

# Nature's Serial Story

E. P. Roe

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# THE WORKS OF E. P. ROE

## VOLUME ONE

### NATURE'S SERIAL STORY

[Illustration: UNDER THE MISTLETOE]

#### PREFACE

"I am getting very tired," said a hard brain-worker to me once. "Life is beginning to drag and lose its zest." This is an experience that can scarcely happen to one who has fallen in love with Nature, or become deeply interested in any of her almost infinite manifestations. Mr. and Mrs. Clifford of my story are not wholly the creations of fancy. The aged man sketched in the following pages was as truly interested in his garden and fruit-trees after he had passed his fourscore years as any enthusiastic horticulturist in his prime, and the invalid, whose memory dwells in my heart, found a solace in flowers which no words of mine have exaggerated. If this book tends to bring others into sympathy with Nature, one of its chief missions will be fulfilled.

A love for the soil and all the pursuits of outdoor life is one of the most healthful signs in a people. Our broad and diversified land affords abundant opportunity for the gratification of every rural taste, and those who form such tastes will never complain that life is losing its zest. Other pleasures pall with time and are satiated. We outgrow them. But every spring is a new revelation, every summer a fresh, original chapter of experience, and every autumn a fruition of hopes as well as of seeds and buds. Nothing can conduce more to happiness and prosperity than multitudes of rural homes. In such abodes you will not find Socialists, Nihilists, and other hare-brained reformers who seek to improve the world by ignoring nature and common-sense. Possession of the soil makes a man conservative, while he, at the same time, is conserved.

The culture of the land is no longer plodding, ox-like drudgery, nor is the farm a place of humdrum, brainless routine. Science offers her aid on every hand, and beauty, in numberless forms, is ever present to those who have eyes and hearts capable of recognizing it. The farmer has a literature of his own, which every year is growing in proportions and value. He also has time for the best literature of the world. It is his own fault if he remains akin to the clod he turns. Is it not more manly to co-work with Nature for a livelihood than to eke out a pallid, pitiful existence behind a counter, usurping some woman's place?

Nature is a good mother, after all, in our latitude. She does not coddle and over-indulge her children, but rewards their love abundantly, invigorates them if they dwell in her presence, and develops mind and muscle, heart and soul, if they obey her laws and seek to know her well. Although infinitely rich, she has not the short-sighted folly of those parents who seek to place everything in the hand of a child without cost. On the contrary, she says, "See what you may win, what you may attain." Every crop is a prize to knowledge, skill, industry. Every flower is a beautiful mystery which may be solved in part; every tree is stored

sunshine for the hearth, shelter from the storm, a thing of beauty while it lives, and of varied use when its life is taken. In animals, birds, insects, and vegetation we are surrounded by diversified life, and our life grows richer, more healthful and complete, as we enter into their life and comprehend it. The clouds above us are not mere reservoirs of water for prosaic use. In their light, shade, and exquisite coloring they are ever a reproach to the blindness of coarse and earthy minds.

The love of Nature is something that may be developed in every heart, and it is a love that rarely fails to purify and exalt. To many she is a cold, indifferent beauty. They see, but do not know and appreciate her, and she passes on her way as if they were nothing to her. But when wooed patiently and lovingly, she stops to smile, caress, and entertain with exhaustless diversion.

In this simple home story I have talked, perhaps, like a garrulous lover who must speak of his mistress, even though his words weary others. I console myself, however, with the thought that my text has proved the prosaic root and stem which have given being to the exquisite flowers of art that adorn these pages. In Mr. Gibson and Mr. Dielman I have had ideal associates in the work. They have poured light on a landscape that would otherwise be dull and gray.

My characters may seem shadows to others, but they have become real, or were real, to me. I meet them still in walks and drives where in fancy I had placed them before. I would not have to go very far to find types of the children introduced, but the lovers, and the majority of the others, began as shadows in the background of imagination, and took form and substance with time. Dr. Marvin, however, is a reality and a most valued friend, who has assisted me greatly in my work. Any one who has the good-fortune to meet Dr. E. A. Mearns, surgeon in the regular army, can scarcely fail to recognize in him the genial sportsman for whom the birds were "always in season." There are others to whom I am indebted, like John Burroughs, Thoreau, Baird, Brewer, and Ridgway, true lovers and interpreters of Nature. Those living stand near her queenly presence; those who have passed on are doubtless nearer still.

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NATURE'S SERIAL STORY

THIS BOOK  
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED  
TO MY WIFE

## NATURE'S SERIAL STORY

### CHAPTER I

#### A COUNTRY HOME

How much it means--what possibilities it suggests! The one I shall describe was built not far from half a century ago, and the lapsing years have only made it more homelike. It has long ceased to be a new object--an innovation--and has become a part of the landscape, like the trees that have grown up around it. Originally painted brown, with the flight of time it has taken a grayish tinge, as if in sympathy with its venerable proprietor. It stands back from the roadway, and in summer has an air of modest seclusion. Elms, maples, and shrubbery give to the passer-by but chance glimpses of the wide veranda, which is indicated, rather than revealed, beyond the thickly clustering vines.

It is now late December, and in contrast with its leafy retirement the old homestead stands out with a sharp distinctness in the white landscape; and yet its sober hue harmonizes with the dark boles of the trees, and suggests that, like them, it is a natural growth of the soil, and quite as capable of clothing itself with foliage in the coming spring. This in a sense will be true when the greenery and blossoms of the wistaria, honeysuckle, and grape-vines appear, for their fibres and tendrils have clung to the old house so long that they may well be deemed an inseparable part of it. Even now it seems that the warmth, light, and comfort within are the sustaining influences which will carry them through, the coming days of frost and storm. A tall pine-tree towers above the northern gable of the dwelling, and it is ever sighing and moaning to itself, as if it possessed some unhappy family secret which it can neither reveal nor forget. On the hither side of its shade a carriage-drive curves toward an ancient horse-block, with many a lichen growing on the under side of the weather-beaten planks and supports. From this platform, where guests have been alighting for a generation or more, the drive passes to an old-fashioned carriage-house, in which are the great family sleigh and a light and gayly painted cutter, revealing that the home is not devoid of the young life to which winter's most exhilarating pastime is so dear. A quaint corn-crib is near, its mossy posts capped with inverted tin pans much corroded by rust. These prevent prowling rats and mice from climbing up among the golden treasures. Still further beyond are the gray old barn and stables, facing the south. Near their doors on the sunny side of the ample yard stand half a dozen ruminating cows, with possibly, between their wide-branching horns, a dim consciousness of the fields, now so white and cold, from which were cropped, in the long-past summer, far juicier morsels than now fall to their lot. Even into their sheltered nook the sun, far down in the south, throws but cold and watery gleams from a steel-colored sky, and as the northern blast eddies around the sheltering buildings the poor creatures shiver, and when their morning airing is over are glad to return to their warm, straw-littered stalls. Even the gallant and champion cock of the yard is chilled. With one foot drawn up into his fluffy feathers he stands motionless in the midst of his disconsolate harem with his eye fixed vacantly on the forbidding outlook. His dames appear neither to miss nor to invite his attentions, and their eyes, usually so bright and alert, often film in weary discontent. Nature, however, is oblivious to all the dumb protests of the barnyard, and the cold steadily strengthens.

Away on every side stretch the angular fields, outlined by fences that are often but white, continuous mounds, and also marked by trees and shrubs that, in their earlier life, ran the gantlet of the bush-hook. Here and there the stones of the higher and more abrupt walls crop out, while the board and rail fences appear strangely dwarfed by the snow that has fallen and drifted around them. The groves and wood-crowned hills still further away look as drearily uninviting as roofless dwellings with icy hearthstones and smokeless chimneys. Towering above all, on the right, is Storm King mountain, its granite rocks and precipices showing darkly here and there, as if its huge white mantle were old and ragged indeed. One might well shiver at the lonely, desolate wastes lying beyond it, grim hills and early-shadowed valleys, where the half-starved fox prowls, and watches for unwary rabbits venturing from their coverts to nibble the frozen twigs. The river, which above the Highlands broadens out into Newburgh Bay, has become a snowy plain, devoid, on this bitter day, of every sign of life. The Beacon hills, on the further side, frown forbiddingly through the intervening northern gale, sweeping southward into the mountain gorge.

On a day like this the most ardent lover of Nature could scarcely fail to shrink from her cold, pallid face and colder breath. Our return to the home, whose ruddy firelight is seen through the frosted window-panes, will be all the more welcome because we have been shivering so long without. The grace of hospitality has been a characteristic of the master of the house for over half a century, and therefore the reader need not fear to enter, especially at this Christmas-time, when the world, as if to make amends for the churlish welcome it gave to its Divine Guest, for whom no better place was found than a stable, now throws open the door and heart in kindly feeling and unselfish impulses.

We propose to make a long visit at this old-fashioned homestead. We shall become the close friends of its inmates, and share in their family life; they will introduce us to some of their neighbors, and take us on many breezy drives and pleasant excursions, with which it is their custom to relieve their busy life; we shall take part in their rural labors, and learn from them the secret of obtaining from nature that which nourishes both soul and body; they will admit us to their confidence, and give us glimpses of that mystery of mysteries, the human heart; and we shall learn how the ceaseless story of life, with its hopes and fears, its joys and sorrows, repeats itself in the quiet seclusion of a country home as truly as in the turmoil of the city. Nor would our visit be complete did we not witness among the ripened fruits of conjugal affection the bud and blossom of that immortal flower which first opened in Eden, and which ever springs unbidden from the heart when the conditions that give it life and sustenance are present.

The hallway of this central scene of our story is wide, and extends to a small piazza in the rear. The front half of this family thoroughfare, partitioned off by sliding-doors, can thus be made into a roomy apartment. Its breezy coolness causes it to be a favorite resort on sultry days, but now it is forsaken, except that a great heater, with its ample rotundity and glowing heart, suggests to the visitor that it stands there as a representative of the host until he shall appear. Some portraits, a fine old engraving, a map of the county, and some sprays of evergreen intermingled with red berries, take away all bareness from the walls, while in a corner near the door stands a rack, formed in part by the branching antlers of a stag, on which hang fur caps and collars, warm wraps and coats, all suggesting abundant means of robbing winter of its rigor. On hooks above the sliding-doors are suspended a modern rifle and



a double-barrelled shot-gun, and above these is a firelock musket that did good service in the Revolution.

The doors opening into the rear hall were pushed back, revealing a broad stairway, leading with an abrupt turn and a landing to the upper chambers. A cheerful apartment on the left of this hall was the abode of an invalid, whose life for many years disease had vainly sought to darken. There were lines of suffering on her thin, white face, and her hair, once black, was silvered; but it would seem that, in the dark, lustrous eyes of the patient woman, courage and hope had been kindled, rather than quenched, by pain. She was now reclining on a sofa, which had been wheeled near to a wood-fire glowing on the hearth of a large Franklin stove; and her dreamy, absent expression often gave place to one of passing interest as her husband, sitting opposite, read from his paper an item of news--some echo from the busy, troubled world, that seemed so remote from their seclusion and peaceful age. The venerable man appeared, however, as if he might still do his share in keeping the world busy, and also in banishing its evils. Although time had whitened his locks, it had touched kindly his stalwart frame, while his square jaw and strong features indicated a character that had met life's vicissitudes as a man should meet them. His native strength and force, however, were like the beautiful region in which he dwelt--once wild and rugged indeed, but now softened and humanized by generations of culture. Even his spectacles could not obscure the friendly and benevolent expression of his large blue eyes. It was evident that he looked at the world, as mirrored before him in the daily journal, with neither cynicism nor mere curiosity, but with a heart in sympathy with all the influences that were making it better.

The sound of a bell caused the old man to rise and assist his wife to her feet; then, with an affectionate manner, tinged with a fine courtesy of the old school, he supported her to the dining-room, placed her in a cushioned chair on his right, at the head of the table, and drew a footstool to her feet. There was a gentleness and solicitude in his bearing which indicated that her weakness was more potent than strength would have been in maintaining her ascendancy!

