aunt again; and certainly I do not expect to see her here."

"Somebody else, then?"

"Why no! There is nobody to come."

"Didn't you never have a beau?" said Prissy Purcell, stooping down and speaking lower.

"A *what*?" said Rotha turning to her.

"A beau. A young man. Most girls does, when they're as good-lookin' as you be. You know what I mean. Didn't you never keep company with no one?"

"Keep company!" said Rotha, half vexed and half amused. "Mrs. Purcell, I was a little girl only just a few days ago."

"But you're as handsome as a red rose," insisted Mrs. Purcell. "Didn't you never yet see nobody you liked more 'n common?"

Rotha looked at her again, and then went on forking up her ground. "Yes," she said; "but people a great deal older than myself, Mrs. Purcell. Now see how that beautiful stem of white lilies is choked and covered up. A little while longer and we shall have a lovely head of white blossom bells there."

"Older 'n your own self?" repeated Mrs. Purcell softly.

"What?--O yes!" said Rotha laughing; "a great deal older than myself. Not what you are thinking about. I have been a school girl till I came here, Mrs. Purcell."

"Then Mis' Busby didn't send you here to keep you away from no one?"

Again Rotha looked in the woman's face, a half startled look this time. "No one, that I know," she answered. But a strange, doubtful feeling therewith came over her, and for a moment she stood still, with her eye going off to the gate and the road, musing. If it were so!--and a terrible impatience swelled in her breast. Ay, if it *were* so, there was no help for her. She could not get away, and nobody could come to her, because nobody knew and nobody would know where she was. Even supposing that so unimportant a person as poor little Rotha Carpenter were not already and utterly forgotten. That was most probable, and anything different was not to be assumed. Continued care for her would have forwarded some testimonials of its existence, in letters or messages. Who should say that it had not? was the next instant thought. They would have come to her aunt, and her aunt would never have delivered them.

This sort of speculation, natural enough, is besides very exasperating. It broke up Rotha's peace for that day and took all the pleasure out of her garden work. She went on pulling up weeds and forking up the soil, but she did the one with a will and the other with a vengeance; staid out longer than usual, and came in tired.

"Joe," said Mrs. Purcell meanwhile in the solitude of her kitchen, "I'll bet you a cookie, Mis' Busby's up to some tricks!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

INQUIRIES.

The weeks went on now without any change but the changes of the season. Rotha's flower borders bloomed up into beauty; somewhat old-fashioned beauty, but none the worse for that. Hypericum and moss pink faded away; the roses blossomed and fell; sweet English columbines lifted their sonsy heads, pale blue and pale rose, and dark purple; poppies sprang up, as often in the gravel road as in the beds; lilies came and went; the laburnum shook out its clusters of gold; old honeysuckles freshened out and filled all the air with the fragrance of their very sweet flowers. Rotha's tulip tree came into blossom, and was a beautiful object from her high window which looked right into the heart of it. Rotha grew very fond of that tulip tree. There were fruits too. The door in the fence, which she had noticed on her first expedition to the barnyard, was found to be the entrance to a large kitchen garden. Truly, Joe Purcell cultivated few vegetables; cabbages however were in number and variety, also potatoes, and that resource of the poor, onions.

The fruits were little cared for; still, there were numbers of purple raspberry bushes trained along the fence, which yielded a good supply of berries; there were strawberry beds, grown up with weeds, where good picking was to be found if any one wanted to take the trouble. Gooseberries were in great profusion, and currants in multitude. Old cherry trees, which shaded parts of the garden disadvantageously for the under growth, yielded a magnificent harvest of Maydukes, white hearts and ox hearts; and pear trees and mulberry trees were not wanting, promising later crops. Mr. and Mrs. Purcell had paid little attention to these treasures; Joe hadn't time, he said; and Prissy wouldn't be bothered with gathering berries after all the rest she had to do. Rotha made it her own particular task to supply the little family with fruit; and it was one of the pieces of work she most enjoyed. Very early, most often, while the sun's rays yet came well aslant, she set off for the old garden with her basket on her arm; and brought in such loads of nature's riches that Joe and his wife declared they had never lived so in their lives. It was lonely but sweet work to Rotha to gather the fruit. The early summer mornings are some of the most wonderful times of the year, for the glory and fulness and freshness of nature; the spirit of life and energy abroad is catching; and sometimes Rotha's heart sang with the birds. For she had a happy faculty of living in the present moment, and throwing herself wholly into the work she might be about, forgetting care and trouble for the time. Other mornings and evenings, she would almost forget the present in thoughts that roamed the past and the future. Pushing her hand among the dewy tufts of strawberry plants to seek the red fruit which had grown large under the shadow of them, her mind would go wandering and searching among old experiences to find out the hidden motives and reasons which had been at work, or the hidden issues which must still be waited for. At such times Rotha would come in thoughtful and tired. How long would her aunt leave her in this place? and how, if her aunt did not release her, was she ever to release herself? What was Mrs. Mowbray about, that she never wrote? several letters had been sent off to her, now a good while ago; letters telling all, and seeking counsel and comfort. No word came back. And oh, where was that once friend, who had told her to tell him everything that concerned her, and promised, tacitly or in so many words, that her applications would never be disregarded nor herself lost sight of? Years had passed now since he had given a sign of his existence, much less a token of his care. But after all, was that a certain thing? Was it not possible, that Mrs. Busby might have come in between, and prevented any letter or word of Mr. Digby's from reaching her? This sort of speculation always made Rotha feel wild and desperate; she banished it as much as she could; for however the case were, she possessed no remedy.

June passed, and July, and August came. No word from Mrs. Busby to Rotha, and Joe Purcell said none came for him. The raspberries were gone, and currants and gooseberries in full harvest; when there happened an unlocked for and unwelcome variety in Rotha's way of life. Mrs. Purcell was taken ill. It was nothing but chills and fever, the doctor said; but chills and fever are pretty troublesome visitors if you do not know how to get rid of them; and that this doctor certainly did not. It may be said, that he had a difficult patient. Prissy Purcell was unaccustomed to follow any will but her own, and made the time of sickness no exception to her habit. With a chill on her she would get up to make bread; with the "sick day" demanding absolute rest and quiet care, she would go out to the garden to gather cabbages, and stand about preparing them and getting ready her dinner; till provoked nature took her revenge and sent the chill creeping over her. Then Prissy would (if it was not baking day) throw down whatever she had in hand and go to her bed; and it fell to Rotha's unwonted fingers to put on the pot and cook the dinner, set the table and wash the dishes, even the pots and pans; for somebody must do it, as she reflected, and poor Mrs. Purcell would come out of her bed in the evening a mere wreck of her usual self, very unfit to do anything.

It was a strange experience, for Rotha to be cooking Joe Purcell's dinner and then eating it with him; making gruel and toast for Prissy and serving it to her; keeping the kitchen in order; sweeping, dusting, mopping, scrubbing, for even that could not be avoided sometimes. "It is my work," Rotha said to herself; "it is what is given me just now to do. I wonder, why? But all the same, it is given; and there must be some use in it." She was very busy oftentimes now,

without the help of her flower borders, which had to be neglected; she rejoiced that the small fruit was gone, or nearly gone; from morning to night, when Prissy was abed, she went steadily from one thing to another with scarce any interval of active work. No study now but her Bible study; and to have time for that, Rotha must get up very early in the morning. Then, at her window, with the glory of the summer day just coming upon the outer world, she sat and read and thought and prayed; her eyes going alternately from her open page to the green and golden depths of the tulip tree opposite her window; looking the while with her mental eye at the fresh and glorious riches of some promise or prophecy. Perhaps Rotha never enjoyed her Bible more, nor ever would, only that with growing experience in the ways of the Lord comes ever new power to see the beauties of them, and with greater knowledge of him comes a larger love.

August passed, and September came. And September also ran its course. The weather grew calm and clear, and began to be crisp with frost, and the outer world beautified with red maple leaves and crimson creepers and golden hickory trees. Prissy got better and took her former place in the house; and therewith Rotha had time to breathe and bethink herself.

Her aunt must long since be returned from Chicago. Once a scrap of a note had been received from her, but it told nothing. It was not dated, and the postmark was not New York. It told absolutely nothing, even indirectly. Airs. Mowbray must long since have reopened her school, but it seemed to be tacitly agreed upon that Rotha was to go to school no more. What were all the people about? there seemed to be a spell upon Rotha and her affairs, as much as if she had been a princess in a fairy tale enchanted and turned to stone, or put to sleep; only she was not turned to stone at all, but all alive and quivering with pain and fear and anxiety. It was her life that was spell-bound. A thousand times she revolved the possibility of going into some work by which she could make money; and always had to give it up. She saw nobody, knew nobody, could apply to no one. She had used up all her writing paper in letters; and never an answer did she get. She began to think indeed her world was bewitched. Winter was looming up in the distance, not so very far off neither; was she to pass it *here*, alone with Prissy Purcell and her husband? Sometimes Rotha's courage gave way and she shed bitter tears; other times, when she was dressing her flowers in the long beds, or when she was looking into the tulip tree with some sweet word of the Bible in her mind, she could even smile at her prospect, and trust, and be quiet, and wait. However, as the autumn wore on, I am afraid the quiet was more and more broken up and the trust more sorrowful.

It was on one of these evenings of early October, that Mr. Southwode presented himself, after so long an interval, at Mrs. Busby's door. Nothing was changed, to all appearance, in the house; it might have been but yesterday that he walked out of it for the last time; and nothing was changed in the appearance of Mr. Southwode himself. Just as he came three years ago, he came now.

Mrs. Busby was alone in her drawing room, and advanced to meet him with outstretched hand and an expression of great welcome. She had not changed either, unless for the better. Her visiter recognized, as he had often done before, the expression of sense and character in her face, the quiet suavity of her manner, the many indications that here was what is called a fine woman. About the goodness of this fine woman he was not so sure; but he paid her a tribute of involuntary respect for her abilities, her cleverness, and her good manners.

"Mr. Southwode! I am delighted to see you!" she exclaimed as she advanced to meet him, cordially, and yet with quiet dignity; not too cordial. "You have been a stranger to New York a great while."

"Yes," he said. "Much longer than I anticipated."

"I thought we should hardly ever see you here again."

"Why not?" he asked with a smile.

"Want of sufficient attraction. You know, we are apt to think here that Englishmen, if they are well placed in their own country, do not want anything of other countries. They are on the very height of civilization, and of everything else. They have enough. And certainly, America cannot offer them much."

"America is a large field for work,"--Mr. Southwode observed.

"Ah yes; but what country is not? I dare say you find enough to do on the other side. Do you not?"

"I have no difficulty on that score," Mr. Southwode confessed; "on either side of the Atlantic."

"We were very glad to hear of the successful termination of your lawsuit," Mrs. Busby went on. "I may congratulate you, may I not? I know you do not set an over value on the goods of fortune; but at the same time, it always seems to

me that the possessor of great means has a great advantage. It is true, wealth is a flood in which many people's heads and hearts are submerged; but that would never be your case, I judge."

"I would rather be drowned in some other medium," he allowed.

"Well, we heard right? The decisions were in your favour, and triumphantly?"

"They were in my favour, and unconditionally. I did not feel that there was much to triumph about, or can be, in a family lawsuit."

"No; they are very sad things. I am very glad you are out of them, and so well out of them."

"Thank you. How are my young friends in the family?"

"The girls? Quite well, thank you, They are unluckily neither of them at home."

"Not at home! I am sorry for that. How has *my* child developed?" he asked with a slight smile.

"She has grown into a young woman," Mrs. Busby answered, with one of those utterly imperceptible, yet thoroughly perceived, changes of manner which speak of a mental check received or a mental protest made. It was not a change of manner either; nothing so tangible; I cannot tell what it was in her expression that Mr. Southwode instantly saw and felt, and that put him upon his guard and upon his mettle at once. Mrs. Busby had drawn her shawl closer round her; that was all the outward gesture. She always wore a shawl. In winter it was thick and in summer it was gossamer; but one way or another a shawl seemed essential to Mrs. Busby's well-being. What Mr. Southwode gathered from her words was a covert rebuke and rebuff. He was informed that Rotha was grown up.

"It is hard to realize that," he said lightly. "It seems but the other day that I left her; and since then, nothing else has changed!"

"She has changed," said Mrs. Busby drily.

"May I ask, how?--besides the physical difference, which to be sure was to be looked for?"

"I do not know that there is any other particular change."

"That would disappoint me," said Mr. Southwode. "I hoped to find a good deal of mental growth and improvement as the fruit of these three years. She has been at school all the time?"

"Yes."

"What is her school record?"

"Very fairly good," said Mrs. Busby, turning her eyes now upon the young man, whom for the last few minutes they had avoided. "I did not know you were so much interested in Rotha, Mr. Southwode."

"She was my charge, you are aware. Her mother left her to my care."

"Until she was placed in mine," said Mrs. Busby with dignity. "I hope you believe that I am able to take good care of her?"

"I should be very sorry to doubt that, and no one who knows Mrs. Busby could question it for a moment. But a charge is a charge, you know. To resign it or delegate it is not optional. I regard myself as Rotha's guardian always, and it was as her guardian that I entrusted her to you."

Mrs. Busby did not answer this, and did not change a muscle in face or figure.

"And so," Mr. Southwode went on, smiling,--he was amused, and he appreciated Mrs. Busby,--"it is as her guardian that I am asking an account of her now."

"I have given it," said Mrs. Busby; and she moved her lips as if they were dry, which however her utterance was not. It was pleasant.

"The young ladies can hardly be expected home early, I suppose?" said Mr.

Southwode, looking at his watch.

"Hardly"--returned Mrs. Busby in the same way.

"When can I see Rotha to-morrow?"

"To-morrow," said Mrs. Busby, speaking leisurely, "you will hardly see her. She is not at home. I said that before, but you understood me to speak of the evening merely."

"Where is she then? I can go to her."

"No, you cannot," said Mrs. Busby half smiling, but it was not a smile
Mr. Southwode liked. "She is at a friend's house in the country."

"Not in New York! How long do you expect her to be absent?"

"That I cannot possibly tell. It depends on circumstances that I do not know."

Mr. Southwode pondered. "Will you favour me with her address?" he asked, taking out his notebook.

"It is not worth the while," said the lady quietly. "She is at a considerable distance from New York, too far for you to go to her; and she may be home any day. It depends, as I said, on what I do not now know."

"And may be delayed yet for some time, then?"

"Possibly."

"Will you give me her address, Mrs. Busby."

Mr. Southwode's pencil was ready, but instead of giving him something to do with it, Mrs. Busby rang the bell. Pencil and notebook waited.

"Lesbia, go up to my dressing room and bring me a little green book with a clasp lying on my table there."

A few minutes of silence and waiting; then Lesbia returned with the announcement, "There aint no sort o' little book there, Mis' Busby. There's a heap o' big ones, but they aint green."

"Go again and look in the left hand drawer."

Lesbia came again. "Aint nothin' there but papers."

"That will do. Mr. Southwode, I have not my address book, and without that I cannot give you what you want. The name of the post-office town is very peculiar, and I always forget it. But I can write to Rotha to-morrow and summon her, if you think it necessary."

"Would that be an inexpedient measure?"

"You must judge. I have not thought best to do it; but if it is necessary
I can do it now."

"I will not give you so much trouble. If you will allow me, I will come again to morrow evening, and get the address."

"To-morrow evening!" said the lady slowly. "I am very sorry, I have an engagement; I shall not be at home to-morrow evening."

Why did it not occur to Mrs. Busby to say that she would leave the address for him, if he would call for it? Mr. Southwode quietly put up his pencil, and remarked that another time would do; and passed on easily to make inquiries about what New York had been doing since he went away? Mrs. Busby told him of certain buildings and plans for buildings here and there, and then suddenly asked,

"When did you come, Mr. Southwode?"

"I landed to-day."

"To-day! Rotha would be very much flattered if she knew how prompt you have been to seek her out."

It was said with a manner meant to be smoothly insinuating, but which somehow had missed the smoothness. Mrs. Busby for that moment had lost the hold she usually kept of herself.

"Rotha would expect no less of me," Mr. Southwode answered calmly.

"Then you and she must have been great friends before you went away? greater than I knew."

"Did Rotha not credit me with so much?" he asked with a smile, which covered a sharp observation of the lady, examining him.

"To tell you the truth," said Mrs. Busby, with a manner which was intended to be gracious, "I did not encourage her. Knowing what gentlemen, and young gentlemen, generally are, I thought it unlikely that you would much remember Rotha amid the pressure of your business in England, and very likely that things might turn out so that she would never see you again. I expected every day to hear that you were married; and of course that would have been an end of your interest in her."

"Why do you think so, may I ask?"

"*Why?* Every woman knows," said Mrs. Busby in amused fashion.

"I will not marry till I find a woman that does not know," said Mr. Southwode shaking his head.

"Now that is unreasonable, Mr. Southwode."

"I do not think so. Prove it."

"I cannot prove it to a man. I have only a woman's knowledge, of what he does not understand. And besides, Mr. Southwode, it is quite right and proper that it should be so. A man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife; and if his father and mother, surely everybody else."

"As I am not married, the case does not come under consideration," said the gentleman carelessly. And after a pause he went on--"I have written several letters to Rotha during the time of my absence, and addressed them to your care. Did you receive them safe?"

"I received several--I do not at this moment recollect just how many."

"Do you know why they were never answered?"

"I suppose I do," said Mrs. Busby composedly. "Rotha has been exceedingly engrossed with her studies."

"She had vacations?"

"O certainly. She had vacations."

"Then can you tell me, Mrs. Busby, why Rotha never wrote to me?"

"I am afraid I cannot tell you," the lady answered slowly, looking into the fire.

"Do you think Rotha has forgotten me?"

"It is not like her, I should say, to forget. I never hear her mention you. But then, I see her little except in the vacations, and not always then; she was often carried off from me."

"By whom, may I ask?"

"O by her school teacher."

"And that was--? Pardon me, but it concerns me to know all about Rotha I can."

"I am not sure if I am justified in telling you."

"Why not?"

"I think," said Mrs. Busby with an appearance of candour, "my guardianship is the proper one for her. How can you be her guardian, while she lives in my house, Mr. Southwode? Or how can you be her guardian out of it?"

"I promised her mother," he said. "How a promise shall be fulfilled, may admit of question; but not whether it shall be fulfilled."

"I know of but one way," Mrs. Busby went on, eyeing him now intently. "If you tell me you are intending to take *that* way,--then I have no more to say, of course. But I know of but one way in which it can be done."

Mr. Southwode laughed a little, a low, soft laugh, that in him always meant amusement. "I did not promise *that* to her mother," he said, "and I cannot promise it to you. It might be convenient, but I do not contemplate it."

"Then, Mr. Southwode, I feel it my duty to request that you fulfil your promise by acting through me."

It was well enough said; it was not without some ground of reason. If he could have felt sure of Mrs. Busby, it might have received, partially at least, his concurrence. But he was as far as possible from feeling sure of Mrs. Busby; and rather gave her credit for playing a clever mask. Upon a little pause which followed the last words, there came a ring at the door and the entrance of the young lady of the house. Antoinette was grown up excessively pretty, and was dressed to set off her prettiness. Her mother might be pardoned for viewing her with secret pride and exultation, if not for the thrill of jealous fear which accompanied the proud joy. That anybody should stand in this beauty's way!

"Mr. Southwode!" exclaimed the young lady. "It is Mr. Southwode come back. Why, Mr. Southwode, what has kept you so long? We heard you were coming five months ago. Why didn't you come then?"

Mrs. Busby wished her daughter had not said that.

"There were reasons--not interesting enough to occupy your ear with them."

"Occupy my ear!" repeated the girl. "That is something new. Mamma, isn't that deliciously polite! Well, what made you stay away so long, Mr. Southwode? I like to have my ear occupied."

"Should not people stay where they belong?"

"And do you belong in England?"

"I suppose, in a measure, I may say I do."

"You talk foolishly, Antoinette," her mother put in. "Don't you know that Mr. Southwode's home is in England?"

"People can change their homes, mamma. Then, you are not going to stay long, Mr. Southwode?"

"I do not know how long. That is an undecided point."

"And what have you come over for now?"

"Antoinette!" said her mother again. "I do not know if you can excuse her, Mr. Southwode; she is entirely too outspoken. That is a question you have nothing to do with, Nettie."