Meanwhile the rest of the family flocked in with an alacrity which proved either that the bitter cold had sharpened their appetites, or that the old-fashioned one-o'clock dinner was a cheerful break in the monotony of the day. There was a middle-aged man, who was evidently the strong stay and staff on which the old people leaned. His wife was the housekeeper of the family, and she was emphatically the "house-mother," as the Germans phrase it. Every line of her good, but rather care-worn, face bespoke an anxious solicitude about everybody and everything except herself. It was apparent that she had inherited not a little of the "Martha" spirit, and "was careful about many things;" but her slight tendency to worry saved others a world of worry, for she was the household providence, and her numberless little anxieties led to so much prevention of evil that there was not much left to cure. Such was her untiring attention that her thoughtless, growing children seemed cared for by the silent forces of nature. Their clothes came to them like the leaves on the trees, and her deft fingers added little ornaments that cost the wearers no more thought than did the blossoms of spring to the unconscious plants of the garden. She was as essential to her husband as the oxygen in the air, and he knew it, although demonstrating his knowledge rather quietly, perhaps. But she understood him, and enjoyed a little secret exultation over the strong man's almost ludicrous helplessness and desolation when her occasional absences suspended for a brief time their conjugal partnership. She surrounded the old people with a perpetual Indian-summer haze of

kindliness, which banished all hard, bleak outlines from their late autumnal life. In brief, she was what God and nature designed woman to be--the gracious, pervading spirit, that filled the roomy house with comfort and rest. Sitting near were her eldest son and pride, a lad about thirteen years of age, and a girl who, when a baby, had looked so like a boy that her father had called her "Johnnie," a sobriquet which still clung to her. Close to the mother's side was a little embodiment of vitality, mischief, and frolic, in the form of a four-year-old boy, the dear torment of the whole house.

There remain but two others to be mentioned, and the Clifford family will be complete, as constituted at present. The first was the youngest son of the aged man at the head of the table. He had inherited his father's features, but there was a dash of recklessness blended with the manifest frankness of his expression, and in his blue eyes there was little trace of shrewd calculation or forethought. Even during the quiet midday meal they flashed with an irrepressible mirthfulness, and not one at the table escaped his aggressive nonsense. His brother, two or three years his senior, was of a very different type, and seemed somewhat overshadowed by the other's brilliancy. He had his mother's dark eyes, but they were deep and grave, and he appeared reserved and silent, even in the home circle. His bronzed features were almost rugged in their strength, but a heavy mustache gave a touch of something like manly beauty to his rather sombre face. You felt instinctively that he was one who would take life seriously--perhaps a little too seriously--and that, whether it brought him joy or sorrow, he would admit the world but charily to his confidence.

Burtis, the youngest brother, had gone through college after a sort of neck-or-nothing fashion, and had been destined for one of the learned professions; but, while his natural ability had enabled him to run the gantlet of examinations, he had evinced such an unconquerable dislike for restraint and plodding study that he had been welcomed back to the paternal acres, which were broad enough for them all. Mr. Clifford, by various means, had acquired considerable property in his day, and was not at all disappointed that his sons should prefer the primal calling to any other, since it was within his power to establish them well when they were ready for a separate domestic life. It must be admitted, however, that thus far the rural tastes of Burtis were chiefly for free out-of-door life, with its accessories of rod, gun, and horses. But Leonard, the eldest, and Webb, the second in years, were true children of the soil, in the better sense of the term. Their country home had been so replete with interest from earliest memory that they had taken root there like the trees which their father had planted. Leonard was a practical farmer, content, in a measure, to follow the traditions of the elders. Webb, on the other hand, was disposed to look past the outward aspects of Nature to her hidden moods and motives, and to take all possible advantage of his discoveries. The farm was to him a laboratory, and, with something of the spirit of the old alchemists, he read, studied, and brooded over the problem of producing the largest results at the least cost. He was by no means deficient in imagination, or even in appreciation of the beautiful side of nature, when his thoughts were directed to this phase of the outer world; but his imagination had become materialistic, and led only to an eager quest after the obscure laws of cause and effect, which might enable him to accomplish what to his plodding neighbors would seem almost miraculous. He understood that the forces with which he was dealing were wellnigh infinite; and it was his delight to study them, to combine them, and make them his servants. It was his theory that the energy in nature was like a vast motive power, over which man could throw the belt of his skill and knowledge, and so produce results commensurate with the force of which he availed himself. There was,

therefore, an unfailing zest in his work, and the majority of his labors had the character of experiments, which, nevertheless, were so guided by experience that they were rarely futile or unremunerative. On themes that accorded with his tastes and pursuits he would often talk earnestly and well, but his silence and preoccupation at other times proved that it is not best to be dominated by one idea, even though it be a large one.

## CHAPTER II

### AMY WINFIELD

The reader may now consider himself introduced to the household with whom he is invited to sojourn. In time he will grow better acquainted with the different members of the family, as they in their several ways develop their own individuality. A remark from old Mr. Clifford indicates that another guest is expected, who, unlike ourselves, will be present in reality, not fancy, and who is destined to become a permanent inmate of the home.

"This is a bitter day," he said, "for little Amy to come to us; and yet, unless something unforeseen prevents, she will be at the station this evening."

"Don't worry about the child," Burtis responded, promptly; "I'll meet her, and am glad of an excuse to go out this horrid day. I'll wrap her up in furs like an Esquimau."

"Yes, and upset her in the drifts with your reckless driving," said good-natured Leonard. "Thunder is wild enough at any time; but of late, between the cold, high feeding, and idleness, he'll have to be broken over again; lucky if he don't break your neck in the operation. The little girl will feel strange enough, anyway, coming among people that she has never seen, and I don't intend that she shall be frightened out of her wits into the bargain by your harum-scarum ways. You'd give her the impression that we were only half-civilized. So I'll drive over for her in the family sleigh, and take Alf with me. He will be nearer her own age, and help to break the ice. If you want a lark, go out by yourself, and drive where you please, after your own break-neck style."

"Leonard is right," resumed Mr. Clifford, emphatically. "The ward committed to me by my dear old friend should be brought to her home with every mark of respect and affection by the one who has the best right to represent me. I'd go myself, were not the cold so severe; but then Leonard's ways are almost as fatherly as my own; and when his good wife there gets hold of the child she'll soon be fused into the family, in spite of the zero weather. She'll find all the cold without the door."

"I yield," said Burtis, with a careless laugh. "Len shall bring home the little chick, and put her under his wife's wing. I should probably misrepresent the family, and make a bad first impression; and as for Webb, you might as well send the undertaker for her."

"I don't think she will feel strange among us very long," said Leonard's wife. "She shall hang up her stocking to-night, like the other children, and I have some nice little knick-knacks with which to fill it. These,

and the gifts which the rest of you have provided, will delight her, as they do all little people, and make her feel at once that she is part of the family."

"Maggie expresses my purpose fully," concluded Mr. Clifford. "As far as it is within our power, we should make her one of the family. In view of my friend's letters, this is the position that I desire her to sustain, and it will be the simplest and most natural relation for us all. Your mother and I will receive her as a daughter, and it is my wish that my sons should treat her as a sister from the first."

Amy Winfield, the subject of the above remarks, was the only daughter of a gentleman who had once been Mr. Clifford's most intimate friend, and also his partner in many business transactions. Mr. Winfield had long resided abroad, and there had lost the wife whom he had married rather late in life. When feeling his own end drawing near, his thoughts turned wistfully to the friend of his early manhood, and, as he recalled Mr. Clifford's rural home, he felt that he could desire no better refuge for his child. He had always written of her as his "little girl," and such she was in his fond eyes, although in fact she had seen eighteen summers. Her slight figure and girlish ways had never dispelled the illusion that she was still a child, and as such he had commended her to his friend, who had responded to the appeal as to a sacred claim, and had already decided to give her a daughter's place in his warm heart. Mr. Winfield could not have chosen a better guardian for the orphan and her property, and a knowledge of this truth had soothed the last hours of the dying man.

It struck Leonard that the muffled figure he picked up at the station and carried through the dusk and snow to the sleigh was rather tall and heavy for the child he was expecting; but he wrapped her warmly, almost beyond the possibility of speaking, or even breathing, and spoke the hearty and encouraging words which are naturally addressed to a little girl. After seeing that her trunks were safely bestowed in a large box-sledge, under the charge of black Abram, one of the farm-hands, he drove rapidly homeward, admonishing Alfred, on the way, "to be sociable." The boy, however, had burrowed so deep under the robes as to be invisible and oblivious. When Leonard was about to lift her out of the sleigh, as he had placed her in it, the young girl protested, and said:

"I fear I shall disappoint you all by being larger and older than you expect."

A moment later he was surprised to find that the "child" was as tall as his wife, who, with abounding motherly kindness, had received the girl into open arms. Scarcely less demonstrative and affectionate was the greeting of old Mr. Clifford, and the orphan felt, almost from the first, that she had found a second father.

"Why, Maggie," whispered Leonard, "the child is as tall as you are!"

"There's only the more to welcome, then," was the genial answer, and, turning to the young girl, she continued, "Come with me, my dear; I'm not going to have you frightened and bewildered with all your new relations before you can take breath. You shall unwrap in your own room, and feel from the start that you have a nook where no one can molest you or make you afraid, to which you can always retreat;" and she led the way to a snug apartment, where an air-tight stove created summer warmth. There was a caressing touch in Mrs. Leonard's assistance which the young girl felt in her very soul, for tears came into her eyes as with a deep sigh of

relief she sat down on a low chair.

"I feared I should be a stranger among strangers," she murmured; "but I already feel as if I were at home."

"You are, Amy," was the prompt reply, spoken with that quiet emphasis which banishes all trace of doubt. "You are at home as truly as I am. There is nothing halfway in this house. Do you know we all thought that you were a child? I now foresee that we shall be companions, and very companionable, too, I am sure."

There was a world of grateful good-will in the dark hazel eyes which Amy lifted to the motherly face bending over her.

"And now come," pursued Mrs. Leonard; "mother Clifford, the boys, and the children are all eager to see you. You won't find much ice to break, and before the evening is over you will feel that you belong to us and we to you. Don't be afraid."

"I am not afraid any more. I was, though, on my way here. Everything looked so cold and dismal from the car windows, and the gentleman in whose care I was had little to say, though kind and attentive enough. I was left to my own thoughts, and gave way to a foolish depression; but when your husband picked me up in his strong arms, and reassured me as if I were a little girl, my feeling of desolation began to pass away. Your greeting and dear old Mr. Clifford's have banished it altogether. I felt as if my own father were blessing me in the friend who is now my guardian, and of whom I have heard so often; and, after my long winter journey among strangers, you've no idea what a refuge this warm room has already become. Oh, I know I shall be happy. I only wish that dear papa knew how well he has provided for me."

"He knows, my dear. But come, or that incorrigible Burt will be bursting upon us in his impatience, and the little mother must not be kept waiting, either. You will soon learn to love her dearly. Weak and gentle as she is, she rules us all."

"Mother's room" was, in truth, the favorite haunt of the house, and only her need of quiet kept it from being full much of the time. There was nothing bleak or repelling in the age it sheltered, and children and grandchildren gathered about the old people almost as instinctively as around their genial open fire. This momentous Christmas-eve found them all there, a committee of reception awaiting the new inmate of their home. There was an eager desire to know what Amy was like, but it was a curiosity wholly devoid of the spirit of criticism. The circumstances under which the orphan came to them would banish any such tendency in people less kindly than the Cliffords; but their home-life meant so much to them all that they were naturally solicitous concerning one who must, from the intimate relations she would sustain, take from or add much to it. Therefore it was with a flutter of no ordinary expectancy that they waited for her appearance. The only one indifferent was Leonard's youngest boy, who, astride his grandpa's cane, was trotting quietly about, unrestricted in his gambols. Alfred had thawed out since his return from the station, and was eager to take the measure of a possible playmate; but, with the shyness of a boy who is to meet a "strange girl," he sought a partial cover behind his grandfather's chair. Little "Johnnie" was flitting about impatiently, with her least mutilated doll upon her arm; while her uncle Burtis, seated on a low stool by his mother's sofa, pretended to be exceedingly jealous, and was deprecating the fact that he would now be no longer petted as her baby, since the child of her adoption must assuredly

take his place. Webb, who, as usual, was somewhat apart from the family group, kept up a poor pretence of reading; and genial Leonard stood with his back to the fire, his hands clasped behind him, beaming upon all, and waiting to shine on the new-comer. Only Mr. Clifford seemed uninfluenced by the warm, bright present. He gazed fixedly into the flickering blaze, and occasionally took off his spectacles to wipe away the moisture that gathered in his eyes. His thoughts, evidently, were busy with years long past, and were following that old, tried friend who had committed to his hands so sacred a trust.

The door opened, and Mrs. Leonard led Amy forward. The latter hesitated a moment, bewildered by the number of eyes turned toward her, and the new relations into which she was entering. She proved that she was not a child by her quick, blushing consciousness of the presence of two young men, who were as yet utter strangers; and they, in turn, involuntarily gave to the lender, brown-haired girl quite a different welcome from the one they had expected to bestow upon a child. Old Mr. Clifford did not permit her embarrassment to last a moment, but, stepping hastily forward, and encircling her with his arm, he led her to his wife, who brought tears into the eyes of the motherless girl by the gentle warmth of her greeting. She monopolized her ward so long that impatient Burtis began to expostulate, and ask when his turn was coming. The young girl turned a shy, blushing face toward him, and her cheeks, mantling under the full rays of the lamp, rendered the exquisite purity of her complexion all the more apparent. He also began to feel that he was flushing absurdly, but he carried it off with his usual audacity.

"I am much embarrassed and perplexed," he said. "I was led to expect a little sister that I could romp with, and pick up and kiss; but here is a young lady that almost paralyzes me with awe."

"I'd like to see you paralyzed from any such cause just once," Leonard remarked, laughingly. "Go kiss your sister, like a little man."

The young fellow seemed to relish the ceremony exceedingly, and responsive mirthfulness gleamed for a moment in Amy's eyes. Then he dragged Webb forward, saying, "Let me introduce to you the grave and learned member of the family, to whom we all speak with bated breath. You must not expect him to get acquainted with you in any ordinary way. He will investigate you, and never rest until he has discovered all the hidden laws of your being. Now, Webb, I will support you while Amy kisses you, and then you may sit down and analyze your sensations, and perhaps cipher out a method by which a kiss can be rendered tenfold more effective."

Unmoved by his brother's raillery, Webb took the young girl's hand, and looked at her so earnestly with his dark, grave eyes, that hers drooped. "Sister Amy," he said, gently, "I was prepared to welcome you on general principles, but I now welcome you for your own sake. Rattle-brain Burt will make a good playmate, but you will come to me when you are in trouble;" and he kissed her brow.

The girl looked up with a swift, grateful glance; it seemed odd to her, even at that moment of strong and confused impressions, and with the salutes of her guardians still warm upon her cheek, that she felt a sense of rest and security never known before. "He will be my brother in very truth," was the interpretation which her heart gave to his quiet words. They all smiled, for the course of the reticent and undemonstrative young man was rather unexpected. Burtis indulged in a ringing laugh, as he said:

"Father, mother, you must both feel wonderfully relieved. Webb is to look after Amy in her hours of woe, which, of course, will be frequent in this vale of tears. He will console you, Amy, by explaining how tears are formed, and how, by a proper regard for the sequence of cause and effect, there might be more or less of them, according to your desire."

"I think I understand Webb," was her smiling answer.

"Don't imagine it. He is a perfect sphinx. Never before has he opened his mouth so widely, and only an occasion like this could have moved him. You must have unconsciously revealed a hidden law, or else he would have been as mum as an oyster."

Leonard, meanwhile, had seated himself, and was holding little Ned on his knee, his arm at the same time encircling shy, sensitive Johnnie, who was fairly trembling with excited expectancy. Ned, with his thumb in his mouth, regarded his new relative in a nonchalant manner; but to the little girl the home-world was the world, and the arrival in its midst of the beautiful lady never seen before was as wonderful as any fairy tale. Indeed, that such a June-like creature should come to them that wintry day--that she had crossed the terrible ocean from a foreign realm far more remote, in the child's consciousness, than fairy-land--seemed quite as strange as if Cinderella had stepped out of the storybook with the avowed purpose of remaining with them until her lost slipper was found. Leonard, big and strong as he was, felt and interpreted the delicate and thrilling organism of his child, and, as Amy turned toward him, he said, with a smile:

"No matter about me. We're old friends; for I've known you ever since you were a little girl at the station. What if you did grow to be a young woman while riding home! Stranger things than that happen every day in storybooks, don't they, Johnnie? Johnnie, you must know, has the advantage of the rest of us. She likes bread-and-butter, and kindred realities of our matter-of-fact sphere, but she also has a world of her own, which is quite as real. I think she is inclined to believe that you are a fairy princess, and that you may have a wand in your pocket by which you can restore to her doll the missing nose and arm."

Amy scarcely needed Leonard's words in order to understand the child, for the period was not remote when, in her own mind, the sharp outlines of fact had shaded off into the manifold mysteries of wonderland. Therefore, with an appreciation and a gentleness which won anew all hearts, she took the little girl on her lap, and said, smilingly:

"I have a wee wand with which, I'm sure, I can do much for you, and perhaps something for dolly. I can't claim to be a fairy princess, but I shall try to be as good to you as if I were one."

Webb, with his book upside down, looked at the young girl in a way which proved that he shared in Johnnie's wonder and vague anticipation. Alfred, behind his grandfather's chair, was the only one who felt aggrieved and disappointed. Thus far he had been overlooked, but he did not much care, for this great girl could be no companion for him. Amy, however, had woman's best grace--tact--and guessed his trouble. "Alf," she said, calling him by his household name, and turning upon him her large hazel eyes, which contained spells as yet unknown even to herself--"Alf, don't be disappointed. You shall find that I am not too big to play with you."

The boy yielded at once to a grace which he would be years in learning to understand, and which yet affected him subtly, and with something of the same influence that it had upon Webb, who felt that a new element was entering into his life. Mercurial Burtis, however, found nothing peculiar in his own pleasant sensations. He had a score of young lady friends, and was merely delighted to find in Amy a very attractive young woman, instead of a child or a dull, plain-featured girl, toward whom brotherly attentions might often become a bore. He lived intensely in the present hour, and was more than content that his adopted sister was quite to his taste.

"Well, Amy," said Mr. Clifford, benignantly, "you seem to have stepped in among us as if there had always been a niche waiting for you, and I think that, after you have broken bread with us, and have had a quiet sleep under the old roof, you will feel at home. Come, I'm going to take you out to supper to-night, and, Burt, do you be as gallant to your mother."

The young fellow made them all laugh by imitating his father's old-style courtesy; and a happy circle of faces gathered around the board in the cheerful supper-room, to which a profuse decoration of evergreens gave a delightfully aromatic odor. Mr. Clifford's "grace" was not a formal mumble, but a grateful acknowledgment of the source from which, as he truly believed, had flowed all the good that had blessed their life; and then followed the genial, unrestrained table-talk of a household that, as yet, possessed no closeted skeleton. The orphan sat among them, and her mourning weeds spoke of a great and recent sorrow, which might have been desolation, but already her kindling eyes and flushed cheeks proved that this strong, bright current of family life would have the power to carry her forward to a new, spring-like experience. To her foreign-bred eyes there was an abundance of novelty in this American home, but it was like the strangeness of heaven to the poor girl, who for months had been so sad and almost despairing. With the strong reaction natural to youth after long depression, her heart responded to the glad life about her, and again she repeated the words to herself, "I'm sure--oh, I am sure I shall be happy here."

### CHAPTER III

#### A COUNTRY FIRESIDE

After supper they all gathered for a time in the large general sitting-room, and careful Leonard went the rounds of the barn and out-buildings. Mr. Clifford, with considerate kindness, had resolved to defer all conversation with Amy relating to her bereavement and the scenes that had ensued. At this holiday-time they would make every effort within their power to pierce with light and warmth the cold gray clouds that of late had gathered so heavily over the poor child's life. At the same time their festivities would be subdued by the memory of her recent sorrow, and restricted to their immediate family circle. But, instead of obtrusive kindness, they enveloped her in the home atmosphere, and made her one of them. The manner in which old Mrs. Clifford kept her near and retained her hand was a benediction in itself.

Leonard was soon heard stamping the snow from his boots on the back piazza, and in a few moments he entered, shivering.



"The coldest night of the year," he exclaimed. "Ten below zero, and it will probably be twelve before morning. It's too bad, Amy, that you have had such a cold reception."

"The thermometer makes a good foil for your smile," she replied. "Indeed, I think the mercury rose a little while you were looking at it."

"Oh no," he said, laughing, "even you could not make it rise to-night. Heigho, Ned! coming to kiss good-night? I say, Ned, tell us what mamma has for Amy's stocking. What a good joke it is, to be sure! We all had the impression you were a little girl, you know, and selected our gifts accordingly. Burt actually bought you a doll. Ha! ha! ha! Maggie had planned to have you hang up your stocking with the children, and such a lot of little traps and sweets she has for you!"

The boy, to whom going to bed at the usual hour was a heavy cross on this momentous evening, promptly availed himself of a chance for delay by climbing on Amy's lap, and going into a voluble inventory of the contents of a drawer into which he had obtained several surreptitious peeps. His effort to tell an interminable story that he might sit up longer, the droll havoc he made with his English, and the naming of the toys that were destined for the supposed child, evoked an unforced merriment which banished the last vestige of restraint.

"Well, I'm glad it has all happened so," said Amy, after the little fellow had reluctantly come to the end of his facts and his invention also. "You make me feel as if I had known you for years--almost, indeed, as if I had come to you as a little girl, and had grown up among you. Come, Ned, it shall all turn out just as you expected. I'll go with you upstairs, and hang my stocking beside yours, and mamma shall put into it all the lovely things you have told me about. Santa Claus does not know much about my coming here, nor what kind of a girl I am, so your kind mamma meant to act the part of Santa Claus in my behalf this year, and give him a chance to get acquainted with me. But he knows all about you, and there's no telling how soon he may come to fill your stocking. You know he has to fill the stockings of all the little boys and girls in the country, and that will take a long time. So I think we had better go at once, for I don't believe he would like it if he came and found you up and awake."

This put a new aspect upon going to bed early, and having seen his short, chubby stocking dangling with a long, slender one of Amy's by the chimney-side, Ned closed his eyes with ineffable content and faith. Amy then returned to the sitting-room, whither she was soon followed by Maggie, and after some further light and laughing talk the conversation naturally drifted toward those subjects in which the family was practically interested.

"What do you think, father?" Leonard asked. "Won't this finish the peach and cherry buds? I've always heard that ten degrees of cold below zero destroyed the fruit germs."

"Not always," replied the man of long experience. "It depends much upon their condition when winter sets in, and whether, previous to the cold snap, there have been prolonged thaws. The new growth on the trees ripened thoroughly last fall, and the frost since has been gradual and steady. I've known peach-buds to survive fifteen below zero; but there's always danger in weather like this. We shall know what the prospects are

after the buds thaw out."

"How will that be possible?" Amy asked, in surprise.

"Now, Webb, is your chance to shine," cried Burtis. "Hitherto, Amy, the oracle has usually been dumb, but you may become a priestess who will evoke untold stores of wisdom."

Webb flushed slightly, but again proved that his brother's banter had little influence.

"If you are willing to wait a few days," he said, with a smile, "I can make clear to you, by the aid of a microscope, what father means, much better than I can explain. I can then show you the fruit germs either perfect or blackened by the frost."

"I'll wait, and remind you of your promise, too. I don't know nearly as much about the country as a butterfly or a bird, but should be quite as unhappy as they were I condemned to city life. So you must not laugh at me if I ask no end of questions, and try to put my finger into some of your horticultural pies."

His pleased look contained all the assurance she needed, and he resumed, speaking generally: "The true places for raising peaches--indeed, all the stone-fruits--successfully in this region are the plateaus and slopes of the mountains beyond us. At their height the mercury never falls as low as it does with us, and when we have not a peach or cherry I have found such trees as existed high up among the hills well laden."

"Look here, uncle Webb," cried Alf, "you've forgotten your geography. The higher you go up the colder it gets."

The young man patiently explained to the boy that the height of the Highlands is not sufficient to cause any material change in climate, while on still nights the coldest air sinks to the lowest levels, and therefore the trees in the valleys and at the base of the mountains suffer the most. "But what you say," he concluded, "is true as a rule. The mercury does range lower on the hills; and if they were a thousand or fifteen hundred feet higher peaches could not be grown at all."

Amy mentally soliloquized: "I am learning not only about the mercury, but also--what Alf has no doubt already found out--that Webb is the one to go to if one wishes anything explained. What's more, he wouldn't, in giving the information, overwhelm one with a sense of deplorable ignorance."

In accordance with his practical bent, Webb continued: "I believe that a great deal of money could be made in the Highlands by raising peaches. The crop would be almost certain, and the large late varieties are those which bring the extraordinary prices. What is more, the mountain land would probably have the quality of virgin soil. You remember, father, don't you, when peaches in this region were scarcely troubled by disease?"

"Indeed I do. There was a time when they would live on almost like apple-trees, and give us an abundance of great luscious fruit year after year. Even with the help of the pigs we could not dispose of the crops, the bulk of which, in many instances, I am sorry to say, went into brandy. What was that you were reading the other day about peaches in Hawthorne's description of the Old Manse?"

Webb took the book and read: "Peach-trees which, in a good year, tormented me with peaches neither to be eaten nor kept, nor, without labor and perplexity, to be given away."

"That hits it exactly," resumed the old gentleman, laughing, "only every year was a good year then, and we had not the New York market within three hours of us. Even if we had, a large modern orchard would have supplied it. One of the most remarkable of the changes I've witnessed in my time is the enormous consumption of fruit in large cities. Why, more is disposed of in Newburgh than used to go to New York. But to return to peaches; our only chance for a long time has been to plant young trees every year or two, and we scarcely secured a crop more than once in three years. Even then the yellows often destroyed the trees before they were old enough to bear much. They are doing far better of late along the Hudson, and there is good prospect that this region will become the greatest peach-growing locality in the country."