"Why not, mamma? He has come for something; and if it is business, or travelling, or hunting, I would like to know."

"Hunting, at this time of year!" said Mrs. Busby.

"I might say it is business," said Mr. Southwode. "In one part of my business, perhaps you can help me."

Antoinette pricked up her ears delightedly, and eagerly asked how? and what?

"I made it part of my business to inquire about a little girl that I left three years ago under your mother's care."

"Rotha!" exclaimed Antoinette; and a cloudy shadow of displeasure and suspicion forthwith fell over her face; not tinder such good control as her mother's. "A little girl! She was not so very little."

"What sort of a girl has she turned out to be?"

"Not little now, I can tell you. She is a great deal bigger than I am. So you came to see about Rotha?"

"What can you tell me about her?"

"What do you want to know?"

"Nothing but the truth," said Mr. Southwode gravely.

"But the truth about what? Rotha is just what she used to be."

"Not changed except in inches?"

"*Inches! Feet!*--" said Antoinette. "We don't think about inches when we look at her. I don't know about anything else. If you want an account of her studies you must ask somebody at school."

"Her teacher was yours?"

"O yes. Lately, you know, we were both in the upper class; and of course we were together in Mrs. Mowbray's lessons; but then in other things we were apart."

"How was that?"

"Studied different things," said Antoinette shortly. "Had different masters. I can't tell you about Rotha's lessons, if you want to know that." She was pulling off her gloves as she spoke, and tugged at them with an appearance of vexation, which might be due to their excellent fit and consequent difficulty of removal.

"Has she proved herself a pleasant inmate of the family?"

"She has been rather an inmate of Mrs. Mowbray's family," said Antoinette. "Mrs. Mowbray has swallowed her up and carried her off from us. *We* don't see much of her."

"Antoinette," said her mother here, "Mr. Southwode wants to know Rotha's address; and I cannot give him the name of the place. Can you help me recollect it?"

"Never knew it, mamma. I didn't know the place had a name. I can't recollect what I never heard."

"There must be a post-office," Mr. Southwode remarked.

"Must there? O I suppose there must, somewhere; but I don't know it."

"Lesbia could not find my address book," Mrs. Busby added.

"It is a matter of no consequence," Mr. Southwode rejoined. And he presently after took his leave. A moment's silence followed his departure.

"There was no need to tell him you did not know the post-office town," said Mrs. Busby. "That was as much as to say, you never write."

"What should I write for?" returned Antoinette defiantly. "Mamma! was that all he came for? to ask about Rotha?"

"All that he came here for," said Mrs. Busby, with lines in her brow and a compressed mouth. "I wish you had not told him where Rotha went to school, either."

"Why?"

"Just as well not to say it."

"But what harm? He could ask, if he wanted to know; and then you would have to tell. What does he want her address for?"

"I don't know; but I can manage that, well enough. He knows nothing about Tanfield."

"Mamma! I wish Rotha had never come to us!" cried Antoinette with tears in her eyes.

"Don't be foolish, Antoinette. Mr. Southwode will be here again in a day or two; and then leave things to me."

Mr. Southwode meantime walked slowly and thoughtfully to the corner of the street. By that time his manner changed; and he hailed a horse car and sprang into it like a man who was suffering from no indecision in either his views or purposes. Oddly enough, the very name which Antoinette had comforted herself with thinking he did not know, had suddenly occurred to him, together with a long-ago proposition of Mrs. Busby to her sister in the latter's time of need. He had pretty well made up his mind.

Half an hour later Mr. Southwode was announced to Mrs. Mowbray.

Mrs. Mowbray recollected him; she never forgot anybody, or failed to catalogue anybody rightly in the vast collections and stores of her memory. She received Mr. Southwode therefore with the gracious courtesy and dignity which was habitual with her, and with the full measure also of her usual reserve and quick observation.

After a few commonplaces respecting his absence and his return, Mr. Southwode begged to ask if Mrs. Busby's niece, Miss Carpenter, were in her house or school?

"Miss Carpenter is not with me," Mrs. Mowbray answered guardedly.

"But she has been with you, if I understand aright?"

"She has been with me until lately."

"Are you informed that she will not return?"

"By no means! I am expecting to see her or hear from her every day. O by no means. Miss Carpenter ought to remain with me several years yet. I shall be much disappointed if she do not. It is one great mistake of parents now-a-days, that they do not give me time enough. The first two or three years can but lay a foundation, on which to build afterwards."

"May I ask, if the foundation has been successfully laid in Miss Carpenter's case? I am interested to know; because Mrs. Carpenter when she died left her child to my care; and I hold myself responsible for what concerns her."

Mrs. Mowbray hesitated slightly. "Where was Mrs. Busby?" she asked then.

"Here; but there was no intercourse between the sisters."

"Was it not by her mother's wish that Miss Carpenter was placed with her aunt?"

"No. I acted on no authority but my own."

"What sort of a woman was Mrs. Carpenter?"

"A very admirable woman. A sweet, sound, noble nature, with a great deal of quiet strength."

"Is her daughter like her?"

"Not in the least. I do not mean that she lacks some of her mother's good qualities; but they are developed differently, and with a wholly different background of temperament."

"Was there a feud between the sisters, or anything like it?"

Mr. Southwode hesitated. "I know the story," he said. "Mrs. Carpenter never complained; but I think another woman would, in her place."

"Will you allow me to ask, how she came to entrust her child to you?"

"I was the only friend at hand. And now," Mr. Southwode went on smiling, "may I be permitted to ask another question or two? When have you heard from Miss Carpenter?"

"Not a word all summer. In the spring my school was broken up, on account of sickness in the house; I sent Rotha

home to her aunt; and since then I have heard nothing from her. Not a word."

"You do not know then of course where she is?"

"With her aunt, I suppose, of course. Is she not with Mrs. Busby?"

"She is making a visit somewhere, Mrs. Busby tells me." And he hesitated.

"Has Rotha's home been happy with her aunt?"

"That is a question I never ask. Rotha does not complain."

"I need not ask whether her abode has been happy *here*," said the gentleman smiling again; "but, has she been a satisfactory member of your school?"

"Perfectly so! Of my school and family."

"You are satisfied with her studies, her progress in them, I mean?"

"Perfectly. I never taught any one with more pleasure or better results."

"I am very glad to hear that," said Mr. Southwode. And he took his leave.

The very next train for Tanfield carried him northward.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DISCOVERIES.

The next day, which was the 24th of October, passed as other days of less significance had done. At dinner Mrs. Purcell complained of Rotha's failure of appetite. Rotha had been down-hearted all the morning. Seven days more, and November would begin!

"You don't eat worth a red cent!" said Mrs. Purcell. "Aint that a good pot pie?"

"Excellent! The queen of England couldn't have a better."

"If she hasn't a better appetite she won't be queen long. Why don't ye eat?"

"Sometimes I can't, Prissy."

"What ails you?"

"Nothing. I get thinking; that's all."

"Joe," said his wife, "what's Mis' Busby doin'?"

"Couldn't say."

"Where is she? Why don't she come after Miss Rotha?"

"I s'pose she's busy with her own affairs. If she'd had consulted me, I could ha' told you more."

"If she ever consults you, I hope you'll give her some good advice. She wants it bad!"

"I guess I will," said Mr. Purcell, lounging out. "If I don't, you kin."

Rotha wished to escape further remark or enquiry, and went out too. She would divert herself with gathering a great bunch of the fall flowers and dress some dishes. She often refreshed herself and refined the tea-table with a nosegay dressed in the middle of it, especially as it seemed to give not less pleasure to her entertainers than to her. She went now slowly down the gravelled drive, filling her hands as she went with asters, chrysanthemums, late honeysuckles, and bits of green from box and cedar and feathery larches. She went slowly, thinking hard all the way, and feeling very

blue indeed. She saw no opening out of her troubles, and she strongly suspected that her aunt meant there should be none. What was to become of her? True, it flashed into her mind, "The Lord is my Shepherd";--but the sheep was taking it into her head to think for herself, and could not see that the path she was following would end in anything but disaster and famishing. If she could but get out of this path----

Ah, silly sheep!

Rotha found herself at the gate leading into the high road; the gate by which she had been admitted so many months ago, and which she had never passed through since. She did not open it now; she stood still, resting one hand on the bars of it and gazing off along the road that led to Tanfield. It was quite empty; there was little passing along that road in the best of times, and very little at this season. It looked hopeless and desolate, the long straight lines of fences, and the gray, empty space between running off into nothing. Anything moving upon it would have been a relief to the eye and the mind; it looked like Rotha's own life at present, unchanging, Monotonous, solitary, barren, endless. Yet very precious flowers had been lately blossoming upon her path, and fragrant plants springing; but this, if she partly knew, at this moment she wholly ignored or forgot. She stood in a dream reverie, looking forward with her bodily eye, but with the eye of her mind back, and far back; to her mother, to her father, to Mr. Digby, and the times at Medwayville when she was a happy child. Nothing regular or consecutive; a maze of dream images in which she lost herself, and under the power of which her tears slowly gathered and began to run down her cheeks. Standing so, looking down the long empty road, and in the very depths of disheartened foreboding and dismay, a step startled her. Nobody was in sight on the road towards Tanfield; it was a quick business step coming in the other direction. Rotha turned her head hurriedly, and then was more in a maze than ever, though of a different kind. Close by the gate somebody was standing. A stranger? And why did he look so little strange? Rotha's eyes grew big unconsciously, while she likewise utterly forgot that they were framed in a setting of wet eyelashes; and then there came flashing changes in her face. I cannot describe how all the lines of it altered; and fire leapt to her eye, not without an alternating shadow however, a sort of shadow of doubt; her lips parted, but she could not bring out a word. The stranger stood still likewise, and looked, and I am not sure but his eyes opened a little; light came into them too, and a smile.

"Have I found you?" he said. "Perhaps you will let me come in."

And while Rotha remained in stupid bewilderment and uncertainty of everything except the identity of the person before her, he laid hold of the latch of the gate and made his own words good; Rotha giving way just enough to allow of it. I think the new-comer was a little uncertain as well; nevertheless he was not the sort of man to shew uncertainty.

"Is this my little Rotha?" he said as he came up to her; and then, taking her hand, he began just where he left off, by stooping and kissing her. That roused Rotha, as much as ever the kiss of the prince in the fairy tale woke the sleeping beauty. The blood flushed all over her face, she pulled her hand away, and flung herself as it were upon the gate again; laying hold of the bars of it and bending down her face upon her arms. What did he do that for? and had he a right? After leaving her unthought of for so many years, was he entitled to speak to her and look at her and--kiss her, just as he could do once when she was a child? Rotha's mind was in terrible tumult, for notwithstanding this protest of reason, or of feeling, that touch of his lips upon her lips had waked up all the old past; it was just like the kiss with which he had bid her good bye three years ago; but whether to forgive him or not, and whether there was anything or not, Rotha did not yet know. Yet the old power of his presence was asserting itself already. All she could do was to keep silent, and the silence was of some little duration; for Mr. Digby, as his old fashion was, waited.

"I see you have not forgotten me," he said at length. "Or--should I say--"

"I thought you *had* forgotten me, Mr. Southwode," said Rotha. She said it with some dignity, removing her arms from the gate and standing before him. Yet she could not raise her eyes to him. Her manner was entirely unexceptionable and graceful.

"What made you think that?"

"I had some reason. It is three years, just three years, since you went away; and I have never heard a word from you in all the time."

"You have not heard from me? How comes that?"

"I do not know how it comes. I have never heard."

"And so, you thought I had never written?"

"Did you write?" said Rotha, flashing the question now at him with her eyes. It was exactly one of the old looks, that he remembered, bright, deep, eager. Yet how the girl had changed!

"I wrote a number of times."

"To me?"

"Yea. I got no answer."

"How could I answer letters that I never had?" cried Rotha.

"Could you not, possibly, have written to me a letter that was not an answer?"

"Yes, and I would; O how I wanted to write, many a time!--but I did not know where to send it. I had not your address."

"I left it with your aunt for you; or rather, I believe I left it in a note for you, when I went away."

"She never let me know as much," said Rotha a little bitterly.

"You might have guessed she had my address. Did you ever ask her? You know, I promised to give it to you?"

"There was no use in my asking her any such thing," said Rotha. "She never let me hear a word from you or about you. I only learned by chance, as it were, that you had gone back to England."

"And so you thought I had forgotten you?"

"What could I think? I did not want to think that," said Rotha, feeling somewhat put in the wrong.

"I did not want you to think that. The least you can do to a friend, if you have got him, is to trust him."

"But then, I thought--they said--I thought, maybe, after you had put me in aunt Serena's care, you had done--or thought you had done--the best you could for me."

"The best I could just at the moment. I never promised to leave you with Mrs. Busby always, did I?"

"But you were in England, and busy," said Rotha. "It seemed--No, it *didn't* seem very natural that you should forget all about me, for I did not think it was at all like you; but that was what people said."

"And Rotha believed?"

"I almost believed it at last," said Rotha, very sorry to confess the fact.

"What do you think now?"

"I think I was mistaken. But, Mr. Digby, three years is a long time; and after all, why should you remember me? I was nothing to you; only a child that you had been very kind to."

He was silent. What was she to him indeed? And what sort of relations was he to maintain between them now? She was not a child any longer. Here was a tall, graceful girl, albeit dressed in exceedingly plain garments; the garments could not hide and even rather emphasized the fact, for she was graceful in spite of them. And the promise of the child's face was abundantly fulfilled in the woman. Features very fine, eyes of changing and flashing power, all the indications that he well remembered of a nature passionate, tender, sensitive and strong; while there was also a certain veil of sweetness and patience over them all, which he did not remember. Mr. Southwode began dimly to perceive that he could not take up things just where he left them; what he left was not in existence. In place of the passionate, variable, wilful child, here was a developed, sensitive, and withal very beautiful woman. What was he to do with her? or what could he do for her?

Unconsciously, the two had begun slowly pacing towards the house, and Rotha was the one to break the silence. Happily, her companion's scruples did not enter her head.

"What brought you here, Mr. Digby? How ever came you to Tanfield?"

"To look after that little girl you thought I had forgotten," he said with a slight smile.

"But what made you come *here*? Did you know I was here?"

"Not at all. I could not find out anything of your whereabouts; except indeed that you were 'in the country.' So much I learned."

"From whom?"

"From Mrs. Busby."

"From my aunt! You have seen her! When did you see her?"

"Yesterday; immediately upon my arrival."

"Then you have only just come? From England, I mean."

"Only just come."

Rotha paused. This statement was delightfully soothing.

"And you saw aunt Serena? And what did she say?"

"She said nothing. I could get nothing out of her, of what I wanted to hear. She said you were quite well, making a visit at a friend's house in the country."

"That--is--not--true!" said Rotha slowly and indignantly. "Did she tell you that?"

"Are you not making a visit here?"

"What is a 'visit'? No, I am not. And, it is not a friend's house, either."

"How came you here? and when? and what for, then?" said he now in his turn.

"I came--some time in last May; near the end, I believe."

"Why?"

Rotha lifted her eyes to his. "I do not know," she said.

"What was the alleged reason for your coming?"

"Aunt Serena was going, she said, to Chicago, on a visit, and my presence would not be convenient. I could not stay in the house in New York alone. So I was sent here. That is all I know."

"*Sent?*"

Rotha nodded. "Yes."

"Not *brought*?"

"O no!"

"Did you come *alone*?"

A sudden spasm seemed to catch the girl's heart; she stopped and covered her face with her hands; and for a minute or two there came a rush of hot tears, irrepressible and unmanageable. Why they came Rotha did not know, and was surprised at them; but there was a quiver and a glitter in her face when she took her hands down, which shewed to her companion that the clouds and the sunshine were at strife somewhere. They walked on a few paces more, and then, coming full in sight of the house, Rotha's steps stayed.

"Where are we going?" she said. "I have no place to take you to, in there."

Mr. Digby's eyes made a survey of the building before him.

"O it is large enough--there is room, and rooms, enough," said Rotha; "but it is all unused and unopened. I have one corner, at the top of the house; and down in another corner Mr. and Mrs. Purcell have their kitchen and a little sleeping place off it; all the rest is desert."

"Who are Mr. and Mrs. Purcell?"

"Aunt Serena's tenants--farmers--I do not know what to call them. They might be servants, but they are not that exactly."

"Do you mean that there is no other person in the house?"

"No other person."

Mr. Southwode began to go forward again, slowly, looking at everything as he went.

"What do you hear from your aunt?"

"Nothing. O yes, I have had one scrap of a note from her; some time ago; but it told me nothing."

"Have you written to her?"

"Over and over; till I was tired."

"Have you written to no one else?"

"Why of course! I wrote to Mrs. Mowbray, again and again; and to one or two of the girls; but I never got an answer. The whole world has seemed dead, and been dead, for me."

They slowly paced by the house, and began to go down the sweep towards the other gate.

"Alone with these two servants for five months!" Mr. Southwode said.

"Rotha, what sort of a life have you been living all this while?"

"I do not know," said the girl catching her breath. "Rather queer. I suppose it has been good for me."

"What makes you suppose that?"

"I think I can feel that it has."--But Rotha added no more.

"Is confidence between us not fully reestablished?" he asked with a smile.

"O yes--if you care to know," Rotha answered hesitatingly, at the same time finding herself ready to slide back into the old habit of being very open with him.

"I care to know--if you like to tell me."

"It has been a queer life," she repeated. "I have been living between two things, my Bible, and the garden. There was an interval of some weeks not long ago, when Mrs. Purcell was sick; and then I lived largely in the kitchen."

"Go on, and tell me--But how can you go on!" Mr. Southwode found himself approaching the gate and road again, and suddenly broke off. "I cannot keep you standing here by the hour, and a little time will not do for us. Pray, if you have no place to take me to, where do you yourself live?"

The laughing glance that came to him now was precisely another of the child's looks that he remembered; a look that recognized his sympathy, and answered it out of a fund of heart treasure.

"I live between my corner at the top of the house, and Mrs. Purcell's corner at the bottom. I have no place but my room and her kitchen."

"Where can I see you? We have a great deal to talk about. Rotha, suppose you go for a drive with me?"

Rotha's eyes sparkled. "It would not be the first time," she said.

"No. Then the next question is, when can we go?" He looked at his watch.

"It is too late for this afternoon," Rotha opined.

"I am afraid it is. I do not think we can manage it. Then--Rotha, will you be ready to-morrow morning? How early can you be ready?"

"We have breakfast about half past six"

"*We?*"

"Yes," said Rotha half laughing. "We. That is, Mr. Purcell, and his wife, and myself."

"Do you take your meals with these people?"

Rotha nodded. "And in their kitchen. It is the only place."

"But they are not--What are they?"

"Not what you would call refined persons," said Rotha, while again the laugh of amusement and pleasure in her eyes shone through an iris of sudden tears. "No--they have been kind to me, though, in their way."

"As kind as their allegiance to Mrs. Busby permitted," said Mr. Southwode drily, recognizing at the same time the full beauty of this look I have tried to describe. "Well! That is over. How early to-morrow will you be ready to come away?"

"To come away?" repeated Rotha. "For a drive, you mean?"

"For a drive from this place. It is not my purpose ever to bring you back again."

The colour darted vividly into Rotha's cheeks, and a corresponding flash came to her eye. Yet she stood still and silent, while the colour went and came. Never here again? Then whither? and under what guardianship? His own? There came a great heart leap of joy at this suggestion, but with it came also a vague pull-back of doubt; the origin of which probably lay in words she had heard long ago and never forgotten, the tendency of which was to throw scruples in the way of such an arrangement or to cast some slur upon it. Was there an echo of them in Rotha's young consciousness? She did feel that she was a child no longer; that there was a difference since the old time. Yet she was still as simple, nearly, as a child; and of that sort of truth in her own heart which readily believes truth in others. Mr. Digby's truth she knew. Altogether there was a confusion of thoughts within her, which he saw, though he did not read.

"Do you owe anything to these people here?" he asked, a sudden question rising in his mind.

"Owe? To Mr. Purcell and his wife? No. I owe them for a good deal of kindness. O! you mean--Yes, in one sense I owe them. I have never paid them anything."

"For your board, and their care of you?"

"No.--I do not owe them for much *care*," said Rotha smiling. "I have taken care of myself since I have been here."

"Do I understand you? Has nobody paid them anything for your stay here?"

"Nobody."

"Upon what footing were you here, then?"

"It has no name," said Rotha contentedly. She could be gay now over this anomalous past. "I do not know what to call it."

"Has your aunt allowed you to depend upon these people?"

"Yes. I have not really depended upon them, Mr. Southwode. I promised myself, and I promised Mrs. Purcell, that some day, if I ever could do it, I would live to pay her. If I could have got any work to do, I would have taken it, and paid her before now; but I had no chance. I could see nobody."

"How literally is that to be taken?"

"With absolute literalness. I have seen nobody but Mr. and Mrs. Purcell since I came here. Began almost to think I

never should."

"But Sundays?"

"What of Sundays?"

"Did you not go to church somewhere?"

"Yes," said Rotha smiling; "in my pleasant corner room at the top of the house. Nowhere else."

"Why not?"

"It is not the habit of the people. And their habit, I found, I could not change."

"What did you do with your Sundays?"

"Spent them alone with my Bible. And often they were very, very pleasant; though I found it difficult to keep up such study all alone, through the long days."

"I must not let you stand here any longer! Will you be ready for me at eleven o'clock to-morrow?"

"Yes. There is no difficulty in that."

"Then I will be here at eleven. Good bye!"

He gave her his hand, looked at her a little steadily, but Rotha could not tell what he was thinking of; then as he let go her hand he lifted his hat and turned away.

A flush of colour came over Rotha's face, and she was glad to turn too; to hide it. Walking up to the house, she tried to think what Mr. Southwode meant by that last gesture. She was half pleased, and half not pleased. It was the manner of a gentleman to a stranger; she was no stranger. But it was also the manner of a gentleman towards a lady. Did he recognize her then for one? for a grown-up woman? a child no longer? and was he going to take on distance in his behaviour to her? She did not like the idea. That thought however, and all thoughts, soon merged in a feeling of exceeding joy. In the surprise and strangeness of the first meeting, Rotha had hardly had time to know how she felt; no Aurora Borealis is more splendid than the rosy rays of light which began now to stream up into her sky. She knew and began to realize that she was overwhelmingly happy. There were questions unsolved and not easy to solve; there were uncertainties and perplexities in her future; she half discerned that; but she could not give attention to it, in the present she was so exceedingly glad. And she need not; for did not Mr. Digby always know what to do with perplexities? She belonged to him again, and he, not her aunt any more, had the disposal of her; it was the old time come back. She was no longer alone and forlorn; no longer divided from her best friend; what of very hard or very evil could come to her now?

She felt she was too much excited to bear the sight of Mrs. Purcell just yet; she turned into the old garden to gather some pears. For the last time! It rang in Rotha's heart like a peal of bells. The glint of the October sun, warm and mellow on yellow leaves and on leaves yet green, on tree branches and even garden palings, was like a reflection from the inner sunshine which even so shone upon everything. The world had not looked so when she came out of the house that afternoon; everything was changed. No more under the dominion of her aunt Busby! how Rotha's heart leapt at the thought. No longer to be shut up here with the two Purcell people, and having an indefinite prospect of dull isolation and hopeless imprisonment before her. What was before *her*, Rotha did not indeed know; only Mr. Digby was in it, and that was enough, and security for all the rest.

She was thinking this, when it suddenly occurred to her, that she had known all along that the love and power of a heavenly friend had been in her future; and yet the knowledge had never given her the rest and the content that the certainty of the human friend gave. Rotha stopped picking pears and stood still, sorry and ashamed. It was true; she could not deny it; and it grieved her. So this was all her faith amounted to, her faith in the Friend who is better and surer immeasurably than all other friends! She could trust Mr. Digby with a trust that made her absolutely careless and happy; she could not trust Christ so. It grieved Rotha keenly; it made her ashamed with a genuine and wholesome shame; but the fact stood.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PERPLEXITIES.

She went in with a lapful of pears. By the way she had made up her mind not to speak of what had happened. She had been considering. Joe and Prissy were certainly kind to her, and kindly disposed; yet, what had become of her letters? They had all been intrusted to Mr. Purcell, to mail or have mailed in Tanfield. Did that fact stand in connection with the other fact, that no answers ever came? It was plain now that Mrs. Busby had been playing a deep game; plain that it had been her purpose to keep Rotha hidden away at least from one person. Rotha was the least in the world of a suspicious nature; nevertheless she felt uncertain what course Joe and Prissy might see fit to take if they knew of what was planning; she resolved they should not know. If only they had not seen Mr. Southwode already! he *would* stand so in sight of the house. But Prissy looked very unsuspicious.

"Well, I do think!" she began. "I should say, you wanted some pears. What ever did you s'pose was goin' to be done with 'em?"

"Eat them!" said Rotha cheerily, emptying her apronful upon the table.

"The boards is just scoured! And them aint the kind."

"The kind for what? They are ripe, are they not?"

"Ripe enough for doin' up. I can make pear honey of 'em. They'd ha' been good done with molasses, if I'd ha' had 'em in time. You can't do nothin' with 'em as they be. They'd draw your mouth all up."

Rotha looked at her pears and laughed. "Shews how much I know!" she said.

"Folks as lives in the City o' Pride don't know much o' things!" remarked Prissy.

"The City of Pride. Why do you call New York that?"

"Aint it?"

"I do not know that there is more pride there than in other places. Pride is in people--not in the places where people live. I think *you* are pretty proud, Prissy."

"That's all us has got to keep us up," rejoined Mrs. Purcell. "Do you think pride's wrong?"

"Yes, and so do you, if you believe your little book up there on the mantelpiece."

"What's in it about pride?" inquired Prissy quickly.

"Do you not recollect? The Lord said, 'How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another.' Here it is." She took the little volume from the mantel shelf and found the place. Prissy looked at it.

"What's the harm?" she said.

"Never mind, if you don't understand. The Lord said it; and he knows."

"What's come to you?" Prissy asked suddenly. "You're twice as much of a girl as you was this mornin'!"

"Am I?"

"Somethin's done you a heap o' good. Your face is fired up; and your eyes is two colours, and there's somethin' shinin' out o' 'em."

"I do feel better," said Rotha soberly. And after that she was careful to be sober as long as supper lasted.

When she went up to her room she sat down to think at leisure. The light was fading out of the depths of the tulip tree; the stars were twinkling in the dark blue; the still air was a little frosty. Yes, the year had sped on a good part of its course, since that May evening when Rotha had first made friends with the big tulip tree. Near five months ago it was, and now the days were growing short again. O was it possible that her release had come? And not the release she had hoped for, but this? so much better! Only five months; and her little imprisonment was ended, and its lessons all--*were*

they all--learned? With her heart filling and swelling, Rotha sat by her window and thought everything over, one thing after another. She had trusted; she might have trusted better!

Her aunt's sending her to this place had separated her from nothing, not even from Mr. Digby. Here he was, and had her again under his protection; and it was *he* henceforth who would say what she should do and where she should go. Not Mrs. Busby henceforth. Rotha's heart thrilled and throbbed with inexpressible joy. Not without queer other thrills also, of what might be described as an instinct of scruple; a certain inner consciousness that in this condition of things there was somewhat anomalous and difficult to adjust. Yet I am by no means sure that this consciousness did in any wise abate the joy. Rotha went over now in imagination all her interview with Mr. Southwode; recalled all he said, and remembered how he looked at each turn of the conversation. And the more she mused, the more her heart bounded. Till at last she recollects that there was something else to be done before eleven o'clock to-morrow; and she went from reverie to very busy activity.

It was all done, all she had to do, before breakfast time next day. After breakfast Rotha was in great doubt how to manage. If she dressed for her departure, Mr. and Mrs. Purcell would find out that something was going to happen, and perhaps try to hinder it. If she waited in her room until called for, she did not know but they would deny her being in the house at all and bar access to her. Doubtless Mr. Digby would not be permanently barred out, or thwarted in what he meant to do; but Rotha could not endure the thought of delay or disappointment. She would have gone out to meet him; but she was no longer a child, and a feeling of maidenly reserve forbade her. She made everything ready; knew she could change her dress in five minutes; and went down to the kitchen about ten o'clock; she could not stay any longer away from the scene of action. She took a knife and helped Mrs. Purcell pare the pears for stewing.

"You have been very kind to me, Prissy," she said, after some time of busy silence.

"Cause I warnt no more put out about the pears, you mean? Well, I'll tell you. I was fit to bite a tenpenny nail off, when I see you come in with that lapful last night. But I knowed you didn't know no better. If Joe warn't so set I'd make him pick the pears; but he always says and sticks to it, the fruits o' the earth what grows on trees aint no good. He'll eat 'em fast enough, I tells him, and so he will; as long as I'll stand to cook 'em; but he won't lift never a hand to get 'em off the trees. No thin' but corn and oats, and them things, is work for a man, he thinks."

"Unreasonable--" said Rotha.

"When isn't men unreasonable?--What do you want, sir? This aint the front o' the house."

And Rotha came round with a start, for there, at the door of the kitchen, at the top of the steps leading up from the scullery, stood Mr. Southwode; and Prissy's question had been put with a strong displeased emphasis.

"I know it," said the intruder in answer, "and I beg your pardon; but--
Does anybody live at the front of the house?

"Them as tries, finds out," said Mrs. Purcell, with a fierce knitting of her brows.

"That is also true, as I have learned by experience. I found that nobody lived there."

"Who did you think lived there? Who do you want?" asked Prissy, ungrammatically, but pointedly.

"Am I speaking to Mrs. Purcell?" And then the new-comer smiled at Rotha and shook hands with her.

"That is my name," said Prissy. "It aint her'n."

"I am aware of that too," said the stranger composedly, "and my present business is with Mrs. Purcell. I wish to know, in the first place, how many weeks Miss Carpenter has been in your house?"

"What do you want to know for?" said Prissy. "Is it any business o' yours?"

"Yes. I may say it is nobody else's business. You have a right to ask; and that is my answer."

"What do you want to know for?"

"I wish to discharge your account. Miss Carpenter promised that you should be honestly paid, when the time came; and the time is come now."

"Be you come from Mis' Busby?"

"I saw Mrs. Busby a few days ago."

"And she sent you?"

"I am not honoured with any commission from Mrs. Busby. As I told you, this business is mine, not hers."

"Mis' Busby put her here in us's care; and us is bound to take care of her, Joe and me. Us can't take no orders but from Mis' Busby."

"No; but you can take money? Mrs. Busby, I think, will not pay you. I will. But I must do it now. I am going away, and may probably never come this way again."

"I don't see what you have to do, a payin' Miss Carpenter's o win's," said Prissy, eyeing him suspiciously from head to foot.

"The best reason in the world.--Rotha, will you go and get ready?"--and then as the door closed upon Rotha Mr. Southwode went on.--"Miss Carpenter has been under my care ever since she lost her mother. I placed her with her aunt when I was obliged to go abroad, to England; and now I am come to take her away."

"To take Rotha away?" cried Prissy.

"To take Miss Carpenter away."

"Maybe Mis' Busby don't want her to go."

"Maybe not. But that is of no consequence. Let me have your account, please."

"Be you goin' to many her?" Prissy asked suddenly.

"That is not a question you have any need to ask."

"I asks it though,"--returned Prissy sturdily. "Be you?"

"No."

"Then I wish you'd go and talk to Mr. Purcell, 'cos I don' know nothin' about it. If you was goin' to marry her, stands to reason everything else gives way; folks must get married, if they has a mind to; but if you aint, I don't see into it, and don't see no sense in it. Mr. Purcell's at the barn. I wish you'd just go and talk to him."

"I have had trouble enough to find you," said the gentleman; "I shall not try to find Mr. Purcell. If you wish me to see him, I will wait here till you bring him."

And so saying, Mr. Southwode deposited his hat on the table and himself sat down. Prissy gave him glance after glance, unsatisfied and uneasy. She did long to refer things to Joe; and she saw she could not manage her unwelcome visiter; so finally she took off her apron and threw it over her head and set off on a run for the barn. Meanwhile Rotha came down, all ready for the drive.

"Where are they all?" she exclaimed.

"One gone after the other. I think, Rotha, it will be the pleasantest way for you, to go out at once to the carriage and wait there for me; if you will let me be so discourteous. You may as well escape the discussion I must hold with these people. Where is your luggage?"

"I have only one little trunk, up stairs at the top of the house. The rest of my things are at aunt Busby's."

"We will not ask her for them. I will take care of your box and bring it along. And give me this."

He took Rotha's handbag from her hand as he spoke and dismissed her with a smile; and Rotha, feeling as if all sorts of burdens were lifted from her at once, went out and went round to where a phaeton was waiting at the front of the house. And there she stood, with her heart beating; remembering her sad coming five months before: (but the five months seemed five years;) thinking of all sorts of incongruous things; uncertain, curious as what was to be done with

her; congratulating herself that she had *one* nice dress, her travelling dress, which she had carefully saved until now; and wondering what she should do for others, her calicos being a good deal worn and only working dresses at the best. So she stood waiting; doubtful, yet on the whole most glad; questioning, yet unable to be anxious; while five minutes after five minutes passed away. At last came the procession; Prissy in front, her husband following with Rotha's trunk on his shoulders, Mr. Southwode bringing up the rear.

"I never thought you'd go like *that*," said Prissy reproachfully. "If us is poor folks, us has hands clean enough to shake."

"I never meant to go without bidding you good bye, Prissy," said Rotha, grasping her hand heartily,

"Looks awful like it--" rejoined Mrs. Purcell.

"I shall always remember your kindness to me," Rotha went on.

"Pay and forget!" said Prissy. "It's all paid for now; and it's us as must give thanks." Then she added in a lower tone, "Where be you goin' now?"

"To Tanfield first, I suppose."

Prissy looked significantly at Mr. Southwode, who was ordering the disposition of the trunk, and had evidently more in her thoughts than she chose to utter. Then Joe came with his hand outstretched for a parting grasp, his face smiling with satisfaction.

"Well," he said, "we've all done the best we could; and nobody has anything to be sorry for. But we shall miss you, bad!"

"All he cares for's the pears!" said his wife. "Come along, Joe; if you are good, I'll get you some."

The wagon drove off before Rotha could hear Joe's answer. She was gone! The weary months of imprisonment were done and passed. What was to follow now?

Rotha could not think, could not care. The phaeton was rolling smoothly along; she was traversing easily the long stretch of highway she had looked at so often; her old best friend was in charge of her; Rotha gave up care. Yet questions would come up in her mind, though she dismissed them as fast; and her heart kept singing for joy. She did not even ask whither she was driven.

She was going to the hotel at Tanfield, the same where she had once put up alone. Here her box was ordered to a room which seemed to have been made ready for her; and Mr. Southwode remarked that lunch would be ready presently. Rotha took off her hat and joined him in the private room where it was prepared. A wood fire was burning, and a table was set, and the October sun shone in, and Mr. Digby was there reading a paper. Rotha put her hand upon her eyes; it seemed too much brightness all at once. Mr. Southwode on his part laid down his paper and looked at her; he was noticing with fresh surprise the changes that three years had made. Truly, *this* was not what he left in Mrs. Busby's care. And there is no doubt Mr. Southwode as well as Rotha had something to think of; and questions he had been debating with himself since yesterday came up with new emphasis and urgency. Nothing of all this shewed. He laid down his paper, stirred up the fire, gave Rotha an easier chair than the one she had first chosen, and took a seat opposite her.

"We have got to begin all over again," he smilingly remarked.

"Oh no!" said Rotha. "I do not think so."

"Why? We cannot be said to know one another now, can we?"

"I know you--" said Rotha a little lower.

"Do you? But I do not know you."

"I am just what I used to be," the girl said briskly, raising her head.

"By your own shewing, *not*. The bird I left would have beat its wings lame against the bars of the cage I found it in."

"I did beat my wings pretty lame at first," said Rotha; "but not in this cage."

"In what one then?" he asked quickly.

"Oh--after you went away. I mean that time."

"What made the cage at that time?"

"Aunt Serena--and aunt Serena's house."

"I was a little afraid of it. But I could not help myself. What did she do?"

Rotha hesitated a little.

"I do not think it is any use to go back to it now," she said. "It was partly my own fault. I had meant fully to do just as you said, and be polite and quiet and pleasant;--and I could not!"

"And so--?"

"And so, we had bad times. After aunt Serena kept me from seeing you and bidding you good bye, or even knowing that you were gone, I could not forgive her. And she knew she had wronged me. And that people do not forget."

"You thought I had too, eh?"

"No," said Rotha; "not then. I knew it was her doing."

"It was wholly her doing. Whenever I came and asked for you, I was always told that you were out, or sick in bed, or in some way quite unable to see me. And my going was extremely sudden, so that I had no time to take measures; other than to write to you and enclose my address."

"I never got it. And all those times I was always at home, and perfectly well, and sometimes--"

"Well--what?"

"Sometimes I was standing in the hall up stairs, leaning over the balusters and listening to your steps in the hall."

Colour rose in Rotha's cheek, and her voice took a tone which told tales; and Mr. Southwode thought he did begin to recognize his little friend of old time.

"And then--" Rotha went on, "you know what I used to be, and can guess that I was not very patient."

"I can guess that. And what are you now?"

She flashed one of her quick looks at him, smiled and blushed. "I have grown a little older--" she said.

Mr. Southwode quite perceived that. He was inclined to believe that what he had before him was the ripened fruit which in its green state he had tried so hard to bring into the sun; grown sweet and rich beyond his hopes. He turned the conversation however, took up his paper again and read to Rotha a paragraph concerning some late events in Europe; from which they went off into a talk leading far from personal affairs, to the affairs of nations past and present, and branching off into questions of history and literature. And Mr. Southwode found again the Rotha of old, only with the change I have above indicated. The talk was lively for an hour, until lunch was served. It was served for them alone, in the room where they were. As they took their places at table and the meal began, for a few minutes there was silence.

"This is like--and not like--the old time," Mr. Southwode remarked smiling.

"I think it is more 'not like,'" said Rotha.

"Why, pray?"

Rotha hesitated. "I said just now I had not changed; but in some things I have."

"Grown a little taller."

"A good deal, Mr. Southwode! And that is the least of the changes, I suppose."

"What are the others? Come, it is the very thing it imports me to know.
And the quicker the better. Tell me all you can."

"About myself?"

"I mean, about yourself!"

"That's difficult."

"I admit it is difficult; but easier for a frank nature, such as yours used to be, than for another."

Meanwhile he helped her to things on the table, taking care of her in the manner he used to do in old time. It put a kind of spell upon Rotta. The old instinct of doing what he wished her to do seemed to be springing up in its full imperativeness.

"What do you want to know?" she asked doubtfully.

"Everything!"

"Everything is not much, in this case. I have lived most of the time, till last May, with Mrs. Mowbray; at school."

"What did you do at school?"

"Nothing. I *began* to do, that is all. I have just begun to learn. Just began to feel that I was getting hold of things, and that they were growing most delightful. Then all was broken on ."

"That was last May?"

"Yes."

"Why do you suppose your aunt chose just that time to send you here?"

"I have no idea! She was going to Chicago, she said--"

"You know she did not go?"

"Did not go? She was in New York all this summer?"

"So I understood from herself In New York or near it."

"Then what *did* she mean by sending me here, Mr. Digby? She did not know you were coming."

"You think that knowledge would have affected her measures?"

"I know it would!"

"It is an unfruitful subject to inquire into. I am afraid your vacations can hardly have been pleasant times, spent in your aunt's family?"

"I was not always with her. Quite as often I staid with Mrs. Mowbray--my dear Mrs. Mowbray! and with her I went to Catskill, and to Niagara, and to Nahant, and to the Adirondacks. I had great times. It was the next best thing to--to the old days, when I was with you."

"I should think it would have been much better," Mr. Southwode said, forbidding the smile that was inclined to come. For Rotta's manner did not make her words less flattering.

"Do you? Do you not know me better than that, Mr. Digby?" said Rotta, feeling a little injured.

"I suppose I do! You were always an unreasonable child. But I can understand how you should regret Mrs. Mowbray."

"Now?" said Rotta. "I do not regret anything now. I am too happy to tell how happy I am."

"I remember, you are gifted with a great capacity for happiness," Mr. Southwode said, letting the smile come now.

"It is a good thing," said Ratha. "Sometimes, even this summer, I could forget my troubles in my flower beds. Did you notice in what nice order they were, and how many flowers still?"