"I'm sure you are right," assented Webb, "and I think it will pay us to plant largely in the spring. I don't suppose you ever saw a peach-orchard in England, Amy?"

"I don't think I ever did. They were all grown in front of sunny walls, \_espalier\_, as papa termed it. We had some in our garden."

"Yes," resumed Webb, "the climate there is too cool and humid for even the wood to ripen. Here, on the contrary, we often have too vivid sunshine. I propose that we put out all the north slope in peaches."

"Do you think a northern exposure best?" Leonard asked.

"I certainly do. In my opinion it is not the frost, unless it be very severe, that plays the mischief with the buds, but alternate freezing and thawing, especially after the buds have started in spring. On a northern slope the buds usually remain dormant until the danger of late frosts is over. I am quite sure, too, that the yellows is a disease due chiefly to careless or dishonest propagation. Pits and buds have been taken from infected trees, and thus the evil has been spread far and wide. There is as much to be gained in the careful and long-continued selection of fruits and vegetables as in the judicious breeding of stock."

"Has no remedy for the yellows been discovered?" Leonard again queried.

"Only the axe and fire. The evil should be extirpated as fast as it appears. Prevention is far better than any attempt at cure. The thing to do is to obtain healthier trees, and then set them out on new land. That's why I think the north slope will be a good place, for peaches have never been grown there in my memory."

"Come, Amy," said Burt. "Len and Webb are now fairly astride of their horticultural hobbies. Come with me, and see the moon shining on old Storm King."

They pushed aside the heavy crimson curtains, which added a sense of warmth to the cheerful room, and looked at the cold white world without--a ghost of a world, it seemed to Amy. The moon, nearly full, had risen in the gap of the Highlands, and had now climbed well above the mountains, softening and etherealizing them until every harsh, rugged outline was lost. The river at their feet looked pallid and ghostly also. When not enchained by frost, lights twinkled here and there all over its broad surface, and the

intervals were brief when the throbbing engines of some passing steamer were not heard. Now it was like the face of the dead when a busy life is over.

"It's all very beautiful," said Amy, shivering, "but too cold and still. I love life, and this reminds one of death, the thoughts of which, with all that it involves, have oppressed me so long that I must throw off the burden. I was growing morbid, and giving way to a deeper and deeper depression, and now your sunny home life seems just the antidote for it all."

The warm-hearted fellow was touched, for there were tears in the young girl's eyes. "You have come to the right place, Amy," he said, eagerly. "You cannot love life more than I, and I promise to make it lively for you. I'm just the physician to minister to the mind diseased with melancholy. Trust me. I can do a hundred-fold more for you than delving, matter-of-fact Webb. So come to me when you have the blues. Let us make an alliance offensive and defensive against all the powers of dulness and gloom."

"I'll do my best," she replied, smiling; "but there will be hours, and perhaps days, when the past with its shadows will come back too vividly for me to escape it."

"I'll banish all shadows, never fear. I'll make the present so real and jolly that you will forget the past."

"I don't wish to forget, but only to think of it without the dreary foreboding and sinking of heart that oppressed me till I came here. I know you will do much for me, but I am sure I shall like Webb also."

"Oh, of course you will. He's one of the best fellows in the world. Don't think that I misunderstand him or fail to appreciate his worth because I love to run him so. Perhaps you'll wake him up and get him out of his ruts. But I foresee that I'm the medicine you most need. Come to the fire; you are shivering."

"Oh, I'm so glad that I've found such a home," she said, with a grateful glance, as she emerged from the curtains.

## CHAPTER IV

### GUNNING BY MOONLIGHT

Webb saw the glance from eyes on which were still traces of tears; he also saw his brother's look of sympathy; and with the kindly purpose of creating a diversion to her thoughts he started up, breaking off his discussion with Leonard, and left the room. A moment later he returned from the hall with the double-barrelled gun.

"What now, Webb?" cried Burt, on the \_qui vive\_. "You will make Amy think we are attacked by Indians."

"If you are not afraid of the cold, get your gun, and I think I can give you some sport, and, for a wonder, make you useful also," Webb replied.

"While you were careering this afternoon I examined the young trees in the nursery, and found that the rabbits were doing no end of mischief. It has been so cold, and the snow is so deep, that the little rascals are gathering near the house. They have gnawed nearly all the bark off the stems of some of the trees, and I doubt whether I can save them. At first I was puzzled by their performances. You know, father, that short nursery row grafted with our seedling apple, the Highland Beauty? Well, I found many of the lower twigs taken off with a sharp, slanting cut, as if they had been severed with a knife, and I imagined that a thrifty neighbor had resolved to share in our monopoly of the new variety, but I soon discovered that the cuttings had been made too much at random to confirm the impression that some one had been gathering scions for grafting. Tracks on the snow, and girdled trees, soon made it evident that rabbits were the depredators. One of the little pests must have climbed into a bushy tree at least eighteen inches from the snow, in order to reach the twigs I found cut."

"A rabbit up a tree!" exclaimed Leonard. "Who ever heard of such a thing?"

"Well, you can see for yourself to-morrow," Webb resumed. "Of course we can't afford to pasture the little fellows on our young trees, and so must feed them until they can be shot or trapped. The latter method will be good fun for you, Alf. This afternoon I placed sweet apples, cabbage-leaves, and turnips around the edge of a little thicket near the trees; and, Burt, you know there is a clump of evergreens near, from whose cover I think we can obtain some good shots. So get your gun, and we'll start even."

At the prospect of sport Burt forgot Amy and everything else, and dashed off.

"Oh, papa, can't I go with them?" pleaded Alf.

"What do you think, Maggie?" Leonard asked his wife, who now entered.

"Well, boys will be boys. If you will let mamma bundle you up--"

"Oh, yes, anything, if I can only go!" cried Alf, trembling with excitement.

"Sister Amy," Webb remarked, a little diffidently, "if you care to see the fun, you can get a good view from the window of your room. I'll load my gun in the hall."

"Can I see you load?" Amy asked, catching some of Alf's strong interest. "It's all so novel to me."

"Certainly. I think you will soon find that you can do pretty much as you please in your new home. You are now among republicans, you know, and we are scarcely conscious of any government."

"But I have already discovered one very strong law in this household," she smilingly asserted, as she stood beside him near the hall-table, on which he had placed his powder-flask and shot-pouch.

"Ah, what is that?" he asked, pouring the powder carefully into the muzzles of the gun.

"The law of kindness, of good-will. Why," she exclaimed, "I expected to be weeks in getting acquainted, but here you are all calling me sister Amy as if it were the most natural thing in the world. It seems so odd," she laughed, "that I am not a bit afraid of you, even with your gun, and yet we have just met, as it were. The way you and your brothers say 'sister Amy' makes the relation seem real. I can scarcely believe that I am the same girl that stepped down at the station this evening, nor can I get over my pleased wonder at the transformation."

"Amy," said the young man, earnestly, "your coming promises so much to us all! You were just the one element lacking in our home. I now see that it was so. I already have the presentiment that you will do more for us than we can for you."

"I ought to do all that the deepest gratitude could prompt. You have never known what it is to be desolate one hour, and to find an ideal home the next."

"I wish it might be an ideal home to you; but don't expect too much. You will find some of us very human."

"Therefore I shall feel the more at home. Papa always spoiled me by letting me have my own way, and I shall often tax your patience. Do you know, I never saw a gun loaded before. There seems to be so much going on here, and I have lived such a quiet life of late. How will you make the thing go off?"

"These little percussion-caps will do the business. It seems to me that I've always been quiet, and perhaps a trifle heavy. I hope you will think it your mission to render me less matter-of-fact. I'm ready now, and here comes Burt with his breech-loader. If you will go to your room now, you can see our shots."

A moment later she stood with Johnnie at her window, both almost holding their breath in expectation as they saw the young men, with Alf following, steal toward a clump of evergreens behind the house.

"Quiet and steady now," Webb cautioned his eager brother; "and, Alf, you step in my tracks, so there may be no noise." Thus they made their way among the pines, and peered cautiously out. "Hold on, Burt," Webb whispered, as the former was bringing his gun to his shoulder; "I want a crack at them as well as yourself. Let's reconnoitre. Yes, there are three or four of the scamps. Let Alf see them. They look so pretty in the moonlight that I've scarcely the heart to disturb, much less to kill them."

"Oh, stop your sentimental nonsense!" muttered Burt, impatiently. "It's confoundedly cold, and they may take fright and disappear."

"Black ingratitude!" Webb exclaimed. "If there isn't one in the apple nursery in spite of all my provision for them! That ends my compunctions. I'll take him, and you that big fellow munching a cabbage-leaf. We'll count three--now, one, two--" The two reports rang out as one, and the watchers at the window saw the flashes, and thrilled at the reverberating echoes.

"It's almost as exciting as if they were shooting Indians, robbers, or giants," cried Johnnie, clapping her hands and jumping up and down.

"Back," said Webb to Alf, who was about to rush forward to secure the game; "we may get another shot."

They waited a few moments in vain, and then succumbed to the cold. To Alf was given the supreme delight of picking up the game that lay on the snow, making with their blood the one bit of color in all the white garden.

"Poor little chaps!" Webb remarked, as he joined the family gathered around Alf and the rabbits in the sitting-room. "It's a pity the world wasn't wide enough for us all."

"What has come over you, Webb?" asked Burt, lifting his eyebrows. "Has there been a hidden spring of sentiment in your nature all these years, which has just struck the surface?"

It was evident that nearly all shared in Webb's mild regret that such a sudden period had been put to life at once so pretty, innocent, and harmful. Alf, however, was conscious of only pure exultation. Your boy is usually a genuine savage, governed solely by the primal instinct of the chase and destruction of wild animals. He stroked the fur, and with eyes of absorbed curiosity examined the mischievous teeth, the long ears, the queer little feet that never get cold, and the places where the lead had entered with the sharp deadly shock that had driven out into the chill night the nameless something which had been the little creature's life. Amy, too, stroked the fur with a pity on her face which made it very sweet to Webb, while tender-hearted Johnnie was exceedingly remorseful, and wished to know whether "the bunnies, if put by the fire, would not come to life before morning." Indeed, there was a general chorus of commiseration, which Burt brought to a prosaic conclusion by saying: "Crocodile tears, every one. You'll all enjoy the pot-pie to-morrow with great gusto. By the way, I'll prop up one of these little fellows at the foot of Ned's crib, and in the morning he'll think that the original 'Br'er Rabbit' has hopped out of Uncle Remus's stories to make him a Christmas visit."

## CHAPTER V

### CHRISTMAS EVE AND MORNING

Old Mrs. Clifford now created a diversion by asking: "How about our plants to-night, Maggie? Ought we not to take some precautions? Once before when it was as cold as this we lost some, you know"

"Leonard," said his wife, in response to the suggestion, "it will be safer for you to put a tub of water in the flower-room; that will draw the frost from the plants. Mother is the queen of the flowers in this house," continued Mrs. Leonard, turning to Amy, "and I think she will be inclined to appoint you first lady in attendance. She finds me cumbered with too many other cares. But it doesn't matter. Mother has only to look at the plants to make them grow and bloom."

"There you are mistaken," replied the old lady, laughing. "Flowers are like babies. I never made much of a fuss over my babies, but I loved them, and saw that they had just what they needed at the right time."

"That accounts for Webb's exuberant growth and spirit, and the ethereal beauty of Len's mature blossoming," remarked Burt.

"You are a plant that never had enough pruning," retorted his portly eldest brother.

"I shall be glad to help you, if you will teach me how," Amy said to Mrs. Clifford.

"In the pruning department?" asked Burt, with assumed dismay.

"Possibly," was the reply, with an arch little look which delighted the young fellow.

"Come, Maggie," said Mrs. Clifford, "sing a Christmas carol before we separate. It will be a pleasant way of bringing our happy evening to a close."

Mrs. Leonard went to the piano. "Amy," she asked, "can't you help me?"

"I'll do my best, if you will choose something I know."

A selection was soon made, and Amy modestly blended a clear, sweet voice with the air that Mrs. Leonard sang, and as the sympathetic tones of the young girl swelled the rich volume of song the others exchanged looks of unaffected pleasure.

"Oh, Amy, I am so glad you can sing!" cried Mrs. Clifford, "for we have always made so much of music in our home."

"Papa," she replied, with moist eyes, "felt as you do, and he had me sing for him ever since I can remember."

"Amy dear," said Mrs. Leonard, in a low voice, "suppose you take the soprano and I the alto in the next stanza."

They were all delighted with the result, and another selection was made, in which Burt's tenor and Webb's bass came in with fine effect.

"Amy, what a godsend you are to us all!" said Leonard, enthusiastically. "I am one of the great army of poets who can't sing, but a poet nevertheless."