"I am afraid I did not specially notice."

"Awhile ago they were full of bloom, and lovely. And when I took them in hand they were a wilderness. Nobody had touched them for ever so long. I had a job of it. But it paid."

"What else have you done this summer?"

"Nothing else, except study my Bible. It was all the study I had."

"How did you study it? as a disciple? or as an inquirer?"

"O, as a disciple. Can one really *study* it in any other way?"

"I am afraid so. There is deep study, and there is superficial study, you know. Then you are a disciple, Ratha?"

"Yes, Mr. Southwode; a sort of one. But I am one."

"When did that come about?"

"Not so very long after you went away. I came to the time that you told me of, that it would come."

"What time? I do not recollect."

"A time when everything failed me."--Ratha felt somehow disappointed, that she should remember so much better than he did.

"And then you found Christ?"

"Yes,--after a while."

"What have you been doing for him since then?"

"Doing for him?" Ratha repeated.

"Yes."

"I do not know. Not much. I am afraid, not anything."

"Was that because you thought there was not much to do?"

"N--o," said Ratha thoughtfully; "I did not think *that*. Only nothing particular for me to do."

"That was a mistake."

"I did not see anything for me to do."

"Perhaps. But the Lord has no servants to be idle. If they do not see their work, it is either that their eyes are not good, or that they are looking in the wrong direction."

A silence followed this statement, during which Ratha was thinking.

"Mr. Digby, what do you mean by their eyes being not good?"

"Not seeing clearly."

"And what makes people's eyes dim to see their work?"

"A want of sensitiveness in their optic nerve," he said smiling. "It is written, you know the words--'He died for all, that they which live should not live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them'--How has it been in your case?"

"I never thought of it," Ratha answered slowly. "I believe my head has been just full of myself,--learning and

enjoying."

"I do not want to check either, and the service of Christ does not check either. I am glad, after all, the *enjoying* has formed such a part of your experience."

"With Mrs. Mowbray, how should it not? You know her a little, Mr. Southwode?"

"Only a little."

"But you cannot know her, for you never needed her. O such a friend as she is! Not to me only, but to whoever needs her. She goes along life with her hands full of blessings, and she is forever dropping something into somebody's lap; if it is not help, it is pleasure; if it is not a fruit, it is a flower. I never saw anybody like her. She is a very angel in the shape of a woman; and she is doing angel's work all the day long. I have seen, and I know. All sorts of help, and comfort, and cheer, and tenderness, and sympathy; and herself is the very last person' in all the world she thinks of."

"That's a pretty character," said Mr. Southwode.

"It comes out in everything," Rotta went on. "It is not in giving only; she is forever making everybody happy, if she can. There are some people you cannot make happy. But nursing them when they are sick, and comforting them when they are in trouble, and helping them when they are in difficulty, and supplying them when they are in need, and if they are none of those things, then just throwing flowers in their lap,—that is Mrs. Mowbray. Yes, and she can reprove them when they are wrong, too; and that is a harder service than either."

"In how many of all these ways has she done you good, Rotta? if I may ask."

"It is only pleasant to answer, Mr. Digby. In all of them." And Rotta's eyes filled full, and her cheek took fire.

"Not 'supplying need' also?"

"O yes! O that was one of the first things her kind hand did for me. Mr. Southwode, do you know, many people criticise her for the use she makes of her money; they call her extravagant, and indiscreet, and all that. They say she ought to lay up her money."

"Quite natural."

"But it hurt me sometimes."

"It need not hurt you. There is another judgment, which is of more importance. 'There is, that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches.' And there is, 'that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.' But the world must weigh according to its balances, and they are too small to take heaven in."

A pause followed. With the going back to Mrs. Mowbray and all the memories connected with her, a sort of mist of association began to rise in Rotta's mind, to dim the new brightness of the present time. Uneasy half recollections of words or manner, or perhaps rather of the impression that words and manner had left behind them, began to come floating in upon her joyousness. The silence lasted.

"What did you learn with Mrs. Mowbray?" Mr. Southwode asked at length.

"Beginnings of things," said Rotta regretfully; "only beginnings. I had not time fairly to learn anything."

"Beginnings of what?"

"French, Latin, geometry and algebra, history of course, philosophy, chemistry,—those were the principal things. I was going into geology, and I wanted to learn German; but Mrs. Mowbray thought I was doing enough already."

"Enough, I should think. Music?"

"O no!" said Rotta smiling.

"Drawing?"

"No," said the girl with a sigh this time. "Mrs. Mowbray could not give me everything you know, for she has others to help. And aunt Serena would not have heard of such a thing."

"What would you like to do now, Rotha?"

"Do? About what, Mr. Digby?"

"Learning. I suppose you would like to go on in all these paths of knowledge you have entered?"

Rotha looked towards him a little doubtfully. How did he mean? Himself to be her teacher again? But his next words explained.

"You would like to go to school again?"

"Yes, of course. I should like it very much."

"Then that is one thing decided."

"Shall I go back to Mrs. Mowbray?" she asked eagerly.

Mr. Southwode hesitated, and delayed his answer.

"I would rather be at a greater distance from Mrs. Busby," he confessed then.

And Rotha made no answer. Those old impressions and associations were trooping in. She remembered that Mrs. Mowbray had never favoured the introduction of Mr. Southwode's name into their conversations; she had a dim apprehension that her influence would be thrown into Mrs. Busby's scale, and that possibly both ladies would join to prevent her, Rotha's, being under Mr. Southwode's protection and management. While not in the least suspicious, Rotha was too fine strung not to be an acute discerning. So far her thoughts went distinctly, and it was enough to tie her tongue. But beyond this, there were lights and shadows hovering on the horizon, which followed no traceable lines and revealed no recognizable forms, and yet made her feel that the social atmosphere held or might develop elements not altogether benign and peaceful. There had been words said or half said formerly, on one or two occasions, which had given her a clue she did not now like to follow out; words it would have been comfortable to forget, only Rotha did not forget. She *had* forgotten or dismissed them, but as I said they began to come back. Besides, she was older. She could see now, simple as she was still, that in the relations between her and her guardian there was something anomalous; that for a young girl like her to be under care of a man no older than he, who was neither brother nor uncle nor any relation at all, and for her to be eating her bread at his expense, was a state of things which must be regarded as unusual, and to say the least, questionable. Poor Rotha sat thinking of this while she went on with her luncheon, and growing alternately hot and cold as she thought of it; everything being aggravated by an occasional glance at the friend opposite her, whose neighbourhood was so sweet, and every line of his face and figure so inexpressibly precious to her. For it began to dawn upon Rotha the woman, what had been utterly spurned in idea by Rotha the child, that this anomalous relation could not subsist always. She must, or he must, find a way out of it; and she preferred that it should be herself and not he. And the only way out of it that Rotha could see, was, that she should train herself to become a teacher; and so, in a very few years, a very few, come to be self-supported. It struck her heart like a bolt of ice, the thought; for the passionate delight of Rotha's heart was this very friend, from whom she began to see that she must separate herself. The greatest comfort at this moment was, that Mr. Southwode himself looked so composed and untroubled by doubts or whatever else. Yet Mr. Southwode had his own thoughts the while; and to conclude from the calmness of his face that his mind was equally uncrossed by a question, would have been to make a mistake.

"Where then, if not to Mrs. Mowbray's?" Rotha inquired at last, breaking a long silence.

"Perhaps Boston. How would you like that? Or would you be very sorry not to return to New York?"

"Yes, sorry," said Rotha, "but I think it may be best. O Boston, or anywhere, Mr. Southwode! Just what you think wisest. But--I was thinking--"

Rotha laid down her knife and fork and pushed away her plate. Her heart began to beat at an uneasy rate, and her voice grew anxious.

"May I give you some fruit?"

"No--I do not care for it--thank you."

"This looks like a good pear. Try."

It was on the whole easier to be doing something with her fingers. Rotha began to peal the pear.

"You were thinking--?" Mr. Southwode then resumed.

"I?--O yes! I was thinking--" And Rotha's pear and peel went down. "I was thinking--Mr. Digby, if I knew just what I was going to do, or be afterwards,--wouldn't it help us to know what I had better study? what preparation I ought to have?"

"Afterwards? After what?" said Mr. Southwode, without laying down his pear.

"After I have done with school."

"When do you suppose that will be?"

"I do not know. That of course would depend upon the other question."

"Not necessarily. My wish is that you should be fitted for any situation in life. A one-sided education is never to be chosen, if one can help it; and one generally can help it. We can, at any rate. What are you thinking of doing, Rotha? in that 'afterwards' to which you refer?"

"I have not thought very much about it. But you know I must do *something*. I suppose teaching would be the best. I dare say Mrs. Mowbray would take me for one of her helpers, if I were once fitted to fill the place."

"What put this in your head?"

"I suppose, *first*, some words of aunt Serena. That was her plan for me."

"I thought it was arranged that I was to take care of you."

"You are doing it," said Rotha gratefully. "But of course you could not do it always."

"Why not?"

"Why--because--" said Rotha faltering and flushing a little,--"I do not belong to you in any way. It would not be right."

"My memory is better, it seems, than yours. If I recollect right, you were given to me by your mother."

"O yes," said Rotha, flushing deeper,--"she did. But I am sure she did not mean that I should be a charge upon you, after I was able to help myself."

"You do not fancy that you can 'help yourself now'?"

"No."

"You do not judge that you are empowered to take back her gift?"

"Not exactly. But Mr. Southwode," said Rotha half laughing, "I do not see how you can keep it. I *must* do something for myself."

"Not till I give permission. Eat your pear, and leave business to me."

It rather comforted Rotha that this command was given to her; nevertheless and although the pear was a fine one, she 'chewed the cud of meditation' along with it. Very inopportune those words heard long ago came floating back upon her memory, making her uncomfortable; making her doubt whether she could possibly remain long under the care that was so genial to her. Still, the present was too good to be spoiled, albeit the enjoyment of it was shadowed, by these reflections. I think, rather, according to some perverse principle of human nature, they made the enjoyment of it more tremblingly acute. However, the fruit was consumed in silence; Mr. 'Southwode having, as I hinted, his own thoughts. They left the table and took seats before the fire.

"Now Rotha," said her guardian, "I should like to know what you have done in these three years. Are you willing that I should try to find out?"

"By questioning me?" said Rotha laughing and flushing. "It would not be a new thing, Mr. Digby."

Whereupon Mr. Southwode went into an examination of Rotha's acquirements and mental standing. It was pleasant enough and easy enough, though it was searching; it had too much savour of old times about it to be anything but easy and pleasant. Rotha did not fear it, and so enjoyed it. And so did her examiner. He found all that he had once known possible and hoped for her. The quick intelligence of the child he found matured; the keen apprehension practised; the excellent memory stored, even beyond what he expected. And then, Rotha's capital powers of reasoning were as true and clear-sighted as ever, her feeling as just and unperverted; the thirst for knowledge was more developed and very strong; and the knowledge already laid up amounted to a stock of surprising amount and variety.

That was to both parties a very pleasant two hours. Rotha was looking, by turns, into the face she loved so well and watching the familiar face play, with the delight of one whose eyes have been long without the sight of what they loved. Moreover, she was taking up again the various threads of learning which had slipped from her hand, feeling now that her hold of them would not loose again. There was a savour of old associations, too, about this talk, which was very fascinating; and further yet, Rotha had a subtle consciousness that she was satisfying Mr. Southwode. And he on his part was making new acquaintance with his little friend of old, and noticing with a little surprise and much admiration how she had changed and grown. The face which was always so eager and expressive had taken on womanly softness and mature richness, without losing a bit of its changeful fire. The sallow skin had become clear and fine; the lines of the lips, not less passionate and not less decided than they used to be, were soft and pure; refinement was in every curve of them, and in all the face, and all the figure, and in every movement of either; and the deep, flashing eyes could be innocently merry and sweet too, and constantly answered him before the lips could speak. As one quarter of an hour sped on after another, Mr. Southwode grew less and less ready to be relieved of his charge. Yet, he asked himself, what should he do with her? He did not entertain the idea Mrs. Purcell had suggested; it was not precisely a disagreeable idea, and it recurred to him, in the midst of philosophy and mathematics; it was not a disagreeable idea, but--he had never entertained it! And he doubted besides if Rotha would easily entertain it. He knew she was fond of him, fond of being with him; but it was a childish fondness, he said to himself; it could be nothing else. It was a childish fondness, too frankly shewn to be anything more or deeper. And Rotha was very young, had seen nobody, and could not know what she would like. That she would do anything he asked her, he had little doubt; she would marry him if he asked her; but Mr. Southwode did not want a wife on those terms. What should he do with her? Yes, he knew the difficulties, much better than she knew them; he knew how people would talk, and how under the circumstances they would have reason to talk; which Rotha knew not. All which troublesome elements of the relation subsisting between them, only somehow made Mr. Southwode hold to it the faster. Probably he was by nature an obstinate man.

Upon the pause which followed the end of her examination came a question of Rotha.

"Are you going to stay in this country now, Mr. Southwode?"

"My home is in England," he answered, rousing himself out of reverie.

Rotha's heart sank at that; sank sadly. Next came a recoil of her reason--Yes, you had better go away, if I cling to you in this fashion!

"Why?" was his next counter question. "What makes you ask?"

"I did not know," said Rotha. "I wanted to know. I heard people say you would live over there."

"What else have you heard people say about me?"

"Not much. Aunt Serena never spoke of you, I think, if she could help it. I have only heard somebody say that you were very rich--that your home would be over there now, probably;--and that you would concern yourself no more about me," Rotha added, in the instinct of truth.

"Kind judgment," said Mr. Southwode; "but in this case not true. The rest is true, that I have a large property."

He went on to tell Rotha several things about himself; not using many words, at the same time not making any mystery of it. He told her that his very large means came from business; that the business was in hands which made it unnecessary that he should give to the oversight of it more than a portion of his time. He had a home in England, and he described it; in the Lake country, surrounded with beautiful scenery. He was very fond of it, but he was not a fixture there; on the contrary, he went wherever there was reason for him to go, or work to be done by his going. "So I am here now, you see." he concluded.

And so, something else may take you back again, and keep you there! thought Rotha; but she did not say what she thought, nor indeed say anything. Mr. Southwode's detail, while it interested her terribly, and in a sort nattered her, also reduced her to a very low feeling of downheartedness. What was she to him, the poor little American orphan, to the rich English gentleman? what but just one of his various and probably many objects of benevolence? What more could she be, in the nature of things? No; she had been quite right; what she had to do was to equip herself as speedily as possible for the battle of life, and dash into it as a teacher, and only remember as a kind of fairy tale the part of her life when he had been its guardian and protector. Rotha's heart swelled; yet she would shew nothing of that. She sat still and moveless; too still and unchanging, in fact, for the supposition that her thoughts were not whirling round a fixed centre. I do not know how much of this Mr. Southwode read, I am not sure but the whirl of his own thoughts occupied him sufficiently. However, when this still silence had lasted a little while, he broke it up by proposing to take Rotha a drive. "You used to like it," he remarked. Rotha did not like it less now. She went to get ready; thinking to herself that it was maybe the very last time. Why had she come to Tanfield at all? and why had Mr. Southwode sought her out there? Better if she could have remained as she was, and he no more than a locked up treasure of the past kept in her memory.

CHAPTER XXX.

DOWN HILL.

The afternoon was on the wane by the time they set out. The afternoon of a fair day in October. For Rotha's present mood it was almost too fair. The country around Tanfield is level for a mile or two, and well cultivated; the hues of the forest at the change of tire leaf are not seen here. Yet October was not left without witnesses. Here and there a warm stubble field told of summer gone and harvests gathered; her and there the yellowing green of a weeping willow proclaimed that autumn was passing away. Hay ricks carefully covered; wood sheds carefully filled; now and then a plough upturning the rich soil, and leaving furrows of ruddy brown creeping over the field; they all told the time of year; and so did at intervals a great maple tree in its livery of red and green, or a hickory all in gold, or a great red oak in its dark splendour. There was no mistaking October; even without the genial, gracious sun which shed over all the landscape such mellow and mellowing rays. Mr. Southwode had obtained an easy-going phaeton, with a pair of lively ponies; and through this level, quiet, rich, farm country they bowled along smoothly and fast. The pleasure, to Rotha, was so keen that it almost took on the semblance of pain. "This once," she was saying to herself; "and if only this once, then why this once?" And then she chid herself, and bade herself enjoy thoroughly and thankfully what was given her. She tried, and did not perfectly succeed.

Mr. Southwode was silent on his part, more than usual. Certainly his reflections were in no sort like Rotha's, as they had no need; yet he was not clear in his own mind as to the best, or even the possible, issues of things. He found that he was not willing to entertain for a moment Rotha's proposition about striking off from his protection and making a livelihood for herself. Yet it was good sense. In fact, what else could be done? If Mr. Southwode had had a mother, and so a home, to which he could have introduced her; that would have been simple enough. She might have taken the place of a young sister. Failing that, what plan could be substituted, short of the one Mrs. Purcell had rudely proposed? He had no idea that Rotha was ready for that. Yes, undoubtedly she loved him, after another fashion; he was her childhood's friend and guardian and tutor; and as a child, no doubt, she still paid him reverence and affection. Mr. Southwode would never take advantage of the power this fact gave him, to draw Rotha into an alliance which her free mind would not have chosen. Some men would; many men might; it did not suit him. He could never take a wife on such doubtful terms. He was not clear that he wanted her on any terms. Yet oddly, and inconsistently, when he looked at the fine, honest, thoughtful, sensitive face beside him, something within him said, "I shall never let you go." It was very inconsistent. How he was to keep her, he could not see. He did not look at her often, for every look perplexed him. And Mr. Southwode was not in the least used to being perplexed. That perplexed him. Meanwhile he kept his horses well in hand and drove admirably. Over the level roads, through the still air, they went with the steadiness and almost the swiftness, of a locomotive. It was glorious driving. Rotha caught her breath with delight.

At this rate of progress however the small ex-tent of level country was soon passed over. They began to get among broken ground and low hills; hills and round heights covered with tufts of wood growth, now in all the colours of the gay time of year. Hickories all gold, ashes in sad purple, bronzed chestnut oaks, yellow birches, and sometimes sober green savins; and maples in abundance and in brilliant variegation. There were risings and fallings of ground now, and turning of angles; and as they went the hills grew higher and set closer upon the road, and the road was often too steep for the pace the horses had hitherto kept up. Now they must walk up a hill, and sometimes walk down again.

"Do you know where you are, Mr. Digby?" said Rotha, one of these times.

"Not perfectly."

"Is not that a very favourable statement of the case?"

"Let us take an observation," said he, pulling up at the top of the hill. "There is the west, by the sun. We have kept our backs upon Tanfield generally; it must lie well to the south, and a little to the east of us. I am going to take the first turning that promises to bring us round, and back by another road. There is the railway!--do you see, yonder, its straight level line? Now I know where we are. That is the Tanfield railway, running on to the north. We must come about and meet it, somewhere."

The coming about, however, proved to be a long and gradual process. The first turning they took did not lead immediately in the desired direction, only as it were inclined towards it; the second turning was not more satisfactory. Meanwhile they got deeper among the hills; the ground was more and more rough; farming land disappeared; rocks and woodland filled the eye, look where it would; the roads were less travelled and by no means smooth going any longer. Even so, they were prettier; the changes of hill and valley, sudden and varied as they were, gave interest to every foot of the way. All this took time; but nobody was in a hurry. Rotha was thinking that perhaps it was her last drive with Mr. Southwode; and Mr. Southwode was thinking, I do not know what; nor perhaps did he.

The point was found at last where they could turn their faces towards Tanfield; they were sure of their way when they reached the top of a hill and saw, spread out before them for many a square mile, the plain country in which the town stood, and far away in the midst of it could discern the glinting of the light upon its spires and houses. The sun was very low; its level rays gave an exquisite illumination to the whole scene, lighting every rise of ground and every tuft of woodland, and even coming back from scattered single trees with beautiful defining effect. Mr. Southwode drew up his horses; and for a few minutes he and Rotha fed their eyes with what was before them. The sun was just kissing the horizon.

"That is worth coming all the way for!" he said.

"And we shall not have it but just half a minute longer," said Rotha. "There--the light is going now. O what a sight it is!--There! now it is all gone. How far are we from home, do you suppose?"