"Yes, indeed, Len," added Burt; "it needs but a glance to see that you are of that ethereal mold of which poets and singers are made. But isn't it capital! We now have all the four parts."

"Amy," said Mr. Clifford, "do you know an old Christmas hymn that your father and I loved when we were as young as you are?" and he named it.

"I have often sung it for him, and he usually spoke of you when I did so"; and she sang sweet, undying words to a sweet, quaint air in a voice that trembled with feeling.

The old gentleman wiped his eyes again and again. "Ah!" he said, "how that takes me back into the past! My friend and I knew and loved that air and hymn over sixty years ago. I can see him now as he looked then. God bless his child, and now my child!" he added, as he drew Amy caressingly toward him. "A brief evening has made you one of us. I thank God that he



has sent one whom it will be so easy for us all to love; and we gratefully accept you as a Christmas gift from Heaven."

Then, with the simplicity of an ancient patriarch, he gathered his household around the family altar, black Abram and two maids entering at his summons, and taking seats with an air of deference near the door. Not long afterward the old house stood silent and dark in the pallid landscape.

Though greatly wearied, Amy was kept awake during the earlier part of the night by the novelty of her new life and relations, and she was awakened in the late dawn of the following day by exclamations of delight from Mrs. Leonard's room. She soon remembered that it was Christmas morning. The children evidently had found their stockings, for she heard Johnnie say, "Oh, mamma, do you think Aunt Amy is awake? I would so like to take her stocking to her!"

"Yes," cried Amy, "I'm awake"; and the little girl, draped in white, soon pushed open the door, holding her own and Amy's stockings in hands that trembled with delightful anticipation.

"Jump into bed with me," said Amy, "and we will empty our stockings together."

The years rolled back, the previous months of sorrow and suffering were forgotten; the day, the hour, with its associations, the eager child that nestled close to her, made her a child again. She yielded wholly to her mood; she would be a little girl once more, Johnnie's companion in feeling and delight; and the morning of her life was still so new that the impulses of that enchanted age before the light of experience has defined the world into its matter-of-fact proportions came back unforced and unaffected. Her voice vied with Johnnie's in its notes of excitement and pleasure, and to more than one who heard her it seemed that their first impression was correct, that a little child had come to them, and that the tall, graceful maiden was a myth.

"Merry Christmas, Amy!" cried the voice of Webb on the stairs.

The child vanished instantly, and a blushing girl let fall the half-emptied stocking. Something in that deep voice proved that if she were not yet a woman, she had drawn so near that mystery of life that its embarrassing self-consciousness was beginning to assert itself. "How silly he will think me!" was her mental comment, as she returned his greeting in a voice that was rather faint.

The "rising bell" now resounded through the house, and she sprang up with the purpose of making amends by a manner of marked dignity. And yet there remained with her a sense of home security, of a great and new-found happiness, which the cold gray morning could not banish. The air-tight stove glowed with heat and comfort, and she afterward learned that Mrs. Leonard had replenished the fire so noiselessly as not to awaken her. The hearty Christmas greetings of the family as she came into the breakfast-room were like an echo of the angels' song of "good-will." The abounding kindness and genuine pleasure at her presence made the feeling that she had indeed become one of the household seem the most natural thing in the world, instead of a swiftly wrought miracle.

Little Ned had in his arms one of the rabbits that had been shot on the previous evening, and to him it was more wonderful than all his toys. "You should have seen him when he awoke," said his mother, "and saw the

poor little thing propped up at the foot of his crib. His eyes grew wider and rounder, and at last he breathed, in an awed whisper, 'Br'er Rabbit.' But he soon overcame his surprise, and the jargon he talked to it made our sides ache with laughing."

The gifts that had been prepared for the supposed child were taken by Amy in very good part, but with the tact of a well-bred girl who would not spoil a jest, rather than with the undisguised delight of Johnnie.

"Only Johnnie and I have seen little Amy," said Leonard--"I at the depot before she grew up; and this morning she became a little girl again as a Christmas wonder for my little girl. Johnnie's faith and fairy lore may make the transformation possible to her again, but I fear the rest of us will never catch another glimpse of the child we expected"; for Amy's grown-up air since she had appeared in the breakfast-room had been almost a surprise to him after hearing through the partition her pretty nonsense over her stocking.

"I fear you are right," said Amy, with a half-sigh; "and yet it was lovely to feel just like Johnnie once more;" and she stole a shy glance at Webb, who must have heard some of her exclamations. The expression of his face seemed to reassure her, and without further misgiving she joined in a laugh at one of Burt's sallies.

## CHAPTER VI

### NATURE'S HALF-KNOWN SECRETS

Amy's thoughts naturally reverted before very long to Mrs. Clifford's pets--the flowers--and she asked how they had endured the intense cold of the night.

"They have had a narrow escape," the old lady replied. "If Maggie had not suggested the tub of water last night, I fear we should have lost the greater part of them."

"Yes," said Mrs. Leonard, "I went to the flower-room with fear and trembling this morning, and when I found the water frozen thick I was in despair."

"It was the water freezing that saved the plants," Webb remarked, quietly. "I put water in the root-cellar before I went to bed last night, with like good effect."

"Well, for the life of me," said Maggie, "I can't understand why the plants and roots don't freeze when water does."

"Come, Burt," added her husband, "you are a college-bred man. You explain how the water draws the frost from the plants."

"Oh, bother!" Burt answered, flushing slightly, "I've forgotten. Some principle of latent heat involved, I believe. Ask Webb. If he could live long enough he'd coax from Nature all her secrets. He's the worst Paul Pry into her affairs that I ever knew. So beware, Amy, unless you are more secretive than Nature, which I cannot believe, since you seem so

natural."

"I'm afraid your knowledge, Burt, resembles latent heat," laughed Leonard. "Come, see what you can do, Webb."

"Burt is right," said Webb, good-naturedly; "the principle of latent heat explains it all, and he could refresh his memory in a few moments. The water does not draw the frost from the plants, but before it can freeze it must give out one hundred and forty degrees of latent heat. The flower-room and root-cellar were therefore so much warmer during the night than if the water had not been there. The plants that were nipped probably suffered after the ice became so thick as to check in a great measure the freezing process."

"How can ice stop water from freezing?" Alf asked, in much astonishment.

"By keeping it warm, on the same principle that your bed-clothes kept you warm last night. Heat passes very slowly through ice—that is, it is a poor conductor. With the snow it is the winter wrap of nature, which protects all life beneath it. When our ponds and rivers are once frozen over, the latent heat in the water beneath can escape through the ice but very gradually, and every particle of ice that forms gives out into the water next to it one hundred and forty degrees of heat. Were it not for these facts our ponds would soon become solid. But to return to the tub of water in the flower-room. The water, when placed there, was probably warmer than the air, and so would give out or radiate its heat until a thermometer, placed either in the room or in the water, would mark thirty-two degrees above zero. At this point the water would begin to freeze, but plants or vegetables would not. They would require slightly severer cold to affect them. But as soon as the water begins to freeze it also gradually gives out its latent heat, and before a particle of ice can form it must give out one hundred and forty degrees of heat to the air and water around it. Therefore the freezing process goes on slowly, and both the air and water are kept comparatively warm. After a time, however, the ice becomes so thick over the surface that the freezing goes on more and more slowly, because the latent heat in the unfrozen water cannot readily escape through the ice. It is therefore retained, just as the latent heat in the water of an ice-covered pond is retained."

"It follows, then," said Leonard, "that after the water beneath the ice in the tub began to freeze slowly, the flower-room, in that same degree, began to grow cold."

"Certainly, for only as the water freezes can it give out its latent heat. The thick wooden side of the tub is a poor conductor; the ice that has formed over the surface is even a worse, and so the water within is shielded from the cold. It therefore almost ceases to freeze, and so becomes of no practical use. An intelligent understanding of these principles is of great practical value. If I could have waked up and placed another tub of water in the room at two or three o'clock, or else taken all of the ice out of the first one, the process of freezing and giving out heat would have gone on rapidly again, and none of the plants would have suffered. I have heard people say that putting water in a cellar was all a humbug—that the water froze and the vegetables also. Of course the vegetables froze after the water congealed, or the cellar may have been so defective that both froze at the same time. The latent heat given out by a small amount of freezing water cannot counteract any great severity of frost."

"The more water you have, then, the better?" said his father.

"Yes, for then there is more to freeze, and the effect is more gradual and lasting."

"I feel highly honored, Webb," said his mother, smiling, "that so much science should minister to me and my little collection of plants. I now see that the why and wherefore comes in very usefully. But please tell me why you put the plants that were touched with frost into cold water, and why you will not let the sunlight fall on them?"

"For the same reason that you would put your hand in cold water if frost-bitten. Your expression, 'touched with frost,' shows that there is hope for them. If they were thoroughly frozen you would lose them. Your plants, you know, are composed chiefly of water, which fills innumerable little cells formed by the vegetable tissue. If the water in the cells is chilled beyond a certain point, if it becomes solid ice, it expands and breaks down the tissue of the cells, and the structure of the plant is destroyed. If the frost can be gradually withdrawn so as to leave the cells substantially intact, they can eventually resume their functions, and the plant receive no very great injury."

"But why does sudden heat or sunlight destroy a frosted plant?"

"For the same reason that it breaks down the vegetable tissue. Heat expands, and the greater the heat the more rapid the expansion. When the rays of the sun, which contain a great deal of heat, fall on any part of a frost-bitten plant, that part begins to expand so rapidly and violently that the cellular tissues are ruptured, and life is destroyed. What is more, the heat does not permeate equally and at once the parts affected by frost. The part furthest away from the heat remains contracted, while the parts receiving it expand rapidly and unequally, and this becomes another cause for the breaking up of the vegetable tissue. The same principle is illustrated when we turn up the flame of a lamp suddenly. The glass next to the flame expands so rapidly that the other parts cannot keep pace, and so, as the result of unequal expansion, the chimney goes to pieces. With this principle in mind, we seek to withdraw the frost and to reapply the vivifying heat very gradually and equally to every part, so that the vegetable tissues may be preserved unbroken. This is best done by immersing them in cold water, and then keeping them at a low temperature in a shady place. As the various parts of the plant resume their functions, the light and heat essential to its life and growth can gradually be increased."

"It seems to me that your theory is at fault, Webb," said Leonard. "How is it that some plants are able to endure such violent alternations of heat and cold?"

"We don't have to go far--at least I do not--before coming to the

limitations of knowledge. What it is in the structure of a plant like the pansy, for instance, which makes it so much more hardy than others that seem stronger and more vigorous, even the microscope does not reveal. Nature has plenty of secrets that she has not yet told. But of all people in the world those who obtain their livelihood from the soil should seek to learn the wherefore of everything, for such knowledge often doubles the prospect of success."

"Now, Amy," said Burtis, laughing, "you see what sort of a fellow Webb

is. You cannot even sneeze without his considering the wherefore back to the remotest cause."

"Are you afraid of me, Amy?" asked Webb.

"No," was the quiet reply.

Amy spent the greater part of the day in unpacking her trunks, and in getting settled in her home-like room. It soon began to take on a familiar air. Hearts, like plants, strike root rapidly when the conditions are favorable. Johnnie was her delighted assistant much of the time, and this Christmas-day was one long thrill of excitement to the child. Her wonder grew and grew, for there was a foreign air about many of Amy's things, and, having been brought from such a long distance, they seemed to belong to another world. The severe cold continued, and only the irrepressible Burtis ventured out to any extent. When Alf's excitement over his presents began to flag, Webb helped him make two box-traps, and the boy concealed them in the copse where the rabbit-tracks were thickest. Only the biting frost kept him, in his intense eagerness, from remaining out to see the result. Webb, however, taught him patience by assuring him that watched traps never caught game.

Beyond the natural home festivities the day passed quietly, and this was also true of the entire holiday season. Cheerfulness, happiness abounded, and there was an unobtrusive effort on the part of every one to surround the orphan girl with a genial, sunny atmosphere. And yet she was ever made to feel that her sorrow was remembered and respected. She saw that Mr. Clifford's mind was often busy with the memory of his friend, that even Burt declined invitations to country merrymakings in the vicinity, and that she was saved the ordeal of meeting gay young neighbors with whom the Clifford home was a favorite resort. In brief, they had received her as a daughter of the house, and in many delicate ways proved that they regarded her as entitled to the same consideration as if she were one. Meanwhile she was shown that her presence cast no gloom over the family life, and she knew and they knew that it would be her father's wish that she should share in all the healing gladness of that life. No true friend who has passed on to the unclouded shore would wish to leave clouds and chilling shadows as a legacy, and they all felt that in Amy's case it had been her father's desire and effort to place her under conditions that would develop her young life happily and therefore healthfully. There is the widest difference in the world between cheerfulness and mirthfulness which arise from happy home life and peaceful hearts, and the levity that is at once unfeeling, inconsiderate, and a sure indication of a coarse-fibred, ill-bred nature. Amy was made to feel this, and she found little indeed which jarred with memories that were only sad, not bitter or essentially depressing. Every day brought new assurance that her father's wishes and hopes in her behalf had been fulfilled to a degree that must have added to his heavenly content, could he have known how well he had provided for her. And so the busy days glided on; and when the evening brought the household together, there were music, reading aloud, and genial family talk, which usually was largely colored by their rural calling. Therefore, on New-Year's morning Amy stood as upon a sunny eminence, and saw her path leading away amid scenes that promised usefulness, happiness, and content.

## NEIGHBORS DROP IN

One evening early in the year three neighbors dropped in. They were evidently as diverse in character as in appearance. The eldest was known in the neighborhood as Squire Bartley, having long been a justice of the peace. He was a large landholder, and carried on his farm in the old-fashioned ways, without much regard to system, order, or improvement. He had a big, good-natured red face, a stout, burly form, and a corresponding voice. In marked contrast with his aspect and past experience was Mr. Alvord, who was thin almost to emaciation, and upon whose pallid face not only ill-health but deep mental suffering had left their unmistakable traces. He was a new-comer into the vicinity, and little was known of his past history beyond the fact that he had exchanged city life for country pursuits in the hope of gaining strength and vigor. He ought to have been in the full prime of cheerful manhood, but his sombre face and dark, gloomy eyes indicated that something had occurred in the past which so deeply shadowed his life as to make its long continuance doubtful. He had not reached middle age, and yet old Mr Clifford appeared a heartier man than he. While he had little knowledge of rural occupations, he entered into them with eagerness, apparently finding them an antidote for sad memories. He had little to say, but was a good listener, and evidently found at the Cliffords' a warmth and cheer coming not from the hearth only. Webb and Leonard had both been very kind to him in his inexperience, and an occasional evening at their fireside was the only social tendency that he had been known to indulge. Dr. Marvin, the third visitor, might easily compete with Burt in flow of spirits, and in his day had been quite as keen a sportsman. But he was unlike Burt in this, that all birds were game to him, and for his purpose were always in season. To Emerson's line,

"Hast thou named all the birds without a gun?"

he could not reply in the affirmative, and yet to kill as many as possible had never been his object. From earliest childhood he had developed a taste for ornithology, and the study of the fauna of the region had been almost his sole recreation for years. He too was a frequent visitor at the Cliffords', where he ever found ready listeners and questioners.

"I don't know what is the matter with my poultry," Squire Bartley remarked, after the weather, politics, and harmless phases of local gossip had been discussed; "they are getting as poor as crows. My boys say that they are fed as well as usual. What's more, I've had them throw down for 'em a warm mixture of meal and potatoes before they go to roost, but we don't get an egg. What luck are you having, Leonard?"

"Well, I don't know that I'm having much luck in the matter," Leonard replied, with his humorous smile; "but I can't complain. Until this very cold weather set in we had eggs in plenty, and still have a fair supply. I'm inclined to think that if your hens are the right kind, and are properly cared for, they can't help producing eggs. That has usually been my experience. I don't believe much in luck, but there are a few simple things that are essential to success with poultry in winter. By the way, do you give them well or spring water to drink?"

"Well, no, I don't believe we do, at this time of year. I've so arranged it that the drippings from the eaves of the barn fall into a trough, and

that saves trouble. I expect the boys are careless, too. for I've seen the fowls eating snow and ice."

"That accounts for your poultry being like crows, for, whatever the reason may be, snow-water will soon reduce chickens to mere feathers and bones."

"You don't say so!" cried the squire. "Well, I never heard that before."

"I don't think your system of feeding is the correct one, either," pursued Leonard. "You give your hens the warm meal to-morrow evening, as usual, and then about midnight go to the roosts and feel of their crops. I'll warrant you'll find them empty. The meal, you see, digests speedily, and is soon all gone. Then come the long cold hours before morning, and the poor creatures have nothing to sustain them, and they become chilled and enfeebled. It takes some time for the grain you give them in the morning to digest, and so they are left too long a time without support. Give them the grain in the evening--corn and buckwheat and barley mixed--and there is something for their gizzards to act on all night long. The birds are thus sustained and kept warm by their food. Then in the morning, when they naturally feel the cold the most, give them the warm food, mixing a little pepper with it during such weather as this."

"Well," remarked the squire, "I guess you're right. Anyway, I'll try your plan. One is apt to do things the same way year after year without much thought about it."

"Then, again," resumed Leonard, "I find it pays to keep poultry warm, clean, and well sheltered. In very cold weather I let them out only for an hour or two. The rest of the time they are shut up in the chicken-house, which has an abundance of light, and is well ventilated. Beneath the floor of the chicken-house is a cellar, which I can fill with stable manure, and graduate the heat by its fermentation. This acts like a steady furnace. There is room in the cellar to turn the manure from time to time to prevent its becoming fire-fanged, so that there is no loss in this respect. Between the heat from beneath, and the sun streaming in the windows on the south side of the house, I can keep my laying hens warm even in zero weather; and I make it a point not to have too many. Beyond a certain number, the more you have the worse you're off, for poultry won't stand crowding."

"You farmers," put in Dr. Marvin, "are like the doctors, who kill or cure too much by rule and precedent. You get into certain ways or ruts, and stick to them. A little thought and observation would often greatly modify your course. Now in regard to your poultry, you should remember that they all existed once as nature made them--they were wild, and domestication cannot wholly change their character. It seems to me that the way to learn how to manage fowls successfully is to observe their habits and modes of life when left to themselves. In summer, when they have a range, we find them eating grass, seeds, insects, etc. In short, they are omnivorous. In winter, when they can't get these things, they are often fed one or two kinds of grain continuously. Now, from their very nature, they need in winter all the kinds of food that they instinctively select when foraging for themselves--fresh vegetables, meat, and varieties of seeds or grain. We give to our chickens all the refuse from the kitchen--the varied food we eat ourselves, with the exception of that which contains a large percentage of salt--and they thrive and lay well. Before they are two years old we decapitate them. Old fowls, with rare exceptions, will not lay in winter."

Sad-eyed Mr. Alvord listened as if there were more consolation and cheer in this talk on poultry than in the counsel of sages. The "chicken fever" is more inevitable in a man's life than the chicken-pox, and sooner or later all who are exposed succumb to it. Seeing the interest developing in his neighbor's face, Leonard said, briskly:

"Mr. Alvord, here's an investment that will pay you to consider. The care of poultry involves light and intelligent labor, and therefore is adapted to those who cannot well meet the rough and heavy phases of outdoor work. The fowls often become pets to their keepers, and the individual oddities and peculiarities of character form an amusing study which is not wanting in practical advantages. The majority of people keep ordinary barn-door fowls, which are the result of many breeds or strains. The consequence is almost as great diversity of character within gallinaceous limits as exists in the families that care for them. For instance, one hen is a good, persistent layer; another is a patient, brooding mother; a third is fickle, and leaves her nest so often and for such long intervals that the eggs become chilled, and incubation ceases. Some are tame and tractable, others as wild as hawks, and others still are not of much account in any direction, and are like commonplace women, who are merely good to count when the census is taken."

"I hope you make no reference to present company," Maggie remarked.

Leonard gave his wife one of his humorous looks as he replied, "I never could admit that in regard to you, for it would prove too much against myself. The idea of my picking out a commonplace woman!"

"Leonard knows, as we all do, that he would be like a decapitated chicken himself without her," said Mrs. Clifford, with her low laugh.

Maggie smiled. This was re-assuring from the mother of the eldest and favorite son.

"Well," remarked Squire Bartley, sententiously, "there are old housewives in the neighborhood that have more luck with poultry than any of you, with all your science."

"Nonsense," replied Dr. Marvin. "You know a little about law, squire, and I less about medicine, perhaps, and yet any good mother could take care of a lot of children better than we could. There is old Mrs. Mulligan, on the creek road. She raises ducks, geese, and chickens innumerable, and yet I fail to see much luck in her management; but she has learned from experience a better skill than the books could have taught her, for she said to me one day, 'I jis thries to foind out what the crathers wants, and I gives it to 'em,' She knows the character of every hen, duck, and goose she has, and you don't catch her wasting a sitting of eggs under a fickle biddy. And then she watches over her broods as Mrs. Leonard does over hers. Don't talk about luck. There has been more of intelligent care than luck in bringing up this boy Alf. I believe in book-farming as much as any one, but a successful farmer could not be made by books only; nor could I ever learn to be a skilful physician from books, although all the horses on your place could not haul the medical literature extant. I must adopt Mrs. Mulligan's tactics, and so must you. We must find out 'what the crathers want,' be they plants, stock, or that most difficult subject of all, the human crather. He succeeds best who does this in season, and not out of season."

"You are right, doctor," said Leonard, laughing. "I agree with what you



say about the varied diet of poultry in general, and also in particular, and I conform my practice to your views. At the same time I am convinced that failure and partial success with poultry result more from inadequate shelter and lack of cleanliness than from lack of proper food. It does not often happen in the country that fowls are restricted to a narrow yard or run, and when left to themselves they pick up, even in winter, much and varied food in and about the barn. But how rarely is proper shelter provided! It is almost as injurious for poultry as it would be for us to be crowded, and subjected to draughts, dampness, and cold. They may survive, but they can't thrive and be profitable. In many instances they are not even protected from storms, and it's a waste of grain to feed poultry that roost under a dripping roof."

"Well," said the squire, "I guess we've been rather slack. I must send my boys over to see how you manage."

"Amy," remarked Burtis, laughing, "you are very polite. You are trying to look as if you were interested."

"I am interested," said the young girl, positively. "One of the things I liked best in English people was their keen interest in all rural pursuits. Papa did not care much for such things; but now that I am a country girl I intend to learn all I can about country life."

Amy had not intended this as a politic speech, but it nevertheless won her the increased good-will of all present. Burtis whispered,

"Let me be your instructor."

Something like a smile softened Webb's rugged face, but he did not raise his eyes from the fire.

"If her words are not the result of a passing impulse," he thought, "sooner or later she will come to me. Nature, however, tolerates no fitful, half-hearted scholars, and should she prove one, she will be contented with Burt's out-of-door fun."

"Miss Amy," remarked Dr. Marvin, vivaciously, "if you will form some of my tastes you will never suffer from ennui. Don't be alarmed; I have not drugs in my mind. Doctors rarely take their own medicine. You don't look very strong, and have come back to your native land with the characteristics of a delicate American girl, rather than the vigor of an English one. I fear you slighted British beef and mutton. If I were so officious as to prescribe unasked, I should put you on birds for several months, morning, noon, and evening. Don't you be officious also, Burt. It's on the end of your tongue to say that you will shoot them for her. I had no such commonplace meaning. I meant that Miss Amy should enjoy the birds in their native haunts, and learn to distinguish the different varieties by their notes, plumage, and habits. Such recreation would take her often out-of-doors, and fill every spring and summer day with zest."

"But, Dr. Marvin," cried Amy, "is not the study of ornithology rather a formidable undertaking?"

"Yes," was the prompt reply. "I sometimes feel as if I could devote several lifetimes to it. But is it such a formidable thing to begin with a few of our commonest birds, like the robin or wren, for instance; to note when they first arrive from their southern sojourn, the comical scenes of courtship and rivalry in the trees about the door, the building

of their homes, and their housekeeping? I am sorry to say that I find some of my patients consumed with a gossip interest in their neighbors' affairs. If that interest were transferred to the families residing in the cherry and apple trees, to happy little homes that often can be watched even from our windows, its exercise would have a much better effect on health and character. When a taste for such things is once formed, it is astonishing how one thing leads to another, and how fast knowledge is gained. The birds will soon begin to arrive, Miss Amy, and a goodly number stay with us all winter. Pick out a few favorite kinds, and form their intimate acquaintance. I would suggest that you learn to identify some of the birds that nest near the house, and follow their fortunes through the spring and as late in the summer as their stay permits, keeping a little diary of your observations. Alf here will be a famous ally. You will find these little bird histories, as they develop from day to day, more charming than a serial story."

It were hard to tell who was the more captivated by the science of ornithology, Amy or Alf, when this simple and agreeable method for its study was suggested. Mr. Alvord looked wistfully at the unalloyed pleasure of the boy and the young girl as they at once got together on the sofa and discussed the project. He quietly remarked to the doctor, "I also shall make time to follow your suggestion, and shall look forward to some congenial society without my home if not within it."

"See what comes from being enthusiastic about a thing!" laughed the doctor. "I have made three converts."

Mrs. Leonard looked furtively and pityingly at the lonely Mr. Alvord. A man without a wife to take care of him was to her one of the forlornest of objects, and with secret satisfaction she thought, "Leonard, I imagine, would find the birds' housekeeping a poor substitute for mine."