"By the roads, I do not know; but once at the bottom of this hill we shall have nothing but level travelling, and the horses go pretty well."

"*Pretty* well!" said Rotha laughing. "I am wondering then what you would call very well? We have got to cross the railway, Mr. Southwode. It runs by the foot of the hill."

"There is no train near," he answered as he put his horses in motion.

They went slowly down the hill, which was rough and steep. The horses behaved well, setting down their feet carefully, and holding back the carnage with the instinct or training which seems to be aware what would be the consequence of letting themselves and it go. But then happened one of those things against which instinct is no protection and training cannot provide. Just as a sharp turn in the road was reached, from which it went on turning round a shoulder of the hill till it reached the lower ground, this thing happened. It was the worst possible place for an accident; the descent was steep and rough and winding, the road disappearing from view behind the turn; and crossed evidently, just a little further below, by the railway track. The horses at this point came to a sudden stop. Mr. Southwode alone saw why. Some buckle or pin or strap, which had to do with the secure holding of the end of the carriage pole to the harness, was broken or had given way, and the pole had fallen to the ground. The horses had made an astonished pause, but he knew this pause would be followed the next instant by a mad headlong rush down the hill and a swallowing of the plain with their hoofs, if they ever reached it; which was in a high degree unlikely for them and impossible for the carriage. Rotha only knew that the horses quietly stopped, and that Mr. Southwode said quietly,

"Jump, Rotha!"

Yes, he said it quietly; and yet there was something in tone or accent which left no room for disobedience or even hesitation. That something was very much the matter, Rotha at once knew; and if there was danger she did not at all wish to get out of it and leave him to face it alone. She would rather have sat still and taken what came, so she took it with him. Moreover she had always been told that in case of a runaway the last thing to be done is to try to get out of the carriage. All this was full in her mind; and yet when Mr. Southwode said "Jump," she knew she must mind him. He offered her no help; but light and active as she was she did not need it; a step on the wheel and a spring to the ground, and she was safe. Just for that instant the horses stood still; then followed what their driver had known would follow.

Almost as Rotha's foot touched the ground they dashed forward, and with one confused rush and whirl she saw them, phaeton and all, disappear round the turn of the hill.

And there was the railway track to cross! Rotha stood still, feeling stunned and sick. It was all so sudden. One minute in happy safety and quiet, beside the person she liked best in the world; only the next minute alone and desolate, with the sight of him before her eyes hurled to danger and probable death. Danger? how could anything live to get to the bottom of that hill at the rate the horses took?

Of the fallen carnage pole Rotha knew nothing, and needed not that to be assured that the chance of her ever hearing Mr. Southwode speak again was a very, very slender one. She did not think; she merely knew all this, with a dumb, blank consciousness; she stood still, mechanically pressing her hands upon her heart. The noise of the horses' hoofs and the rushing wheels had been swallowed up by the intervening hill, and the stillness was simply mocking in its tranquil peacefulness. The sunlight at the glory of which they had both been looking, had hardly died away from the landscape; and one of them, most likely, was beyond seeing the light of earth forevermore. Rotha stood as still as death herself, listening for a sound that came not, and gradually growing white and whiter. Yet she never was in any danger of fainting; no sealing of her senses served as a release to her pain; in full, clear consciousness she stood there, and heard the silence and saw the sweet fall of the evening light upon the plain. Only stunned; with a consciousness that was but partially alive to suffering. I suppose the mind cannot fully take in such a change at once. She was so stunned, that several minutes passed before she could act, or move; and it seemed that the silence and peace had long been reigning over hill and plain, when she roused herself to go down the road.

She went then with dreadful haste, yet so trembling that she could not go as fast as she would. The horror of what might be at the bottom of the hill might have kept her for ever upon it; but the need to know was greater still; and so with an awful fear of what every step might bring her to, she sped down the hill. She heard no noise; she saw no wreck; following the winding of the road, which wound fearfully down such a steep, she came to the railway crossing and passed it, and followed on still further down; the curve of the road always hiding from her what might be beyond. Her feet got wings at last; she was shaking in every joint, yet fairly flew along, being unable to endure the fear and uncertainty. No trace of any disaster met her eyes; no call for help or cry to the horses came to her ears; what did the silence portend?

Just at the bottom the road made another sharp turn around a clump of woodland. Rounding this turn, Rotha came suddenly upon what she sought. The first glance shewed her that Mr. Southwode was upon his feet; the second that the horses were standing still. Rotha hardly saw anything more. She made her way, still running, till she got to Mr. Southwode's side, and there stopped and looked at him; with white lips apart and eyes that put an intense question. For though she saw him standing and apparently well able to stand, the passion of fear could not so immediately be driven out by the evidence of one sense alone. He met the urgency of her eyes and smiled.

"I am all right," he said.

"Not hurt?"

"Not in the least."

Looking at her still, for her face had startled him, he saw a change come over it which was beyond the demands of mere friendly solicitude, even when very warm. He saw the flash of intense joy in her eyes, and what was yet more, a quiver in the unbent lovely lines about the mouth. One does not stop to reason out conclusions at such a time. Mr. Southwode was still holding the reins of the panting horses, the carriage was a wreck a few yards off, they were miles away from home; he forgot it all, and acting upon one of those subtle instincts which give no account of themselves, he laid one arm lightly around Rotha and bent down and kissed the unsteady lips.

A sudden flood of scarlet, so intense that it was almost pain, shot over Rotha's face, and her eyes drooped and failed utterly to meet his. She had been very near bursting into tears, woman's natural relief from overstrained nerves; but his kiss turned the current of feeling into another channel, and the sting of delight and pain was met by an overwhelming consciousness. Had she betrayed herself? What made him do that? It was good for Rotha just then that she was no practised woman of the world, not skilled in any manner of evasion or trick of deceptive art. If she had been; if she had answered his demonstration with a little cold, careless laugh, and turned it off with a word of derision; as I suppose she would if she had not been so utterly true and honest, according to a woman's terrible instinct of self-preservation, or preservation of her secret; he would have thought as he had thought before--she loves me as a child does. But the extreme confusion, and the lovely abasement of the lowered brow, went to his heart with their unmistakeable revelation. Instead of releasing her, he put both arms round her now and gently drew her up to him. But Rotha was by no means so

clear in her mind as by this time he was. She did not understand his action, and so misinterpreted it. She made a brave effort to relieve him from what she thought overwrought gratitude.

"That is nothing to thank me for, Mr. Southwode," she said. "Any friend would have been anxious, in my place."

"True. Were you anxious simply as a friend, Rotha?"

Rotha hesitated, and the hesitation lasted till it amounted to an eloquent answer; and the arms that held her drew her a little closer.

"But I do not understand--" she managed to say.

"Do you not? I do. I think I can make you understand too."

But his explanations were wordless, and if convincing were exceedingly confusing to Rotha.

"But Mr. Southwode!--what *do* you mean?" she managed at last to say, trying to release herself.

"I mean, that you belong to me, and I belong to you, for the rest of our lives. That is what I mean."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes," said he with a low laugh; "and so are you. When you and I mean a thing, we mean it."

Rotha wondered that he could mean it, and she wondered how he could know that she meant it. Had she somehow betrayed herself? and how? She felt very humble, and very proud at the same time; in one way esteeming at its full value the woman's heart and life she had to give, as every woman should; in another way thinking it not half good enough. Shamefaced, because her secret was found out, yet too honest and noble of nature to attempt any poor effort at deceit, she stood with lights and shadows flying over her face in a lovely and most womanly manner; yet mostly lights, of shy modesty and half veiled gladness and humble content. Fifty things came to her lips to say, and she could speak none of them; and she began to wish the silence would be broken.

"How did you know, Mr. Southwode?" she burst forth at last, that question pressing too hard to be satisfied.

"Know what?" said he.

"I mean--you know what I mean! I mean,--now came you--what made you-- speak as you did? I mean! *that* isn't it. I mean, what justification did you think you had?"

Mr. Southwode laughed his low laugh again.

"Do I need justification?"

"Yes, for jumping at conclusions."

"That is the way they say women always do."

"Not in such things!"

"Perhaps not. Certainly *you* have not done it in this case."

"How came you to do it? Please answer me! Mr. Southwode, are you sure you know what you mean? You did not think of any such thing when we set out upon our drive this afternoon?" Rotha spoke with great and painful difficulty, but she felt she must speak.

"I had thought of it. But Rotha, I was not sure of you."

"In what way?"

"I knew you cared for me, a good deal; but I fancied it was merely a child's devotion, which would vanish fast away as soon as the right claim was made to your heart."

"And why do you not think so still?" said Rotha, the flames of consciousness flashing up to her very brow. But Mr.

Southwode only laughed softly and kissed, both lips and brow, tenderly and reverently, if very assuredly.

"I have not done anything--" said Rotha, trembling and a little distressed.

"Nothing, but to be true and pure and natural; and so has come the answer to my question, which I might not have ventured to ask. Mrs. Purcell asked me to-day whether I was going to marry you, and I said no; for I never could have let you marry me with a child's transient passion and find out afterwards that your woman's heart was not given me. But now I will correct my answer to Mrs. Purcell, if I have opportunity."

"But," said Rotha hesitating,--"I think in one thing you are mistaken. I do not think my feeling has really changed, since long ago."

"Did you give me your woman's heart *then*?"

"You think I had it not to give; but I think, I gave you all I had. And though I have changed, *that* has not changed."

"I take it," he said. "And what I have to give you, I will let my life tell you. Now we must try to get home."

Released from the arm that had held her all this while, Rotha for the first time surveyed the ground. There were the horses, standing quietly enough after their mad rush down the hill; panting yet, and feeling nervous, as might be seen by the movement of ears and air of head. And a few rods behind lay what had been the phaeton; now a thorough and utter wreck.

"How did it happen?" exclaimed Rotha, in a sudden spasm of dread catching hold of Mr. Southwode's arm. He told her what had been the beginning of the trouble.

"What carelessness! But how have you escaped? And how came the carriage to be such a smash?"

"I knew what was before me, when on the hill the horses made that sudden pause and I saw the pole on the ground. I knew they would be still only that one instant. Then I told you to jump. You behaved very well."

"I did nothing," said Rotha. "The tone of your voice, when you said 'Jump!' was something, or had something in it, which I could not possibly disobey. I did not want to jump, at all; but I had no choice. Then?--"

"Then followed what I knew must come. You saw how we went down the hill; but happily the road turned and you could not see us long. I do not know how we went scathless so far as we did; but at last the end of the pole of the phaeton lodged against some obstacle in the road, stuck fast, and the carriage simply turned a somersault over it, throwing me out into safety, and itself getting presently broken almost to shivers."

"Throwing you out into safety!" Rotha exclaimed, turning pale.

"Don't I look safe?" said he smiling.

"And you are as cool as if nothing had happened."

"Am I? On the contrary, I feel very warm about the region of my heart, and as if a good deal had happened. Now Rotha, we have got to walk home. How many miles it is, I do not know."

"And I do not care!" said Rotha. "But how came you to keep hold of the reins all the time? Or did you catch them afterwards?"

"No, I held on to them. It was the only way to save the horses."

"But they were running! How could you?"

"I do not know; only what has to be done, generally can be done. We will take the rest of the way gently."

But I am not sure that they did; and I am sure that they did not much think how they took it. Rather briskly, I fancy, following the horses, which were restless yet; and with a certain apprehension that there was a long way to go. On the roads they had travelled at first coming out there had been frequently a farmhouse to be seen; now they came to none. The road was solitary, stretching away between tracts of rocky and stony soil, left to its natural condition, and with patches of wood. But what a walk that was after all! The mild, mellow October light beautified even the barren spots of earth, and made the woodland tufts of foliage into clusters of beauty. As the light faded, the hues of things grew

softer; a spicier fragrance came from leaf and stem; the gently gathering dusk seemed to fold the two who were walking through it into a more reserved world of their own. And then, above in the dark bright sky lights began to look forth, so quiet, so peaceful, as if they were blinking their sympathy with the wanderers. These did not talk very much, and about nothing but trifling matters by the way; yet it came over Rotha's mind that perhaps in all future time she would never have a pleasanter walk than this. Could life have anything better? And she might have been right, if she had been like many, who know nothing more precious than the earthly love which for her was just in its blossoming time. But she was wrong; for to people given over, as these two were, to the service of Christ, the joys of life are on an ascending scale; experience brings more than time takes away; affection, having a joint object beyond and above each other, does never grow weary or stale, and never knows disappointment or satiety; and the work of life brings in delicious fruits as they go, and the light of heaven shines brighter and brighter upon their footsteps. It can be only owing to their own fault, if to-morrow is not steadily better than to-day.

But from what I have said it will appear that Rotha was presently in a contented state of mind; and she went revolving all sorts of things in her thoughts as she walked, laying up stores of material for future conversations, which however she was glad Mr. Southwode did not begin now.

As for Mr. Southwode, he minded his horses, and also minded her; but if he spoke at all it was merely to remark on some rough bit of ground, or some wonderful bit of colour in the evening sky.

"Well, hollo, mister!" cried a hotel hostler as they approached near enough to have the manner of their travelling discernible,--"what ha' you done wi' your waggin'?"

"I was unable to do anything with it."

"Where is it then?"

"About five miles off, I judge, lying at the foot of a hill."

"Spilled, hey?"

"It will never hold anything again."

"What's that? what's this?" cried the landlord now, issuing from the lower door of the house; "what's wrong here, sir?"

"I do not know," said Mr. Southwode; "but there has been carelessness somewhere. Either the hostler did his work with his eyes shut, or the leather of the harness gave way, or the iron work of something. The pole fell, as we were going down a steep hill; of course the phaeton is a wreck. I could only save the horses."

The landlord was in a great fume.

"Sir, sir," he stammered and blustered,--"this is *your* account of it."

"Precisely," said Mr. Southwode. "That is my account of it."

"How in thunder did it happen? It was bad driving, I expect."

"It was nothing of the kind. It was a steep hill, a dropped carriage pole, and a run. You could not expect the horses not to run. And of course the carriage went to pieces."

"Who was in it?"

"I was in it. The lady jumped out, just before the run began."

"Didn't you know enough to jump too?"

"I knew enough not to jump," said Mr. Southwode, laughing a little. "By that means I saved your horses."

"And I expect you want me to take that as pay for the carriage! and take your story too. But it was at your risk, sir--at your risk. When I sends out a team, without I sends a man with it, it's at the driver's risk, whoever he is. I expect you to make it good, sir. I can't afford no otherwise. The phaeton was in good order when it went out o' this yard; and I expect you to bring it back in good order, or stand the loss. My business wouldn't keep me, sir, on no other principles. You must make the damage good, if you're a gentleman or no gentleman."

"Take the best supposition, and let me have supper. If you will make *that* good, Mr. Landlord, you may add the phaeton to my bill."

"You'll pay it, I s'pose?" cried the anxious landlord, as his guest turned away.

"I always pay my bills," said Mr. Southwode, mounting the steps to the piazza. "Now Rotha, come and have something to eat."

Supper was long since over for the family; the two had the great dining hall to themselves. It was the room in which Rotha had taken her solitary breakfast the morning of her arrival. Now as she and her companion took their seats at one of the small tables, it seemed to the girl that she had got into an enchanted country. Aladdin's vaults of jewels were not a pleasanter place in his eyes, than this room to her to-night. And she had not to take care even of her supper; care of every sort was gone. One thing however was on Rotha's mind.

"Mr. Southwode," she said as soon as they had placed themselves,—"it was not your fault, all that about the phaeton."

"No."

"Then you ought not to pay for it."

"It would be more loss to this poor man, than to me, Rotha, I fancy."

"Yes, but right is right. Making a present is one thing; paying an unjust charge is another. It is allowing that you were to blame."

"I do not know that it is unjust. And peace is worth paying for, if the phaeton is not."

"How much do you suppose it will be?"

"I do not know," he said laughing a little. "Are you anxious, about it?"

Rotha coloured up brightly. "It seems like allowing that you were in the wrong," she said. "And the man was very impertinent."

"I recognize your old fierce logic of justice. Haven't you learned yet that one must give and take a good deal in this world, to get along smoothly? No charge the man can ever make will equal what the broken phaeton is worth to me, Rotha."

CHAPTER XXXI.

DISCUSSIONS.

The sitting room, when they came to it after supper, looked as pleasant as a hotel sitting room could. It was but a bare apartment, after the fashion of country hotels; however it was filled with the blaze of a good fire, and that gives a glimmer of comfort anywhere. Moreover it was a private room; they had it to themselves. Now what next? thought Rotha.

Mr. Southwode put a chair for her, gave a little dressing to the fire, and then stood by the mantel-piece with his back towards it, so that his face was in shadow. Probably he was considering Rotha's face, into which the fire shone full. For it was a pleasant thing to look at, with its brightness just now softened by a lovely veil of modesty, and a certain unmistakeable blessedness of content lurking in the corners of the mouth and the lines of the brow. It met all the requirements of a fastidious man. There was sense, dignity, refinement, sensitiveness, and frankness; and the gazer almost forgot what he wanted to do, in the pleasure of looking. Rotha had time to wonder more than once "what next?"

"It seems to me we have a great deal to talk about, Rotha," Mr. Southwode said at last. "And not much time. What comes first?"

"I suppose," said Rotha, "the first thing is, that I must go back to school."

"I suppose you must!" he said. There was an accent about it that made

Rotha laugh.

"Why I must of course!" she said. "I do not know anything;--only the beginnings of things."

"Yes," repeated Mr. Southwode, "for a year you must go, I suppose. For a year-- After that, I will not wait any longer. You shall do the rest of your studying with me."

"You know I like that best of all--" she said softly.

"Perhaps I will take you to Germany."

"Germany!"--

"It is a good place to study German. Or to study anything."

"Must one go to France too, to study French?" Rotha asked with a nervous laugh.

"We must not be too long away from home. But a year--or till next summer; school terms end in summer, do they not?"

"In June."

"So, for a year, or for eight months, I shall hardly see you. We must do a great deal of talking to-night."

"Where will you be, Mr. Digby?" Rotha asked timidly, as he took a chair beside her.

"Not far off; but for this interval I shall choose to play the part of guardian, rather than that of lover, before the eyes of the world."

"O yes, indeed!" said Rotha earnestly. "For every reason."

"All the more, I am not going to play the part of guardian to-night. Rotha I think *now*, it would be as well to return to Mrs. Mowbray for these eight months. Would you like that?"

"O I shall like it very much! if you like it."

"Things are changed, since we talked about it this afternoon."

"Yes!--" said Rotha breathless. And there was something she wanted to say, but at that minute she could not say it. For that minute she could not disturb the sweetness of things as they were. Scruples must wait. Mr. Southwode saw that she was a little disturbed, shy and nervous, albeit there was no doubt that she was very happy. He stretched out his hand and took hers, holding it in a fast steady clasp; as if to assure her of something tangible and real in her new happiness. "Now," said he, "tell me about yourself--about all these years."

"I did tell you, in part."

"Yes. Tell me the other part. I want to have the whole now."

"It would just--annoy you, I am afraid."

"What sort of a home did you have with your aunt?"

"Not pleasant. That was *partly* my own fault. I was not patient and gentle and quiet--as you told me to be. I got into a kind of a fury, at things and at her."

"What did she do?"

And then Rotha told him the whole story, not sparing herself at all by the way; till he knew pretty well what her life had been these three years, and what part Mrs. Mowbray and what part Mrs. Busby had played in it. Only one thing Rotha did not tell him; the episode of the stockings. He listened in absolute silence, save that now and then he helped her on with a question; holding her hand firmly all the while. And Rotha felt the clasp and knew what it meant, and poured out her heart. After she had done, he was still silent a minute.

"What shall we do to Mrs. Mowbray!" he broke out.

"You cannot do anything to her," said Rotha. "Thanks are nothing; and there is no way of doing the least thing beside;--unless she could be very ill and left to my care; and I do not wish that."

"Perhaps she will give up schooling some day; and we will coax her over to England and make her live with us."

Rotha started and turned upon the speaker one of her brilliant looks. A sort of delight at the thought, and admiration of *his* thought, with a flush of intense affection which regarded at least two people, made her face like a cluster of diamonds. Mr. Southwode smiled, and then began to talk about that home to which he had alluded. He described it to Rotha; sketched the plan of the house for her; told her about the people of the surrounding country. The house was not magnificent or stately, he said; but large, comfortable, old, and rather picturesque in appearance; standing in the midst of extensive and very lovely grounds, where art had not interfered with nature. He told Rotha he thought she would like it.