## CHAPTER VIII

### EAGLES

"Speaking of birds, doctor, there are some big fellows around this winter," said Burtis. "While in the mountains with the wood teams some days since I saw a gray and a bald eagle sailing around, but could not get a shot at them. As soon as it grows milder I am going up to the cliffs on the river to see if I can get within rifle range."

"Oh, come, Burt, I thought you were too good a sportsman to make such a mistake," the doctor rejoined. "A gray eagle is merely a young bald eagle. We have only two species of the genuine eagle in this country, the bald, or American, and the golden, or ring-tailed. The latter is very rare, for their majesties are not fond of society, even of their own kind, and two nests are seldom found within thirty miles of each other. The bald eagle has been common enough, and I have shot many. One morning long ago I shot two, and had quite a funny experience with one of them."

"Pray tell us about it," said Burtis, glad of a diversion from his ornithological shortcomings.

"Well, one February morning (I could not have been much over fourteen at

the time) I crossed the river on the ice, and took the train for Peekskill. Having transacted my business and procured a good supply of ammunition, I started homeward. From the car windows I saw two eagles circling over the cliffs of the lower Highlands, and with the rashness and inexperience of a boy I determined to leave the train while it was under full headway. I passed through to the rear car, descended to the lowest step, and, without realizing my danger, watched for a level place that promised well for the mad project. Such a spot soon occurring, I grasped the iron rail tightly with my right hand, and with my gun in my left I stepped off into the snow, which was wet and slushy. My foot bounded up and back as if I had been india-rubber, and maintaining my hold I streamed away behind the car in an almost horizontal position. About once in every thirty feet my foot struck the ground, bounded up and back, and I streamed away again as if I were towed or carried through the air. After taking a few steps of this character, which exceeded any attributed to giants in fairy-lore, I saw I was in for it, and the next time my foot struck I let go, and splashed, with a force that I even now ache to think of, into the wet snow. It's a wonder I didn't break my neck, but I scrambled up not very much the worse for my tumble. There were the eagles; my gun was all right, and that was all I cared for at the time. I soon loaded, using the heaviest shot I had, and in a few moments the great birds sailed over my head. I devoted a barrel to each, and down they both came, fluttering, whirling, and uttering cries that Wilson describes as something like a maniacal laugh. One lodged in the top of a tall hemlock, and stuck; the other came flapping and crashing through another tree until stopped by the lower limbs, where it remained. I now saw that their distance had been so great that I had merely disabled them, and I began reloading, but I was so wild from excitement and exultation that I put in the shot first. Of course my caps only snapped, and the eagle in the hemlock top, recovering a brief renewal of strength after the shock of his wound, flew slowly and heavily away, and fell on the ice near the centre of the river. I afterward learned that it was carried off by some people on an ice-boat. The other eagle, whose wing I had broken, now reached the ground, and I ran toward it, determined that I should not lose both of my trophies. As I approached I saw that I had an ugly customer to deal with, for the bird, finding that he could not escape, threw himself on his back, with his tail doubled under him, and was prepared to strike blows with talons and beak that would make serious wounds, I resolved to take my game home alive, and after a little thought cut a crotched stick, with which I held his head down while I fastened his feet together. A man who now appeared walking down the track aided me in securing the fierce creature, which task we accomplished by tying some coarse bagging round his wings, body, and talons. I then went on to the nearest station in order to take the train homeward. Of course the eagle attracted a great deal of attention in the cars--more than he seemed to enjoy, for he soon grew very restless. I was approaching my destination, and three or four people were about me, talking, pointing, and trying to touch the bird, when he made a sudden dive. The bagging round his wings and feet gave way, and so did the people on every side. Down through the aisle, flapping and screaming, went the eagle; and the ladies, with skirts abridged, stood on the seats and screamed quite as discordantly. Not a man present would help me, but, mounting on their seats, they vociferated advice. The conductor appeared on the scene, and I said that if he would head the bird off I would catch him. This he agreed to do, but he no sooner saw the eagle bearing down on him with his savage eye and beak than he, as nimbly at the best of them, hopped upon a seat, and stood beside a woman, probably for her protection. A minute or two later the train stopped at my station, and I was almost desperate. Fortunately I was in the last car, and I drove my eagle toward the rear door, from which, by the vigorous use of

my feet, I induced him to alight on the ground--the first passenger of the kind, I am sure, that ever left the cars at that station. After several minor adventures, I succeeded in getting him home. I hoped to keep him alive, but he would not eat; so I stuffed him in the only way I could, and he is now one of my specimens."

"Well," said Burt, laughing, "that exceeds any eagle adventure that I have heard of in this region. In the car business you certainly brought his majesty down to the prose of common life, and I don't wonder the regal bird refused to eat thereafter."

"Cannot eagles be tamed--made gentle and friendly?" old Mrs. Clifford asked. "I think I remember hearing that you had a pet eagle years ago."

"Yes, I kept one--a female--six months. She was an unusually large specimen, and measured about eight feet with wings extended. The females of all birds of prey, you know, are larger than the males. As in the former case, I had broken one of her wings, and she also threw herself on her back and made her defence in the most savage manner. Although I took every precaution in my power, my hands were bleeding in several places before I reached home, and, in fact, she kept them in a rather dilapidated condition all the time I had her. I placed her in a large empty room connected with the barn, and found her ready enough to eat. Indeed, she was voracious, and the savage manner in which she tore and swallowed her food was not a pleasant spectacle. I bought several hundred live carp--a cheap, bony fish--and put them in a ditch where I could take them with a net as I wanted them. The eagle would spring upon a fish, take one of her long hops into a corner, and tear off its head with one stroke of her beak. While I was curing her broken wing the creature tolerated me after a fashion, but when she was well she grew more and more savage and dangerous. Once a Dutchman, who worked for us, came in with me, and the way the eagle chased that man around the room and out of the door, he swearing meanwhile in high German and in a high key, was a sight to remember. I was laughing immoderately, when the bird swooped down on my shoulder, and the scars would have been there to-day had not her talons been dulled by their constant attrition with the boards of her extemporized cage. Covering my face with my arm--for she could take one's eye out by a stroke of her beak--I also retreated. She then dashed against the window with such force that she bent the wood-work and broke every pane of glass. She seemed so wild for freedom that I gave it to her, but the foolish creature, instead of sailing far away, lingered on a bluff near the river, and soon boys and men were out after her with shot-guns. I determined that they should not mangle her to no purpose, and so, with the aid of my rifle, I added her also to my collection of specimens."

"Have you ever found one of their nests?" Webb asked.

"Yes. They are rather curious affairs, and are sometimes five feet in diameter each way, and quite flat at the top. They use for the substratum of the domicile quite respectable cord-wood sticks, thicker than one's wrist. The mother-bird must be laying her eggs at this season, cold as it is. But they don't mind the cold, for they nest above the Arctic Circle."

"I don't see how it is possible for them to protect their eggs and young in such severe weather," Mrs. Clifford remarked.

"Nature takes care of her own in her own way," replied the doctor, with a slight shrug. "One of the birds always remains on the nest."

"Well," said Squire Bartley, who had listened rather impatiently to so much talk about an unprofitable bird, "I wish my hens were laying now. Seems to me that Nature does better by eagles and crows than by any fowls I ever had. Good-night, friends."

With a wistful glance at Amy's pure young face, and a sigh so low that only pitiful Mrs. Leonard heard it, Mr. Alvord also bowed himself out in his quiet way.

"Doctor," said Burtis, resolutely, "you have excited my strongest emulation, and I shall never be content until I have brought down an eagle or two."

"Dear me!" cried the doctor, looking at his watch, "I should think that you would have had enough of eagles, and of me also, by this time. Remember, Miss Amy, I prescribe birds, but don't watch a bald-eagle's nest too closely. We are not ready to part with your bright eyes any more than you are."

## CHAPTER IX

### SLEIGHING IN THE HIGHLANDS

During the night there was a slight fall of snow, and Webb explained at the breakfast-table that its descent had done more to warm the air than would have been accomplished by the fall of an equal amount of red-hot sand. But more potent than the freezing particles of vapor giving off their latent heat were the soft south wind and the bright sunshine, which seemingly had the warmth of May.

"Come, Amy," said Burtis, exultantly, "this is no day to mope in the house. If you will trust yourself to me and Thunder, you shall skim the river there as swiftly as you can next summer on the fastest steamer."

Amy was too English to be afraid of a horse, and with wraps that soon proved burdensome in the increasing warmth of the day, she and Burt dashed down the slopes and hill that led to the river, and out upon the wide, white plain. She was a little nervous as she thought of the fathoms of cold, dark water beneath her; but when she saw the great loads of lumber and coal that were passing to and fro on the track she was convinced that the ice-bridge was safe, and she gave herself up to the unalloyed enjoyment of the grand scenery. First they crossed Newburgh Bay, with the city rising steeply on one side, and the Beacon Mountains further away on the other. The snow covered the ice unbrokenly, except as tracks crossed here and there to various points. Large flocks of crows were feeding on these extemporized roadways, and they looked blacker than crows in the general whiteness. As the sleigh glided here and there it was hard for Amy to believe that they were in the track of steamers and innumerable sail-boats, and that the distant shores did not slope down to a level plain, on which the grass and grain would wave in the coming June; but when Burt turned southward and drove under the great beetling mountains, and told her that their granite feet were over a hundred yards deep in the water, she understood the marvellous engineering of the frost-spirit that had spanned the river, where the tides are so swift, and had so strengthened it in a few short days and nights that it could

bear enormous burdens.

Never before had she seen such grand and impressive scenery. They could drive within a few feet of the base of Storm King and Cro' Nest; and the great precipices and rocky ledges, from which often hung long, glittering icicles, seemed tenfold more vast than when seen from a distance. The furrowed granite cliffs, surmounted by snow, looked like giant faces, lined and wrinkled by age and passion. Even the bright sunshine could do little to soften their frowning grandeur. Amy's face became more and more serious as the majesty of the landscape impressed her, and she grew silent under Burtis's light talk. At last she said:

"How transient and insignificant one feels among these mountains! They could not have looked very different on the morning when Adam first saw Eve."

"They are indeed superb," replied Burt, "and I am glad my home--our home--is among them; and yet I am sure that Adam would have found Eve more attractive than all the mountains in the world, just as I find your face, flushed by the morning air, far more interesting than these hills that I have known and loved so long."

"My face is a novelty, brother Burt," she answered, with deepening color, for the young fellow's frequent glances of admiration were slightly embarrassing.

"Strange to say, it is growing so familiar that I seem to have known you all my life," he responded, with a touch of tenderness in his tone.

"That is because I am your sister," she said, quietly. "Both the word and the relation suggest the idea that we have grown up together," and then she changed the subject so decidedly that even impetuous Burt felt that he must be more prudent in expressing the interest which daily grew stronger. As they were skirting Constitution Island, Amy exclaimed:

"What a quaint old house! Who lives there all alone?"

"Some one that you know about, I imagine. Have you ever read 'The Wide, Wide World'?"

"What girl has not?"

"Well, Miss Warner, the author of the book, resides there. The place has a historical interest also. Do you see those old walls? They were built over one hundred years ago. At the beginning of the Revolution, the Continental authorities were stupid enough to spend considerable money, for that period, in the building of a fort on those rocks. Any one might have seen that the higher ground opposite, at West Point, commanded the position."

"No matter about the fort. Tell me of Miss Warner."

"Well, she and her sister spend their summers there, and are ever busy writing, I believe. I'll row you down in the spring after they return. They are not there in winter, I am told. I have no doubt that she will receive you kindly, and tell you all about herself."

"I shall not fail to remind you of your promise, and I don't believe she will resent a very brief call from one who longs to see her and speak

with her. I am not curious about celebrities in general, but there are some writers whose words have touched my heart, and whom I would like to see and thank. Where are you going now?"

"I am going to show you West Point in its winter aspect. You will find it a charming place to visit occasionally, only you must not go so often as to catch the cadet fever."

"Pray what is that?"

"It is an acute attack of admiration for very young men of a military cut. I use the word cut advisedly, for these incipient soldiers look for all the world as if carved out of wood. They gradually get over their stiffness, however, and as officers usually have a fine bearing, as you may see if we meet any of them. I wish, though, that you could see a squad of 'plebes' drilling. They would provoke a grin on the face of old Melancholy himself."

"Where is the danger, then, of acute admiration?"

"Well, they improve, I suppose, and are said to be quite irresistible during the latter part of their course. You need not laugh. If you knew how many women--some of them old enough to be the boys' mothers--had succumbed, you would take my warning to heart."

"What nonsense! You are a little jealous of them, Burt."

"I should be indeed if you took a fancy to any of them."