Rotha's eyes fell; she made no answer, but was he thought very grave. He went on to tell her about himself and his business. He, and his father and grandfather before him, had been owners of a large manufacturing establishment, the buildings of which made almost a village some three miles from the house, and the workmen in which were very many.

"Isn't that troublesome often?" Rotha asked, forgetting herself now.

"No. Why should it be troublesome?"

"I read in the papers so much about strikes, and disagreements between masters and workmen in this country."

"We never had a strike, and we never have disagreements."

"That is nice; but how do you manage? I suppose I can guess! They all do what you tell them."

"I do not tell them anything unreasonable."

"Still, ignorant people do not always know what is reasonable."

"That is true. And it is rather the Golden Rule we go by, than the might of Reason or the reign of Law."

"How do you manage, Mr. Digby?"

"I am not to be Mr. Digby always, I hope?"

"This year--" murmured Rotha.

"This year! I do not mean to ask anything unreasonable of you either; but I *would* like you to remember that things are changed," he said, amused.

"Yes, I will," said Rotha confusedly--"I will remember; I do remember, but now please tell me about your factory people."

"What about them?"

"O, how you manage; how they do; anything!"

"Well--the hands go to work at six o'clock, and work two hours; or not quite that, for the bell rings in time to let them wash their hands before breakfast; and for that there are rooms provided, with soap and towels and everything necessary. Then they gather in the dining halls, where their breakfast is ready; or if any of them prefer to bring their own food, it is cooked for them. There is no compulsion."

"What do they have for breakfast?"

"Coffee and tea and bread, and porridge with milk or with syrup--all at certain fixed low rates and all of good quality. There are people to cook, and boys and girls to wait upon the tables. They have the time till half past eight, but it is not all used for eating; the last quarter of an hour they stroll about and talk together. At half past eight comes the time for prayers. One of the managers conducts the service in the chapel; the Bible is read, and a hymn is sung, and there is a short prayer. At nine o'clock all hands go back to work."

"They have had an hour's good rest," said Rotha. "You say, in the *chapel*? have you a chapel for them?"

"In the midst of the mills. It is a pretty little building--in old English rustic style; I think it very pretty."

"I dare say the people enjoy that," said Rotha. "It *ought* to be pretty, for them. I should think your hands would never want to leave you, Mr. Southwode."

"They never do. And as I told you, there is never a question of strikes. Neither do we ever have a time of bad business. The work done is so thorough and has been so long well known, that we never need to ask for orders. We never lose by making bad debts; and we never give notes, or take them. I say 'we'--I am using the old formula--it is all in my hand now."

"Why are not other people wise enough to make such arrangements and have the same sort of comfort?"

"Men fail to recognize their common humanity with those under them. That has been the basis of our management from the beginning. But the chapel, and the religious influence, are of later date.--I must find a ring for this finger, Rotha."

"A ring!" exclaimed the girl.

"Yes. Is not that the custom here? to make people remember what they have pledged themselves to?--" he said smiling.

"Oh never mind that, Mr. Southwode!" said Rotha hurriedly. "Go on and tell me more about your mill people."

"What shall I tell you?"

"About your ways,--and their ways. When do they have dinner?"

"Between one and two. They have an hour for it. A little after half past one they go to work again and work till six; only they have time allowed them for tea and coffee at half past four."

"There is no drinking, I suppose?"

"Not even of beer. Half the people do their work at their own homes; they bring it in on certain days, when we give them hot tea and coffee and bread and cheese, which they have without paying for it. That saves them from the temptation of the public houses; and there is no such thing as drunkenness known in the community."

"Tea and coffee seem to play a great part," said Rotha.

"So they do. People steadily at work in any mechanical way need frequent refreshment of body, which also in some degree is refreshment of mind; and there, as beer and whiskey are banished, tea and coffee come in happily. I do not know how they would manage without them--Then in various ways we minister to the people and care for them; so that we are like one big family. When any are sick, they are paid at least half wages all the time; and by clubbing together it is generally made up to full wages. We have hospitals, where they have board and lodging and care in addition to half wages; but there is no compulsion about going to the hospitals. And whenever any of them are in any sort of trouble, they come to us for counsel and sympathy and help; my father knew them all personally, and so do I, and so did my dear mother when she was living. But a mistress is wanted there now, Rotha," Mr. Southwode went on. "I cannot do all I would alone, nor half so well what I do. Your place is ready."

"O do not speak so!" cried Rotha catching her breath. "I wish I were fit for it."

"Fit for it!" said he, putting his hand under her chin and drawing his fingers slowly along the delicate outlines, while the blood mounted into her cheeks and flamed out vividly.

"You make me feel so very small, telling me all these things!" she said.

"They are such grand things! And what am I?"

He lifted her face, not without a little resistance on her part, till he could reach her lips, and gave his answer there first; gave it tenderly, and laughingly.

"You are mine," he said; "and what is mine I do not like anybody to find fault with, except myself."

"I mean it seriously, Mr. Digby--" Rotha made effort to say.

"So do I. And seriously, I want you there very much. I want your help in the schools, and with men, women and

children out of the schools. It is pleasant work too. They are always glad to see me; and they will be more glad to see you."

"Never!" said Rotha energetically. "What is the name of the place? you never told me."

"Southwode."

"Southwode! That is pretty."

"I am glad you think so. I will shew you, if I can, a little what the house is like."

He had sketched the ground plan of it before; now he drew the elevation, giving some hints of the surrounding trees and further lines of the landscape; telling her all sorts of quiet details about this room and that room, this and that growth of trees, or plantation, or shrubbery. And Rotha looked on and listened, in a kind of dream witchery of pleasure; absorbed, fascinated, with very fulness of content.

Nevertheless, her mind was not settled on one point, and that a very essential point; and after the evening was over and she was alone in her own room, she thought about it a great deal. She could not think regularly; that was impossible; she was in too great a confusion of emotions; happiness and wonder and strangeness and doubt made a labyrinth; through which Rotha had no clue but a thread of sensitive impulse; a woman's too frequent only leader, or misleader. That thread she held fast to; and made up her mind that certain words in consonance therewith should certainly be spoken to Mr. Digby in the morning. It would not be easy, nor pleasant. No, not at all; but that made no difference. She had taken to her room with her the sketch which Mr. Southwode had made of his home; she would keep that always. It was very lovely to Rotha's eyes. She looked at it fondly, longingly, even with a tear or two; but all the same, one thing she was sure it was right to do, to say; and she would do it, though it drew the heart out of her body. She thought about it for a while, trying to arrange how she should do it; but then went to sleep, and slept as if all cares were gone.

She slept late; then dressed hastily, nervously, thinking of her task. It would be very difficult to speak so that her words would have any chance of effect; but Rotha set her teeth with the resolve that it should be done. Better any pain or awkwardness than a mistake now. Now or never a mistake must be prevented. She went to the sitting room with her heart beating. Mr. Digby was already there, and the new, unwonted manner of his greeting nearly routed Rotha's plan of attack. She stood still to collect her forces. She was sure the breakfast bell would ring in a minute, and then the game would be up. Mr. Southwode set a chair for her, and turned to gather together some papers on the table; he had been writing.

"What o'clock is it?" Rotha asked, to make sure of her own voice.

"Almost breakfast time, if that is what you mean. Are you hungry?"

"I--do not know," said Rotha. "Mr. Digby--"

Mr. Digby knew her well enough and knew the tone of her voice well enough, to be almost sure of what sort of thing was coming. He answered with a matter-of-fact "What, Rotha?"

"I want to say something to you--" But her breath came and went hastily.
Then he came and put his arms round her, and told her to speak.

"It is not easy to speak--what I want to say."

"I am not anxious to make it easy!"

"Why not?" said Rotha, looking suddenly up at him, with such innocent, eager, questioning eyes that he was much inclined to put a sudden stop to her communications. But she had something on her mind, and it was better that she should get rid of it; so he restrained himself.

"Go on, Rotha. What is it?"

"I can hardly talk to you so, Mr. Digby. I think, if I were standing over yonder by the window, with all that space between us, I could manage it better."

"I am not going to put space between us in any way, nor for any reason."

"What is this all about?"

"It is just that, Mr. Southwode. I think--I am afraid--I think, perhaps, you spoke hastily to me yesterday, and might find out afterwards that it was not just the best thing--"

"What?"

"I--for you," said the girl bravely; though her cheeks burned and every nerve in her trembled. He could feel how she was trembling. "I think-- maybe,--you might find it out after a while; and I would rather you should find it out at once. I propose,"--she went on hurriedly, forcing herself to say all she had meant to say;--"I propose, that we agree to let things be as if you had not said it; let things be as they were--for a year,--until next summer, I mean. And *then*, if you think it was not a mistake, you can tell me."

She had turned a little pale now, and her lip quivered slightly. And after a slight pause, which Mr. Southwode did not break, she went on,--

"And, in the mean time, we will let nobody know anything about it."

"I shall tell Mrs. Mowbray the first five minutes I am in her company," he said.

Rotha looked up again, but then her eyes fell, and the strained lines of brow and lips relaxed, and the colour rose.

"About Mrs. Busby, you shall do as you please. You do not know me yet, Rotha--my little Rotha! Do you think I would say to any woman what I said to you yesterday, and not know my own mind?"

"No--" Rotha said softly. "But I thought I was so unfit I do not know what I thought! only I knew I must speak to you."

"You are a brave girl," said he tenderly, "and my very darling." And he allowed himself the kisses now. "Was that all, Rotha?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"You have nothing else on your mind?"

"No."

"Then come to breakfast. It is always bad to go to breakfast with anything on your mind. It is only on *my* mind that it is so long to next June!"

Rotha however was very willing it should be so. She wanted all these months, to study, to work, to think, to make herself as ready as she could be for what was before her.

The train could not take them until eleven o'clock. After breakfast Rotha sat for a time meditating, no longer on troublesome subjects, while Mr. Southwode finished the letter he had begun earlier. As he began to fold up his paper, she came out with a question.

"Mr. Southwode, what do you think I had better specially study this winter?"

He did not smile, for if the question was put like a child, the work he knew would be done like a woman. He asked quietly,

"What is your object in going to school at all?"

The answer lingered, till his eyes looked up for it; then Rotha said, while a lovely flush covered the girl's face,--

"That you may not be ashamed of me."

"That contingency never came under my consideration," he said, commanding his gravity.

"But indeed it did under mine!"

"Allow me to ask a further question. After that, do you expect to make it the main business of your life to please me?"

"I suppose so," said Rotha, flushing deeper but speaking frankly, as her manner was. "It would be nothing new."

"I should think that would come to be terribly monotonous!" he said with feigned dryness.

"On the contrary!" said Rotha. "That is just what saves life from monotony." And then her colour fairly flamed up; but she would not qualify her words.

"Right in principle," he said, smiling now, "but wrong in application."

"How, Mr. Digby?" said Rotha, a little abashed.

He threw his letter on one side, came and sat down by her, and putting his arm round her shoulders, answered first by one of those silent answers which--sometimes--say so much more than anything spoken.

"I should be a sorry fellow," he said, "if I did not estimate those words at their full value, which to me is beyond value. I know you of old, and how much they mean. But, Rotha, this is not to be the rule of your life,--nor of mine."

"Why not?" she asked shyly.

"Because we are both servants of another Master, whom we love even better than we love each other."

Did they? Did *she*? Rotha leaned her head upon her hand and queried. Was she all right there? Or, as her heart was bounding back to the allegiance she had so delighted to give to Mr. Digby, might she be in danger of putting that allegiance first? He would not do the like. No, he would never make such a mistake; but she?--Mr. Southwode went on,

"That would put life at a lower figure than I want it to be, for you or for myself. No, Christ first; and his service, and his honour, and his pleasure and his will, first. After that, then nothing dearer, and nothing to which we owe more, than each of us to the other."

As she was silent, he asked gently, "What do you say to it, Rotha?"

"Of course you are right. Only--I am afraid I have not got so far as you have."

"You only began the other day. But we are settling principles. I want this one settled clearly and fully, so that we may regulate every footstep by it."

"Every footstep?" Rotha repeated, looking up for a glance.

"You do not understand that?"

"No."

"It is the rule of all my footsteps. I want it to be the rule of all yours. Let me ask you a question. In view of all that Christ has done for us, what do we owe him?"

"Why--of course--all," said Rotha looking up.

"What does 'all' mean? There is nothing like defining terms."

"What can 'all' mean *but* all?"

"There is a general impression among many Christians that the whole does not include the parts."

"Among Christians?"

"Among many who are called so."

"But how do you mean?"

"Do you know there is such a thing as saying 'yes' in general, and 'no' in particular? What in your understanding of it, does 'all' include?"

"Everything, of course."

"That is my understanding of it. Then we owe to our Master all we have?"

"Yes--" said Rotha with slight hesitation. Mr. Southwode smiled.

"That is certainly the Bible understanding of it. 'For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again.'"

"But how much is involved in that 'living to him'?"

"Let us find out, if we can. Turn to Lev. xiv. and read at the 14th verse. These are the directions for the cleansing of a leper who has been healed of his leprosy." He gave her his Bible, and she read.

"And the priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering, and the priest shall put it upon the tip of the right ear of him that is to be cleansed, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot. And the priest shall take some of the log of oil, and pour it into the palm of his own left hand, and shall sprinkle of the oil with his finger seven times before the Lord: and of the rest of the oil that is in his hand shall the priest put upon the tip of the right ear of him that is to be cleansed, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot, upon the blood of the trespass offering."

"I do not see the meaning of that," said Rotha.

"Yet it is very simple.--Head and hand and foot, the whole man and every part of him was cleansed by the blood of the sacrifice; and whereever the redeeming blood had touched, there the consecrating oil must touch also. Head and hand and foot, the whole man was anointed holy to the Lord."

"*Upon the blood of the trespass offering.* O I see it now. And how beautiful that is! and plain enough."

"Turn now to Rom. xii. 1."

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to the Lord."

"You understand?"

"Partly; I think, only partly."

"The priests of old offered whole rams and bullocks upon the altar as tokens and emblems of the entireness with which the worshipper was given to God; the whole offering was consumed by fire and went up to heaven in smoke and fume, all except the little remainder of ashes. We are to be *living* sacrifices, as wholly given, but given in life, and with our whole living powers to be used and exist for God."

"Yes," said Rotha. "I see it now."

"Are you glad to see it?"

"I think I am. It makes me catch my breath a little."

"Why?"

"It must be difficult to live so."

"Not if we love Christ. Indeed if we love him much, it is impossible to live any other way."

"I understand so far," Rotha said after a pause; "but I do not quite know what you are coming to."

"I am coming to something serious; for I do not know whether in this matter you will like what I like."

In Rotha's eyes there flashed an innocent unconscious response to this speech, saying plainly that she could like nothing else! It was so innocent and so unconscious, and withal so eloquent of the place he held with her, that Mr. Southwode could have smiled; did smile to himself; but he would not be diverted, nor let her, from the matter in hand; which, as he said, was serious. He wished to have it decided on its own merits too; and perceived there would be some difficulty about that. Rotha's nature was so passionately true to its ruling affection that, as he knew, that honest glance

of her eyes had told but the simple truth. Mr. Southwode looked grave, even while he could willingly have returned an answer in kind to her eyes' sweet speech. But he kept his gravity and his composed manner, and went on with his work.

"Read one more passage," he said. "1 Cor.-vi. 20."

"Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.' That is again just like the words in Leviticus," said Rotha;--"head and hand and foot redeemed, and head and hand and foot belonging to the Redeemer."

"Exactly," said Mr. Southwode. "That is not difficult to recognize. The question is, will we stand to the bargain?"

"Why?"

"It costs so much, to let it stand."

"It has not cost *you* much," said Rotha. "I should not say, by your face, it has cost you anything."

"It has cost me all I have."

"Well, in a way--"

"Truly," he said, meeting her eyes. "I do not count anything I have my own."

"But in practice--"

"In practice I use it all, or I try to use it all, for my Master; in such way as I think he likes best, and such as will best do his work and honour his name."

"And you do not find that disagreeable or hard," said Rotha. "That is what I said."

"Neither disagreeable nor hard. On the contrary. I am sure there is no way of using oneself and one's possessions that gets so much enjoyment out of them. No, not the thousandth part."

"Then what do you mean by its 'costing so much'?"

"Read 1 Cor. x. 31."

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Rotha read, and this time did not look up.

"What do you think of going by that rule?"

"You mean, for Christ's sake," said Rotha slowly. She knew she was willing to go by any rule for her lover's sake. "Mr. Southwode, I do not think I ever studied it out."

"Shall we study it out now?"

"O yes, please! But you must help me."

"Let us come to particulars. What sorts of things that are bought with money, for instance, do you take most pleasure in?"

Rotha looked up, curious, questioning, wondering, very honest.

"I do not know what *most*," she said. "I take so much pleasure in everything. Books especially. And pictures I delight in. And--do not laugh at me, Mr. Digby! I always did,--I take pleasure in nice, pretty, comfortable, becoming, dresses and clothes generally. So do you, don't you?"

It went beyond Mr. Southwode's power of gravity, the quaint frankness of this speech; and he laughed. Rotha joined in the laugh at herself, but looked seriously for the answer.

"It is a comfort to talk to you," he said. "One can get at the point. And here we have it, Rotha. I think your liking of all the things specified is thoroughly justified and perfectly right; and as you suggest, I share it with you. Now comes the

question. The word says 'whatsoever'; therefore it covers books and pictures and dresses too. Take then the homeliest instance. Are you willing, in buying a gown or a bonnet or anything else, to do it always, as well as you know how, to the glory of God?"

"How can it be done so?"

"Think. If this is your rule, you will choose such a bonnet or gown as you can best do your work--God's work,--in. Therefore it will not be chosen to give the impression that you wish to excite attention or admiration, or that you wish to impose by your wealth, or that dress occupies a large place in your thoughts; it *will* be such as suits a refined taste, such as becomes you and sets off your good qualities to the very best advantage; and it will not cost more than is truly necessary for these ends, because the Lord has more important work for his money to do. Perhaps I rather overrate than underrate the importance of good dressing; it is an undoubted power, but really good dressing is done for Christ, as his servant and steward equips herself for his service; but she uses no more of the Lord's silver and gold than is needful, because that would be unfaithfulness in stewardship."

"But that makes dressing a noble art!" cried Rotha. Her eyes had looked eagerly into the speaker's eyes, taking in his words with quick apprehension.

"Carry out the principle into all other lines of action, then; and see what it will make the rest of life."

"To the glory of God.' The Bible says, eating and drinking?"

"Yes."

"Well how that, Mr. Southwode?"

"And if eating and drinking, then the houses in which we assemble, and the tables at which we sit down."

"Yes, but you are going a little faster than I can follow," said Rotha. "In the first place, it seems to me that people in general do not think as you do."

"I told you so."

"Hardly anybody."

"Hardly anybody!"

"Then, is it not possible--"

"That I am straining the point? You have read the Bible testimony yourself; what do you think?"

Rotha was silent. Could all the Christian world, almost all of it, be wrong, and only Mr. Southwode right? Was the rule indeed to be drawn so close? She doubted. The Bible words, to be sure,--but then, why did not others see them too?

"Read Rom. xii. 1, again."

Rotha read it, and looked up in silence. Mr. Southwode's face wore a slight smile. He did not look, she thought, like a man who felt the poorer for what he had given up.

"Well?--" said he.

"Well. I have read this often," said Rotha. "I know the words."

"Have you obeyed them?"

"I--do--not--know. I am afraid, not."

"When a man has given his body a living sacrifice, has he anything left to give beside?"

"Why not?"

"Think. In that case, his hands are his Master's. They cannot do anything inconsistent with his use of them, or interrupting it, or hindering it. All they do will be, indirectly or directly, for Him."

"Yes--" said Rotha. "But nothing for himself, then?"

"Anything, that will fit him for service, or help him in it."

"But for instance. I am very fond of fancy work," said Rotha.

"Useless fancy work?"

"I am afraid you would call it so."

"Never mind what I call it," said Mr. Southwode, laughing a little; for Rotha's frankness and directness were delightful;--"I am not skilled in fancy work, and I speak in ignorance. What do you call it?"

"Some of it is not of any use," Rotha said thoughtfully; "it is just a putting together of lovely colours. Of course, people must have mats and rugs and cushions and things; and it is pretty work to make them; but they could be bought cheaper, what would do just as well."

"Then the question rises, in view of all these pretty things,--Is it the best use I can make of my time and my money?"

Rotha's fingers drummed upon the table.

"But one must have amusement," she said. "One cannot be always studying."

"Quite true. The question remains, whether this is the best amusement to be had."

"I give that up," said Rotha. "I see what you think."

"Never mind what I think--for once," said he smiling. "Try the question on its own merits."

"I give that up," Rotha repeated. "Except for odds and ends of chances, it does take a fearful amount of time, and money too. But go on, Mr. Digby; I am getting dreadfully interested."

"You can go on without my help."

"But I want it. Please go on."

"You can transfer to eyes and ears and lips and feet what I have said about hands. All would be the Lord's servants. Have I anything else left to give, if I have once given my body a living sacrifice?"

"No. Nothing. But why did I never see that before?"

"What do you think of it, now you do see it?"

"It is grand!" said the girl thoughtfully. "And beautiful. Such a life would be woven all of golden threads. But Mr. Southwode, it would make one different from everybody else in the whole world!"

"Did not Jesus say? 'Ye are not of the world, *even as I am not of the world*.' And--'Therefore the world hateth you.'"

"Yes,--" said Rotha slowly--"I see."

"How would you furnish a house, on this principle?" Mr. Southwode went on.

"A house?" Rotha repeated.

"Yes. Suppose the old house at Southwode was to be refurnished; how should we do it? I would like to have everything there please you."

"But on your principle," said Rotha, colouring beautifully, though she laughed, "you would not arrange it to please me at all."

"If my principle were your principle?"--he said with a flash in his eye which was part pleasure and part amusement.

"I never considered the subject," she said shyly.

"Well let us consider it. What are the points to be principally regarded, in furnishing a house?"

Rotha pondered, a good deal amused; this whole discussion was so novel to her. "I suppose," she said, "one ought to aim at a good appearance-- according to one's means,--and the comfort of the family that are to live in the house,--and prettiness,--and pleasantness."

"And the Lord's service?"

"I do not see how that comes in."

"I must state another question, then. What are the uses for which the house is intended? what is to be done in it, or what ought to be done?"

"People are to be made comfortable in it; they must see their friends,-- and do their work."

"Very well. What work?"

"I do not know. That depends, I suppose."

"But what work is set out in the Bible for every Christian house to do?"

"Mr. Southwode, I do not know. I do not seem to know much of what is in the Bible, at all!"

"After five months of study?" said he kindly. "Well, listen. The Bible bids us not be forgetful to entertain strangers."

"Strangers!"

"That is the word."

"And of course we are to entertain our friends?"

"That may safely be left to people's natural affection. But our *entertainments* it bids us keep for the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind; for people, in short, who can make us no return in kind."

"Does it!"

"Christ said so expressly."

"I remember he did," said Rotha thoughtfully. "But then--but then, Mr. Southwode,--in that case, people are all abroad!"

He was silent.

"But are we not to have society?"

"Undoubtedly, if we can get it."

"Then we must entertain them."

"According to Christ's rule."

"But then, especially if one is rich, people will say--"

"The question with me is, what the Master will say."

"People will not want to come to see you, will they, on those terms?"

"Those will who care to see *us*," said Mr. Southwode; "and I confess those are the only ones I care to see. The people who come merely for the entertainment can find that as well elsewhere."

"One thing is certain," said Rotha. "A house could not be furnished to suit both those styles of guests."

"Then the Bible bids us bring the poor that are cast out, to our houses."

"But that you cannot! Not always," said Rotha. "They are not fit for it."

"There is discretion to be observed, certainly. You would not invite a tramp into your drawing room. But I have known two instances, Rotha, in which a miserable and very degraded drunkard was saved to himself and to society, saved for time and eternity, just in that way; by being taken into a gentleman's house, and cared for and trusted and patiently borne with, until his reformation was complete. In those cases the individuals, it is true, had belonged to the respectable and educated classes of society; but at the time they were brought to the gutter."

"That is not easy work!" said Rotha shaking her head.

"Not when you think of Christ's 'Inasmuch'?"

Rotha was silent a while.

"Well!" she said at last, "I see now that the furnishing of a house has more meaning in it than ever I thought."

"You see, I hope also," Mr. Southwode said gently, "that your conditions of comfort and prettiness and pleasantness are not excluded?"

"I suppose not," said Rotha, thinking busily. "The house would do its work better, even its work among these people you have been speaking of,--far better, for being pretty and comfortable and pleasant. I see that. Refinement is not excluded, only luxury."

"Say, only *useless* luxury."

"Yes, I see that," said Rotha.

"Then the Bible bids us use hospitality without grudging. That is, welcoming to the shelter and comfort of our houses any who at any time may need it. Tired people, homeless people, ailing people, poor people. So the house and the table must be always ready to receive and welcome new guests."

"I see it all, Mr. Digby," said Rotha, lifting her eyes to him.

"There is no finery at Southwode--I might say, nothing fine; there are some things valuable. But the house seems to me to want nothing that the most refined taste can desire. I think you will like it."

"I think I understand the whole scheme of life, as you put it," Rotha went on, shyly getting away from the personal to the abstract. "So far as things can be done, things enjoyed,--books and music and everything,--by a servant of Christ who is always doing his Master's work; so far as they would not hinder but help the work and him; so far you would use them, and there stop."

"Does such a life look to you burdened with restrictions?"

"They do not seem to me really restrictions," Rotha answered slowly. "Taking it altogether, such a life looks to me wide and generous and rich; and the common way poor and narrow."

"How should it be otherwise, when the one is the Lord's way, and the other man's? But people who have not tried do not know that."

"Of course not."

"They will not understand."

"I suppose they *cannot*."

"And the world generally does not like what it does not understand."

"I should think *that* could be borne."

"You are not afraid, then?"

"No, indeed," said Rotha. "But I do not mean that I stand just where you do," she added soberly. "With my whole heart I think this is right and beautiful, and I am sure it is happy; and yet, you know,"--she went on colouring brightly, "I

should like anything because you liked it; and that is not quite enough. But I will study the matter thoroughly now. I never thought of it before--not so."

There was frankness and dignity and modesty in her words and manner, enough to satisfy a difficult man; and Mr. Southwode was too much delighted to even touch this beautiful delicacy by shewing her that he liked it. He answered, with the words, "It is only to follow Christ fully"; and then there was silence. By and by however he began to allow himself some expression of his feelings in certain caresses to the fingers he still held clasped in his own.

"That you should be doing that to my hand!" said Rotha. "Mr. Southwode, what an extraordinary story it all is!"

"What do you mean?"

"Just think--just think. All this, the whole of it, has really come from my mother's shewing to a stranger precisely one of those bits of hospitality you have been speaking about. I wonder if she knows now? You remember how the words run,--'Full measure, pressed down, heaped up and running over, shall they give----'"

Rotha's eyes filled full, full; she was near losing her self-command.

"Do you forget there are two sides to it?" said Mr. Southwode, taking her in his arms very tenderly.

"It has all been on one side!" cried Rotha.

"Do you make nothing of my part?"

"Nothing at all!" said Rotha between crying and laughing. "You have given--given--given,--as you like to do; you have done nothing but give!"

"It is your turn now--" said he laughing.

Rotha was silent, thinking a great deal more than she chose to put into words.

CHAPTER XXXII.

END OF SCHOOL TERM.

That same evening, just when Mrs. Mowbray was set free from a lesson hour, and the library was left to her sole occupation, a gentleman and lady were announced. The next minute Rotha was in her arms. Whatever she felt, the girl's demeanour was very quiet; her reception, on the other hand, was little short of ecstatic. Then Mrs. Mowbray gave a gracious, if somewhat distant, greeting to Rotha's companion; and then looked, with an air of mystified expectancy, to see what was coming next.

"I have brought Miss Carpenter back to you, Mrs. Mowbray," Mr. Southwode began.

"Where did you find her?"

"I found her at Tanfield."

"Tanfield!"--Mrs. Mowbray looked more and more puzzled.

"And now, I am going to ask you to take care of her, till next June."

"Till next June--" Mrs. Mowbray repeated.

"The school year ends then, does it not?"

"May I ask, what is to be done with her after next June?"

"I will take her into my own care."

"What does Mrs. Busby say to that?" Mrs. Mowbray inquired, still doubtful and mystified.

"She says nothing," said Rotha. "She has nothing to say. She never had any right to say what I should do, except the right Mr. Southwode gave her." She felt a secret triumph in the knowledge that now at least Mrs. Mowbray would have to accept Mr. Southwode and make the best she could of him.

"Have you come from Mrs. Busby now?"

"No, madame; Mr. Southwode brought me straight here."

And then followed of course the story of the past five months. Rotha gave it as briefly as she could, slurring over as much as possible her aunt's action and motives, and giving a bare skeleton of the facts. Mrs. Mowbray's mystified expression did not clear away.

"Chicago?" she said. "I do not think Mrs. Busby has been to Chicago. My impression is strong, that she has been in or near New York, all summer."

"So she was, madame."

Mrs. Mowbray considered things with a grave face.

"I have a request to make," Mr. Southwode began then; "a request which I hope Mrs. Mowbray will receive as of purely business character, and in no wise occasioned by curiosity. May I be informed, at a convenient time, what has been paid by Mrs. Busby to this house, on Miss Carpenter's account?"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Mowbray.

"No bills for schooling? or board?"

"Nothing at all. Antoinette's bills I have rendered, and they have been paid. I have never presented any bill for Miss Carpenter, and none has ever been asked for."

Rotha exclaimed, but Mr. Southwode went on----

"You will allow me to ask for it now."

Mrs. Mowbray looked doubtfully at the speaker.

"By what right could I put Mrs. Busby's obligations upon you? How could I account to her?"

"Count them my obligations," he said pleasantly. "I do not wish Miss Carpenter to leave any debts behind her, when she goes from her own country to mine. I will be much obliged, if you will have the account made out in my name and sent to me."

Mrs. Mowbray bowed a grave acknowledgment. "I had better speak to Mrs. Busby first," she said.

"As you please about that," said Mr. Southwode rising.

"But next June!" cried Mrs. Mowbray. "You are not going to take her away next June? I want her for a year longer at least. I want her for two years. That is one of the difficulties I have to contend with; people will not leave their children with me long enough to let me finish what I have begun. It would be much better for Rotha to stay with me another year. Don't you think so?"

"I am afraid a discussion on that point would not turn out in your favour, madame," he said. "Miss Carpenter is able to represent my part in it; I will leave it to her."

And he took leave. But when it came to Rotha's turn, he sealed all his pretensions by quietly kissing her; it was done deliberately, not in a hurry; and Rotha knew it was on purpose and done rather for her sake than his own. And when he was gone, she stood still by the table, flushed and proud, feeling that she was claimed and owned now before all the world. There ensued a little silence, during which Mrs. Mowbray was somewhat uneasily arranging some disarranged books and trifles on the great library table; and Rotha stood still.

"My dear," said the former at last, "am I to congratulate you?"

"There is no occasion, madame," said Rotha.

"What then did Mr. Southwode mean?" said Mrs. Mowbray, stopping her work and looking up much displeased.

"O yes,--I beg your pardon,--if you mean *that*," said Rotha, while the blood mounted into her cheeks again.

"Are you going to marry Mr. Southwode?"

"He says so, madame."

"But what do *you* say?"

"I always say the same that Mr. Southwode says," Rotha replied demurely, while at the same time she was conscious of having to bite in an inclination to laugh.

"My dear, let us understand one another. When I saw him two or three days ago, he did not even know where you were."

"No, ma'am. He found me."

"Have you had any communication with him during these years of his absence?"

"No, madame."

"Did you know, when Mr. Southwode went away, three years ago, that he had any such purpose, or wish?"

"He had no such purpose, or wish, I am sure."

"Then, my dear, how has this come about?"

"I do not know, madame."

Rotha felt the movings within her of a little rebellion, a little irritation, and a great nervous inclination to laugh; nevertheless her manner was sobriety itself.

"My dear, I seem to be the only one in the world to take care of you; and that is my excuse for being so impertinent as to ask these questions. You will bear with me? I *must* take care of you, Rotha!"

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Mowbray! There can be no questions you might not ask me."

"I am a little troubled about you, my dear child. This is very sudden."

"Yes, ma'am," said Rotha slowly,--"I suppose it is."

"And I do not like such things to be done hurriedly."

"No."

"People ought to have time to know their own minds."

"Yes."

"My dear, is it certain that Mr. Southwode knows his?"

"I should not like to ask him, madame," said Rotha, while the corners of her mouth twitched. "He is not that kind of man. And there is nobody else to ask him. I am afraid we shall have to let it stand."

Mrs. Mowbray looked doubtful and ill at ease.

"Mr. Southwode is a very rich man,--" she remarked after a minute or two.

"What then, Mrs. Mowbray?" Rotha asked quickly.

"And, my dear, you have only known him as a little girl," the lady went on, waiving the question.

"What of *that*, madame?"

"You can hardly be said to know him at all."

"It is too late to speak of that now," said Rotha, laying her gloves together and taking off her scarf. "But I saw more as a child, than most people have a chance to see as grown-up people."

"My dear, I am concerned about your welfare, in this most important step of your life. Have you accepted this gentleman out of gratitude?"

"I do not think he would want me, madame, on those terms, if he thought so."

"Yes, he would, perhaps," said Mrs. Mowbray. "Men make that mistake sometimes. But you--you must not make a mistake now, my dear!"

As Rotha was silent, Mrs. Mowbray rose and came to her where she was standing by the table, and put her arms fondly round the girl.

"You know," she said, kissing her repeatedly, "I love you, Rotha. I cannot let you run into danger, if I can help it; and so I put my hand in, perhaps unwarrantedly."

"Never, dear Mrs. Mowbray!" said Rotha gratefully. "You cannot. You may say anything."

"You are one of those people with whom impulse is strong; and such people often do in a minute what they are sorry for all their lives."

"I hope that tendency has been a little sobered in me," said Rotha.

"Perhaps not much."

"Well, won't you give me a little comfort about this matter?" said Mrs. Mowbray, still holding her close and looking at her. "What are you going to marry this man--this gentleman--for?"

But to answer this question, to any but one person, was foreign to all Rotha's nature. She could not do it. The blood flashed to cheek and brow, making its own report; all that Rotha said, was,

"He wishes it, madame."

"And are you to do everything that Mr. Southwode wishes?"

Rotha said nothing, yet this time Mrs. Mowbray got an answer. There was a little unconscious flash of the girl's eye, as for half a second it looked up, which swift as it was, told the whole story. Mrs. Mowbray knew enough of human nature and of the human countenance, to read all she wanted to know in that look. All as far as Rotha was concerned, that is. And that was the principal thing; Mr. Southwode ought to know his own mind, and was at any rate at his own risk; and furthermore it was not Mrs. Mowbray's business to take care of him. And as regarded Rotha, she now saw, there was nothing to be done.

"Then I must lose you!" she said with a sigh and kissing Rotha again. "My dear, I want nothing but your happiness; but I believe I am a little jealous of Mr. Southwode, that he has got you so easily."

Easily! Well, Rotha could not explain that, nor discuss the whole matter at all with Mrs. Mowbray. She went up to her room, feeling glad this talk was over.

And then things fell immediately into school train. And of all in the house, there was no such diligent worker as Rotha during the months of that school term. She was not only diligent. Mrs. Mowbray greatly admired the quiet dignity and the delicate gravity of her manner. She was grave with a wonderful sweet gravity, compounded of a happy consciousness of what had been given her, and a very deep sense of what was demanded of her. Her happiness, or rather the cause of it, for those months remained secret. Nobody in the house, excepting Mrs. Mowbray, knew anything about it; and if anybody surmised, there was nothing in Rotha's quiet, reserved demeanour to embolden any one to put questions. All that Antoinette and Mrs. Busby knew was, that Mr. Southwode had found Rotha and brought her back. "Like his impudence!" Antoinette had said; but Mrs. Busby compressed her lips and said nothing. Both of them kept aloof.

Mr. Southwode himself was little seen by Rotha during those months. He came sometimes, as a guardian might; and there did arise in the house a subdued murmur of comment upon Rotha's very distinguished-looking visiter. Once or twice he took her out for a drive; however, he during that winter played the part of guardian, not of lover, before the eyes of the world; as he had said he would. When spring came, Mr. Digby went home, and was gone three months; not returning till just before the school term closed.

The story is really done; but just because one gets fond of people one has been living with so long, we may take another look or two at them.

School was over, and the girls were gone, and the teachers were scattered; the house seemed empty. Mrs. Mowbray found Rotha one day gathering her books together and trifles out of her desk. She stood and looked at her, lovingly and longingly.

"And now your school days are ended!" she said, with a mixed expression which spoke not only of regret but had a slight touch of reproach in it.

"O no indeed!" said Rotha. "Mr. Southwode used always to be teaching me something, and I suppose he always will."

"I wish I could have you two years more! I grudge you to anybody else for those two years. But I suppose it is of no use for me to talk."

Rotha went off smiling. It was no use indeed! And Mrs. Mowbray turned away with a sigh.

Down stairs, a few hours later, Mr. Southwode was sitting in the little end room back of the library--Mrs. Mowbray's special sanctuary. He was trying to see what was the matter with a cuckoo clock which would not strike. The rooms were all in summer order; sweet with the fragrance of India matting, which covered the floors; cool and quiet in the strange stillness of the vacation time. Mrs. Mowbray was a wonderful housekeeper; everything in her house was kept in blameless condition of purity; the place was as fresh and sweet as any place in a large city in the month of July could be. It was July, and warm weather, and the summer breeze blew in at the windows near which Mr. Southwode was sitting, with a fitful, faint freshness, pushing in the muslin curtains which were half open. There was the cool light which came through green India jalousies, but there was light enough; and everywhere the eye could look there was incentive to thought or suggestion for conversation, in works of arts, bits of travel, reminiscences of distant friends, and tributes from foreign realms of the earth. Books behind him, books before him, books on the table, books on the floor, books in the corners, and books in a great revolving bookstand. There was a dainty rug before the fireplace; there were dainty easy chairs large and small; there was a lovely India screen before the grate; and there was not much room left for anything else when all these things were accommodated. Mr. Southwode however was in one of the chairs, and a cuckoo clock, as I said, on his knees, with which he was busy.

Then came a light step over the matting of the library, and Rotha entered the sanctuary. She came up behind his chair and laid her two hands on his shoulder, bending down so as to speak to him more confidentially. There came to Mr. Southwode a quick recollection of the first time Rotha had ever laid her hand on his shoulder, when her mother was just dead; and how in her forlorn distress the girl had laid her head down too. He remembered the feeling of her thick locks of wavy hair brushing his cheek. Now the full locks of dark hair were bound up, yet not tightly; it was a soft, natural, graceful style, which indeed was the character of all Rotha's dressing; she had independence enough not to be unbecomingly bound by fashion. Mr. Southwode knew exactly what was hanging over his shoulder, though he did not look up. I may say, he saw it as well as if he had.

"I do not know how to speak to you," Rotha began abruptly. "You do not like me to call you 'Mr. Southwode.'"

"No."

"But I do not think I know your Christian name."

"My name is Digby."

"That is your surname--your half surname, I thought."

"Yes, but I was christened Digby. That is my name. I took the surname Digby afterwards in compliance with the terms of a will, and legally my name is Digby Digby; but I am of course by birth Southwode."

"Then if I called you 'Digby,' it would sound as if I were simply dropping the 'Mr.' and calling you by your surname; and that is very ugly. It does not sound respectful."

"Drop the respect."

"But I cannot!" cried Rotha, laughing a little. "I have heard women speak so, and it always seemed to me very ungraceful. Fancy aunt Serena saying 'Busby' to her husband! She always says so carefully 'Mr. Busby'--"

"She is a woman of too much good taste to do otherwise."

"She *has* a good deal," said Rotha, "in many ways. Then what will you think of me, if *I* do 'otherwise'?"

"You are not logical this afternoon," said Mr. Southwode laughing. "Am I an equivalent for Mr. Busby, in your imagination?"

"Will you make that clock go?"

"I think so."

There was a little pause. Rotha did not change her position, and Mr. Southwode went on with his clock work.