"Well, I suppose that is one of the penalties of having brothers. Are all these houses officers' quarters?"

They had now left the ice, and were climbing the hill as he replied:

"No, indeed. This is Logtown--so named, I suppose, because in the earlier days of the post log huts preceded these small wooden houses. They are chiefly occupied by enlisted men and civilian employees. That large building is the band barracks. The officers' quarters, with a few exceptions, are just above the brow of the hill west and south of the plain."

In a few moments Amy saw the wide parade and drill ground, now covered with untrodden snow.

"What a strange formation of land, right in among the mountains," she said.

"Yes," replied her companion. "Nature could not have designed a better place for a military school. It is very accessible, yet easily guarded, and the latter is an important point, for some of the cadets are very wild, and disposed toward larks."

"I imagine that they are like other young fellows. Were you a saint at college?"

"How can you think otherwise? There, just opposite to us, out on the plain, the evening parade takes place after the spring fairly opens. I shall bring you down to see it, and 'tis a pretty sight. The music also is fine. Oh, I shall be magnanimous, and procure you some introductions

if you wish."

"Thank you. That will be the best policy. These substantial buildings on our right are the officers' quarters, I suppose?"

"Yes. That is the commandant's, and the one beyond it is the superintendent's. They are both usually officers of high rank, who have made an honorable record for themselves. The latter has entire charge of the post, and the position is a very responsible one; nor is it by any means a sinecure, for when the papers have nothing else to find fault with they pick at West Point."

"I should think the social life here would be very pleasant."

"It is, in many respects. Army ties beget a sort of comradeship which extends to the officers' wives. Frequent removal from one part of the country to another prevents anything like vegetating. The ladies, I am told, do not become overmuch engrossed in housekeeping, and acquire something of a soldier's knack of doing without many things which would naturally occupy their time and thought if they looked forward to a settled life. Thus they have more time for reading and society. Those that I have met have certainly been very bright and companionable, and many who in girlhood were accustomed to city luxury can tell some strange stories of their frontier life. There is one army custom which often bears pretty hard. Can you imagine yourself an officer's wife?"

"I'll try, if it will be of help to you."

"Then suppose you were nicely settled in one of those houses, your furniture arranged, carpets down, etc. Some morning you learn that an officer outranking your husband has been ordered here on duty. His first step may be to take possession of your house. Quarters are assigned in accordance with rank, and you would be compelled to gather up your household goods and take them to some smaller dwelling. Then your husband--how droll the word sounds!--could compel some other officer, whom he outranked, to move. It would seem that the thing might go on indefinitely, and the coming of a new officer produce a regular 1st of May state of affairs."

"I perceive that you are slyly providing an antidote against the cadet fever. What large building is this?"

"The cadet barracks. There are over two hundred young fellows in the building. They have to study, I can tell you, nor can they slip through here as some of us did at college. All must abide the remorseless examinations, and many drop out. There goes a squad to the riding hall. Would you like to see the drill and sabre practice?"

Amy assenting, they soon reached the balcony overlooking the arena, and spent an amused half-hour. The horses were rather gay, and some were vicious, while the young girl's eyes seemed to have an inspiring effect upon the riders. Altogether the scene was a lively one, and at times exciting. But then drove southward almost to Fort Montgomery, and returning skirted the West Point plain by the river road, pointing out objects of interest at almost every turn, and especially calling the attention of his companion to old Fort Putnam, which he assured her should be the scene of a family picnic on some bright summer day, Amy's wonder and delight scarcely knew bounds when from the north side of the plain she saw for the first time the wonderful gorge through which the



river flows southward from Newburgh Bay--Mount Taurus and Breakneck on one side, and Cro' Nest and Storm King on the other. With a deep sigh of content, she said:

"I'm grateful that my home is in such a region as this."

"I'm grateful too," the young fellow replied, looking at her and not at the scenery.

But she was too pre-occupied to give him much attention, and in less than half an hour Thunder's fleet steps carried them through what seemed a realm of enchantment, and they were at home. "Burt," she said, warmly, "I never had such a drive before. I have enjoyed every moment."

"Ditto, ditto," he cried, merrily, as the horse dashed off with him toward the barn.

## CHAPTER X

### A WINTER THUNDER-STORM

Even before the return of Burtis and Amy the sun had been obscured by a fast-thickening haze, and while the family was at dinner the wind began to moan and sigh around the house in a way that foretold a storm.

"I fear we shall lose our sleighing," old Mr. Clifford remarked, "for all the indications now point to a warm rain."

His prediction was correct. Great masses of vapor soon came pouring over Storm King, and the sky grew blacker every moment. The wind blew in strong, fitful gusts, and yet the air was almost sultry. By four o'clock the rain began to dash with almost the violence of a summer shower against the windowpanes of Mr. and Mrs. Clifford's sitting-room, and it grew so dark that Amy could scarcely see to read the paper to the old gentleman. Suddenly she was startled by a flash, and she looked up inquiringly for an explanation.

"You did not expect to see a thunder-storm almost in midwinter?" said Mr. Clifford, with a smile. "This unusual sultriness is producing unseasonable results."

"Is not a thunder-storm at this season very rare?" she asked.

"Yes; and yet some of the sharpest lightning I have ever seen has occurred in winter."

A heavy rumble in the southwest was now heard, and the interval between the flash and the report indicated that the storm centre was still distant. "I would advise you to go up to Maggie's room," resumed Mr. Clifford, "for from her south and west windows you may witness a scene that you will not soon forget. You are not afraid, are you?"

"No, not unless there is danger," she replied, hesitatingly.

"I have never been struck by lightning," the old man remarked, with a

smile, "and I have passed through many storms. Come, I'll go with you. I never tire of watching the effects down among the mountains."

They found Mrs. Leonard placidly sewing, with Johnnie and Ned playing about the room. "You, evidently, are not afraid," said Amy.

"Oh no!" she replied. "I have more faith in the presence of little children than in the protection of lightning-rods. Yes, you may come in," she said to Webb, who stood at the door. "I suppose you think my sense of security has a very unscientific basis?"

"There are certain phases of credulity that I would not disturb for the world," he answered: "and who knows but you are right? What's more, your faith is infectious; for, whatever reason might tell me, I should still feel safer in a wild storm with the present company around me. Don't you think it odd, Amy, that what we may term natural feeling gets the better of the logic of the head? If that approaching storm should pass directly over us, with thickly flying bolts, would you not feel safer here?"

"Yes."

Webb laughed in his low, peculiar way, and murmured, "What children an accurate scientist would call us!"

"In respect to some things I never wish to grow up," she replied.

"I believe I can echo that wish. The outlook is growing fine, isn't it?"

The whole sky, which in the morning had smiled so brightly in undimmed sunshine, was now black with clouds. These hung so low that the house seemed the centre of a narrow and almost opaque horizon. The room soon darkened with the gloom of twilight, and the faces of the inmates faded into shadowy outlines. The mountains, half wrapped in vapor, loomed vast and indefinite in the obscurity. Every moment the storm grew nearer, and its centre was marked by an ominous blackness which the momentary flashes left all the more intense. The young girl grew deeply absorbed in the scene, and to Webb the strong, pure profile of her awed face, as the increasingly vivid flashes revealed it, was far more attractive than the landscape without, which was passing with swift alternations from ghastly gloom to even more ghastly pallor. He looked at her; the rest looked at the storm, the children gathering like chickens under the mother's wing.

At last there came a flash that startled them all. The mountains leaped out of the darkness like great sheeted spectres, and though seen but a second, they made so strong an impression that they seemed to have left their solid bases and to be approaching in the gloom. Then came a magnificent peal that swept across the whole southern arch of the sky. The reverberations among the hills were deep, long, and grand, and the fainter echoes had not died away before there was another flash--another thunderous report, which, though less loud than the one that preceded it, maintained the symphony with scarcely diminished grandeur.

"This is our Highland music, Amy," Webb remarked, as soon as he could be heard. "It has begun early this season, but you will hear much of it before the year is out."

"It is rather too sublime for my taste," replied the young girl, shrinking closer to Mr. Clifford's side.

"You are safe, my child," said the old man, encircling her with his arm.

"Let me also reassure you in my prosaic way," Webb continued. "There, do you not observe that though this last flash seemed scarcely less vivid, the report followed more tardily, indicating that the storm centre is already well to the south and east of us? The next explosion will take place over the mountains beyond the river. You may now watch the scene in security, for the heavenly artillery is pointed away from you."

"Thank you. I must admit that your prose is both reassuring and inspiring. How one appreciates shelter and home on such a night as this! Hear the rain splash against the window! Every moment the air seems filled with innumerable gems as the intense light pierces them. Think of being out alone on the river, or up there among the hills, while Nature is in such an awful mood!--the snow, the slush, everything dripping, the rain rushing down like a cataract, and thunder-bolts playing over one's head. In contrast, look around this home-like room. Dear old father's serene face"--for Mr. Clifford had already taught her to call him father--"makes the Divine Fatherhood seem more real. Innocent little Ned here does indeed seem a better protection than a lightning-rod, while Johnnie, putting her doll to sleep in the corner, is almost absolute assurance of safety. Your science is all very well, Webb, but the heart demands something as well as the head. Oh, I wish all the world had such shelter as I have to-night!"

It was not often that Amy spoke so freely and impulsively. Like many with delicate organizations, she was excited by the electrical condition of the air. The pallor of awe had given place to a joyous flush, and her eyes were brilliant.

"Sister Amy," said Webb, as they went down to supper, "you must be careful of yourself, and others must be careful of you, for you have not much *\_vis inertiae\_*. Some outside influences might touch you, as I would touch your piano, and make sad discord."

"Should I feel very guilty because I have not more of that substantial quality which can only find adequate expression in Latin?" she asked, with a humorous glance.

"Oh, no! At least not in my opinion. I much prefer a woman in whom the spirit is pre-eminent over the clay. We are all made of dust, you know, and we men, I fear, often smack of the soil too strongly; therefore we are best pleased with contrasts. Moreover, our country life will brace you without blunting your nature. I should be sorry for you, though, if you were friendless, and had to face the world alone."

"That can scarcely happen now," she said, with a grateful glance.

During the early part of the evening they all became absorbed in a story, which Webb read aloud. At last Mr. Clifford rose, drew aside the curtains, and looked out. "Come here, Amy," he said. "Look where the storm thundered a few hours since!"

The sky was cloudless, the winds were hushed, the stars shining, and the mountains stood out gray and serene in the light of the rising moon.

"See, my child, the storm has passed utterly away, and everything speaks of peace and rest. In my long life I have had experiences which at the time seemed as dark and threatening as the storm that awed you in the early evening, but they passed also, and a quiet like that which reigns

without followed. Put the lesson away in your heart, my dear; but may it be long before you have occasion for its use! Good-night."

## CHAPTER XI

### NATURE UNDER GLASS

The next morning Amy asked Mrs. Clifford to initiate her more fully into the mysteries of her flowers, promising under her direction to assume their care in part. The old lady welcomed her assistance cordially, and said, "You could not take your lesson on a more auspicious occasion, for Webb has promised to aid me in giving my pets a bath to-day, and he can explain many things better than I can."

Webb certainly did not appear averse to the arrangement, and all three were soon busy in the flower-room. "You see," resumed Mrs. Clifford, "I use the old-fashioned yellow pots. I long ago gave up all the glazed, ornamental affairs with which novices are tempted, learning from experience that they are a delusion and a snare. Webb has since made it clear to me that the roots need a circulation of air and a free exhalation of moisture as truly as the leaves, and that since glazed pots do not permit this, they should never be employed. After all, there is nothing neater than these common yellow porous pots. I always select the yellowest ones, for they are the most porous. Those that are red are hard-baked, and are almost as bad as the glazed abominations, which once cost me some of my choice favorites."

"I agree with you. The glazed pots are too artificial to be associated with flowers. They suggest veneer, and I don't like veneer," Amy replied. Then she asked Webb: "Are you ready for a fire of questions? Any one with your ability should be able to talk and work at the same time."

"Yes; and I did not require that little diplomatic pat on the back."

"I'll be as direct and severe as an inquisitor, then. Why do you syringe and wash the foliage of the plants? Why will not simple watering of the earth in the pots answer?"

"We wash the foliage in order that the plants may breathe and digest their food."

"How lucid!" said Amy, with laughing irony. "Then," she added, "please take nothing for granted except my ignorance in these matters. I don't know anything about plants except in the most general way."

"Give me time, and I think I can make some things clear. A plant breathes as truly as you do, only unlike yourself it has indefinite thousands of mouths. There is one leaf on which there are over one hundred and fifty thousand. They are called \_stomata\_, or breathing-pores, and are on both sides of the leaf in most plants, but usually are in far greater abundance on the lower side. The plant draws its food from the air and soil--from the latter in liquid form--and this substance must be concentrated and assim

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