"What shall I do about aunt Serena?" Rotha then began again, in a low voice.

"In what respect?"

"Must I ask her to come here?--Monday, I mean?"

"Do you wish to have her come?"

"Oh no, indeed!"

"Then I do not see the 'must.'"

"But they are dying to come."

"Have they asked? If so, there is no more to be said."

"O they have not asked in so many words. But they have done everything *but* ask. Aunt Serena even proposed that I should come there--just fancy it!"

"And be married from her house?"

"Yes."

"I am glad it did not occur to you to agree to the proposal."

"Agree!--But what ought I to do?"

"State the arguments, for and against."

"Well!--I cannot help feeling that it would not be pleasant to have them."

"That is my feeling."

"But then, one ought to forgive people?"

"Forgiveness is one thing, and reinstating in forfeited privileges is another. I have forgiven Mrs. Busby, I hope; but only her repentance could restore her to my respect. I have seen no sign of repentance."

"That involves, and means, punishment."

"Involuntary--and unavoidable."

"I am sorry for aunt Serena!"

"So am I," said Mr. Southwode laughing; "but I do not see why, to save her from being punished, I should punish

myself."

Through the rooms behind them now came another step, and Mrs. Mowbray presently entered the little room, which was full when the three were in it. She was in a white summer robe, her hair in its simple coil at the back of her head shewing the small head and its fine setting to great advantage. Nothing more elegant, more sweet, more gracious can be imagined, than her whole presence. It was not school time; duty was not laying a heavy hand of pressure upon her heart and brain; there was the loveliest expression of rest, and good will, and sparkling sympathy, and ready service, in her whole face and manner. She sat down, and for a while the talk flowed on in general channels, full of interest and vitality however; Mrs. Mowbray had learned to know Mr. Southwode by this time, and had thoroughly accepted him; in fact I think she liked him almost as well as she liked Rotha. The talk went on mainly between those two. Rotha herself was silent when she could be so. She was grave and soft, full of a very fair dignity; evidently her approaching marriage was a somewhat awful thing to her; and though her manner was simple and frank as a child in her intercourse with Mr. Southwode, yet after the fashion of her excitable nature the sensitive blood in her cheeks answered every allusion to Monday, or even the mention of her bridegroom's name when he was not by, or the sound of his step when he came. Mrs. Mowbray was delighted with her; nothing could be more sweet than this delicate consciousness which was grave and thoughtful without ever descending to shyness or hardening to reserve. As for Mr. Southwode, he saw little of it, Rotha was so exactly herself when she was with him; yet now as the talk went on between him and Mrs. Mowbray his eye wandered continually to the eyes which were so downcast, and the quiet withdrawn figure which held itself a little more back than usual.

"And what are your movements?" inquired Mrs. Mowbray at length. "Do you go straight home?"

"I think we shall take a roundabout way through Switzerland and Germany, and stay there awhile first."

"You are carrying away from me my dearest pupil," said Mrs. Mowbray. "She has never been anything but a blessing in my house, ever since she came into it. If she is as good to you as she has been to me, you will have nothing left to ask for. But I grudge her to you!"

"I find that very pardonable," said Mr. Southwode with a smile.

"I was dreadfully set against you at first," Mrs. Mowbray went on, with a manner between seriousness and archness. "I tried hard to make out to my satisfaction that Rotha had accepted you only out of gratitude--in which case I should have made fight; but I found I had no ground to stand on."

Here Rotha made a diversion. She came, as Mrs. Mowbray finished her speech, and kneeled down on a cushion at her feet, laying one hand in her friend's hand.

"Mrs. Mowbray--*this* vacation we shall not be there but next summer, if all's well, you will come and spend the whole time at Southwode?"

"Ah, my dear," said Mrs. Mowbray, "I never know a year beforehand what will become of me!"

"But I said, if all's well?"

"What Rotha petitions for, I petition for also, Mrs. Mowbray," Mr. Southwode added; "and this time with double urgency, for I ask on her account and on mine too."

"You will come," said Rotha. "And," she went on, laying her other hand on Mrs. Mowbray's shoulder--"And some day, you know, you will give up schooling; and then--then--Mr. Southwode says, you must come and live the rest of your days with us. He says the house is big enough, and you shall have a separate establishment to yourself, if you like."

Mrs. Mowbray looked silently at the eager face so near her, and her eyes gathered a little moisture, a tendency which probably she repelled.

"I expect to die in harness,"--she said, while the two pair of eyes looked steadily into one another.

"In one way--but not in school harness! Don't say anything about it; but when you stop work--this work--your home is there."

The beautiful lips trembled a little, but Mrs. Mowbray would not give way.

"That would be a delightful dream!" she said. "Thank you, my dear. When I am tired out with people and things, I will think of this and be refreshed. Now will you bring Mr. Southwode in to tea?"

She rose and swept on before them, leading the way. Her self-command had been successful. Rotha was less in training, and several tears dropped from her eyes as she followed through the library. She was a little disappointed, and the girl's heart was full. Her eager affection had not got the answer it wanted. Rotha did not mistake her friend's manner; she did not think Mrs. Mowbray was without feeling because she would not shew feeling; nor that her appeal had not met a response due and full, because the response was not given in words. She knew that probably Mrs. Mowbray could not trust herself to put it in words. Nevertheless, she felt a little thrown back and disappointed, and "Monday" was near; and I suppose she felt what any girl feels at such a time, the want of a mother. Rotha had nobody but Mrs. Mowbray, and she was parting from her. Two or three tears fell before she could prevent it. And then Mr. Southwode, who had been watching her, and could read her feelings pretty well, stretched out his hand, took one of hers and drew it through his arm. It was a little thing, but done, as some people can do things, in a way that quite took it out of the category. There was in it, somehow, an assurance of mutual confidence, of understanding, and sympathy, and great tenderness. He had not looked at her, nor spoken, but Rotha's step grew lighter immediately; and in quiet content she followed Mrs. Mowbray up stairs and down and along passages and through one room after another. The tea table was not set in the great dining rooms; they too were sweet with fresh matting, and lay in summer coolness and emptiness, giving a long dusky vista towards the front windows, where the blinds shaded the light and muslin curtains shielded from the dust of the streets. But in the smaller end room at the back the great windows were open, and the sea breeze came in fitfully, and the colours of the evening sky were discernible, and there the table was prepared. What a table! Mrs. Mowbray had gathered all sorts of delicacies together; cold birds, and fruit, and dainty India sweetmeats, and rich cheese of best English make, and a cold ham; together with some very delicate warm tea cakes, which I am afraid Mr. Southwode, being an Englishman, did not appreciate properly.

"Do not think this is our usual and ordinary tea!" Rotha said laughing.

"All this extreme luxury is on your account."

"Rotha and I dine early, these summer days," said Mrs. Mowbray; "and I did not wish to starve you when I asked you to stay to tea. This is not dinner, nor any meal that deserves a name--but perhaps you will kindly put up with it, in place of dinner."

"Dinner!" said Mr. Southwode. "This looks festive!"

"O we are always festive in vacation time," said Rotha joyously. "In other houses people call in numbers to help them make merry; here we are merry when the people go!"

They were softly merry round that board. Rotha had got back her gayety, and Mrs. Mowbray was the most charming of hostesses. No one could take such care of her guests; no one could make the time pass so pleasantly; no one had such store of things to tell or to talk of, that were worth the while, and that at the same time were not within the reach of most people; no one had a more beautiful skill to give the conversation a turn that might do somebody good, without in the least allowing it to droop in interest. To-day there was no occasion for this particular blessed faculty to be called into exercise; she could let the talk run as it would; and it ran delightfully. In general society Mr. Southwode was very apt to play a rather quiet part; keeping the ball going indeed, but doing it rather by apt suggestion and incentive applied to other people; this evening he came out and talked, as Rotha was accustomed to hear him; seconding Mrs. Mowbray fully, and making, which I suppose was partly his purpose, an engrossing entertainment for Rotha.

Following a little pause which occurred in the conversation, Mrs. Mowbray broke out,--

"What are you going to do about Mrs. Busby?"

The question was really addressed to Rotha; but as Rotha did not immediately answer, Mr. Southwode took it up, and asked "in what respect?"

"Is she to be invited?"

"I was just talking to Mr. Southwode about it," said Rotha. "Why should she be invited? It would be no pleasure to any one."

"It would be a pleasure to her."

"I do not think it, Mrs. Mowbray! O yes, she would like to come; but *pleasure*--it would be pleasure to nobody. I know

she wants to come."

"Well, my dear, and she is your mother's sister. Always keep well with your relations. Blood is thicker than water."

"I do not think so!" cried Rotha. "I do not feel it so. If she were not my mother's sister, I would not care; she would be nothing to me, one way or another; it is *because* she is my mother's sister that she is so exceedingly disagreeable. If people who are your relations are disagreeable, it is infinitely worse than if they were not relations. It is the relationship that puts them at such an unapproachable distance. You are near to me, Mrs. Mowbray, and my aunt Serena is a thousand miles away."

"It is best the world should not know that, my dear. Do you not agree with me, Mr. Southwode?"

"Better still, that there should be nothing to know," he answered somewhat evasively.

"Yes!" said Rotha; "and if I could have been good and gentle and sweet when I first went to her, things might have been different; but I was not. I suppose I was provoking."

"Cannot you make up the breach now?"

"I have not the wish, Mrs. Mowbray. I see no change in aunt Serena; and unless she could change, I can only wish she were not my mother's sister. I have forgiven her; O I have forgiven her!--but love and kinship are another thing."

"My dear, it would not hurt you, much, to let her come. I know she would feel it a gratification."

"I know that well enough."

"Always gratify people when you can innocently."

"How far?" said Rotha, laughing now in the midst of a little vexation. "I know they are just aching for an invitation to Southwode. There has been enough said to let me see that."

"That must be as your husband pleases."

"*That* must be as my wife pleases," said Mr. Southwode with a smile.

Poor Rotha passed both hands hastily over her face, as if she would wipe away the heat and the colour; then letting them fall, turned her face full to the last speaker.

"Mr. Southwode, you do not want to see them there!"

"Miss Rotha, I do not. But--if you do, I do."

"That throws all the responsibility upon me."

"My dear," said Mrs. Mowbray, "that is what men always like to do--get rid of responsibility--if they can find somebody else to put it on."

"Ever since Adam's day--" Mr. Southwode added.

"Is there any possible reason why aunt Serena, and Mr. Busby and Antoinette, should be asked to come to Southwode? If there is any *reason* for it, I have no more to say; but I do not see the reason."

"She is your mother's sister--" Mrs. Mowbray repeated.

"And that fact it is, which puts her so far from me. Just that fact."

"Maybe it will do her good," suggested Mrs. Mowbray.

Rotha laughed a short, impatient laugh. "How should it?" she asked.

"You never can tell how. My dear, it is not good to have breaches in families. Always heal them up, if you can."

Rotha turned in despair to Mr. Southwode.

"Mrs. Mowbray is right, in principle," he said. "I entirely agree with her. The only question is, whether a breach which remains a breach by the will of the offending party alone, ought to be covered over and condoned by the action of the injured party."

"You must forgive--" said Mrs. Mowbray.

"Yes; and forgiveness implies a readiness to have the breach bridged over and forgotten. I think it does not command or advise that the offender be treated as if he had repented, so long as he does not repent."

"I have no doubt Mrs. Busby repents," said Mrs. Mowbray.

"I have no doubt she is sorry."

"I know she is," said Rotha; "but she would do it again to-morrow."

"What has she done, after all? My dear, human nature is weak."

"I know it is," said Rotha eagerly; "and if I thought it would do her the least bit of good, as far as I am concerned, I would be quite willing to ask her to Southwode. I do not at all wish to give her what I think she deserves."

"I am afraid I do," said Mr. Southwode; "and that is a disposition not to be indulged. Let us give her the chance of possible good, and ask her, Rotha."

"Then I must ask her here Monday."

"I suppose I can stand that."

There was a little pause.

"Well," said Rotha, "if you think it is better, I do not care. It will be a punishment to her--but perhaps it would be a worse punishment to stay away."

"Now," said Mrs. Mowbray, "there is another thing. Don't you think Rotha ought to wear a veil?"

Mrs. Mowbray was getting mischievous. Her sweet blue eyes looked up at Mr. Southwode with a sparkle in them.

"Why should I wear a veil?" said Rotha.

"It is the custom."

"But I do not care in the least for custom. It's a nonsensical custom, too."

"Brides are supposed to want a shield between them and the world," Mrs. Mowbray went on. She loved to tease, yet she never teased Rotha; one reason for which, no doubt, was that Rotha never could be teased. She could laugh at the fun of a suggestion, without at all making it a personal matter. But now her cheeks shewed her not quite unconcerned.

"The world will not be here," she replied. "I understand, in a great crowd it might be pleasant, and as part of a pageant it is pretty; but here there will be no crowd and no pageant; and I do not see why there should be a veil."

"It is becoming--" suggested Mrs. Mowbray.

"But one cannot continue to wear a veil; and why should one try to look preternaturally well just for five minutes?"

"They are five minutes to be remembered," said Mrs. Mowbray, while both Rotha's hearers were amused.

"I would rather they should be remembered to my advantage than to my disadvantage," the latter persisted. "It would be pitiful, to set up a standard which in all my life after I never could reach again."

"It is a very old institution"--Mrs. Mowbray went on, while the mischief in her eyes increased and her lips began to wreath in lines of loveliest archness; Rotha's cheeks the while growing more and more high-coloured. "Rebecca, you know, when she saw her husband from a distance, got down respectfully from her camel and put on her veil."

"That was after her marriage," said Rotha. "That was not at the wedding ceremony."

"I fancy there was nothing that we could call a wedding ceremony," Mr. Southwode remarked. "Perhaps we may say she was married by proxy, when her family sent her away with blessings and good wishes. Her putting on her veil at the sight of Isaac shewed that she recognized him for her husband."

"Yes," said Mrs. Mowbray; "it was the old sign of the woman's being under subjection."

"And under protection--" added Mr. Southwode.

"But it does not mean anything *now*," Rotha said quickly. Mrs. Mowbray laughed, and Mr. Southwode could not prevent a smile, at the naive energy of her utterance.

"You need not think I am afraid of it," Rotha said, facing them bravely. "When I was only a little girl, and very wayward, I never wanted to do anything that would displease Mr. Digby. It is not likely I should begin now."

"My dear," said Mrs. Mowbray, with every feature in a quiver of mischief,--"do you think you have given over being wayward?" And Rotha's earnest gravity broke into laughter.

"I think after all," said Mr. Southwode demurely, "all that old meekness was because in your conscience you thought I was right."

"N--o," said Rotha slowly, looking at him,--"I do not think it was."

"And you would fight me now, if I tried to make you do something you thought was wrong."

"Would I?" Rotha said. But her eyes' swift glance said more, which he alone got the benefit of; an innocent glance of such trust and love and such utter scorn of the suggested possibility, that Mr. Southwode did not for a minute or two know very well what he or anybody else was doing.

"We have wandered away from the question," said Mrs. Mowbray.

"What is the question?" he asked.

"Why, the veil! I believe in the value of symbols, for keeping up the ideas of the things symbolized. Don't you?"

"Unquestionably."

"Well--don't you propose, Mr. Southwode, to maintain the Biblical idea of subjection in your family?"

"As well without the veil as with it."

"I see!" said Mrs. Mowbray. "I shall have to succumb; and Rotha will have her own way. But I did want to see her in a veil. We have had a great deal of trouble over that dress, Rotha and I!"

To Rotha's relief however, Mr. Southwode did not ask why or how, but let the conversation drift on to other subjects.

As they were returning through the long course of rooms and passages to the library, Mrs. Mowbray as before leading the way; in one of the lower rooms, dimly lighted, Rotha's steps lingered. She came close to her companion's side and spoke in a lowered tone, timidly.

"Digby--will you ask aunt Serena to come to Southwode?"

"No, my darling," said he, drawing her up to him,--"I will not."

"Then--I?"

"You, and no other. And without my name coming in at all."

"It will not hold for half as much."

"It must. You are the mistress of the house. And besides,--it may be very well that you, who have been injured, should shew your forgiveness; but I am under no such necessity."

"You, who have not been injured, do *not* forgive her?" said Rotha, laughing a little.

"Yes, I forgive her; but I do not propose to reward her."

"You like me to do it?"

"I like you to do it."

They stood still a moment.

"Digby," said Rotha again, with a breath of anxiety, "*do* you care how I am dressed Monday?"

"Do I?--Yes."

He had both arms round her now, and was looking down into her changing face.

"You do not think it need be costly, do you? Mrs. Mowbray has a notion that it ought to be rich."

"Will you let me choose it?"

Rotha hesitated, looked down and looked up.

"It is all yours--" she said, somewhat vaguely, but he understood her.

"Only, remember that I am a poor girl, and it *ought* not to be costly."

"Mrs. Digby Southwode will not be a poor girl," he said, with caresses which shewed Rotha how sweet the words were to him.

"But you know our principle," said Rotha. "I had a mind to wear just my travelling dress; but Mrs. Mowbray said you would not like that, and I must be in white."

"I think I would like you to be in white," he said.

And everybody declared that was a pretty wedding; the prettiest, some said, that ever was seen. There were not many indeed to say anything about it; the Busbys were there, and one or two of Rotha's school friends, and one or two of Mrs. Mowbray's family, and two or three of the teachers, who thought a great deal of Rotha. These were gathered in the library, with the clergyman who was to officiate. Then, entering the library from the drawing room, came Rotha, on Mr. Southwode's arm. She was in white to be sure, with soft-flowing draperies; there was not a hard line or a harsh outline about her. The sleeves of her robe opened and fell away at the elbow, and the arms beneath were half covered with the white gloves. Or rather, one of them; for only one glove was on. The other was carried in the left hand which Rotha had providently left bare. Her young friends were a little shocked at such irregularity, and even Mrs. Mowbray was annoyed; but Rotha came in too quietly, calmly, gracefully, not to check every feeling but one of contented admiration. Her cheek was not pale, and her voice did not falter, and her hand did not tremble; nor was there apparently any feeling of self-consciousness whatever to trouble the beautiful dignified calm. It was the calm of intensity however, not of apathy; and one or two persons noticed afterwards that Rotha was trembling.

When congratulations had been spoken and Rotha went to get ready for travelling, the little company thinned off. Her young friends went to help her; then Mrs. Mowbray too slipped away; then Mr. Southwode disappeared; and the rest collected at the front windows to see Rotha go. After which final satisfaction Mrs. Busby and her daughter walked home silently.

"Mamma," said Antoinette when they were alone at home, "didn't you think Rotha would have a handsomer wedding dress? I thought she would have white silk at least, or satin; and she had only a white muslin!"

"India muslin--" said Mrs. Busby rather grim.

"Well, India muslin; and there was a little embroidered vine all round the bottom of it; but what's India muslin?"

"It looks well on a good figure," said Mrs. Busby.

"I suppose Rotha has what you would call a good figure. But no lace, mamma! and no veil!"

"There was lace on her sleeves--and handsome."

"O but nothing remarkable. And no veil, mamma?"

"Wanted to shew her hair--" said Mrs. Busby. It had been a sour morning's work for the poor woman.

"And not a flower; not a bouquet; not a bit of ornament of any kind!"

Antoinette went on. "What is the use of being married so? And I know if
I was going to be married, I would have a better travelling bonnet.
Just a common little straw, with a ribband round it! Ridiculous."

"Men are very apt to like that kind of thing," said her mother.

"Are they? Why are they. And if they are, why don't we wear them?
Mamma!--isn't it ridiculous to see how taken up Mr. Southwode is with
Rotha?"

"I did not observe that he was so specially 'taken up,'" Mrs. Busby said.

"O but he had really no eyes for anybody else; and he and I used to be good friends once. Of course, Mr. Southwode is never *empress*?--but I saw that she could not move without his knowing it; and if a chair was half a mile off he would put it out of her way. Mamma--I think *I* should like to be married."

"Don't be silly, Antoinette! Your turn will come."

"Will it? But mamma, I want somebody every bit as good as Mr. Southwode."

Silence.

"Mamma," Antoinette began again, "did he ask you to come to Southwode?"

"No." Short.

"Only Rotha?"

Mrs. Busby made no reply. Another pause.

"Mamma, you said you could manage Mr. Southwode;--and you didn't do it!"