

Only an Incident

Grace Denio Litchfield

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ONLY AN INCIDENT

BY GRACE DENIO LITCHFIELD

1883

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER

I. JOPPA

II. PHEBE

III. GERALD

IV. MRS. UPJOHN'S ENTERTAINMENT

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- V. FRIENDS
- VI. THE PICNIC
- VII. TRIED AS BY FIRE
- VIII. GERALD OBEYS ORDERS
- IX. JOPPA'S MINISTRATIONS TO THE SICK
- X. AN APOLOGY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES
- XI. "MY SON DICK"
- XII. WHY DO SUMMER ROSES FADE?
- XIII. JOPPA'S TRIAL
- XIV. PHEBE'S GOOD-BY
- XV. ONLY AN INCIDENT

TO
GRACE HILL AND EDWIN C. LITCHFIELD.

TO HER FOR WHOSE DEAR SAKE THE STORY WAS PENNED, ALTHOUGH HER EYES
HAVE
NEVER REST UPON ITS PAGES, AND TO HIM WHOSE TENDER WATCH OVER ITS
GROWTH
HAS BEEN ITS VITAL INSPIRATION--TO THE TWO WHO ARE BUT ONE FOREVER IN
THE
HEART OF THEIR DAUGHTER, THIS LITTLE FIRST BOOK IS MOST LOVINGLY
INSCRIBED.

ONLY AN INCODENT

CHAPTER I.

JOPPA.

Joppa was the very centre of all things. That was the opening clause in the creed of every well-educated and right-thinking Joppite. Geographically, however, it was not the centre of any thing, being considerably off from the great lines of railway travel, but possessing two little independent branch roads of its own, that connected it with all the world, or rather that connected all the world with it. For though there were larger places than Joppa even in the county in which it condescended to find itself, and though New York, and Philadelphia, and even Boston, were undeniably larger, as its inhabitants reluctantly

admitted when hard pressed, yet they were unanimous in agreeing, nevertheless, that the sun rose and set wholly and entirely for the benefit of their one little aristocratic community.

Yes; the world was created for Joppa, that the Joppites might live, move, and have their being with as much convenience and as little trouble as possible. Bethany, a considerable town near by, was built to be its shopping emporium; Galilee, a little farther off, to accommodate its art needs; Morocco, a more considerable town still farther off, to be the birthplace of those ancestors who were so unfortunate as to come into the world before there was any Joppa to be born in. Even New York was erected mainly to furnish it with a place of comfortable resort once a year, when it transplanted itself there bodily in a clan, consoling itself for its temporary aberration of body by visiting exclusively and diligently back and forth among its own people, and conforming life in all particulars as far as possible to home rules, still doing when in New York, not as the New Yorkers but as the Joppites did, and never for a moment abandoning its proud position as the one only place in the world worth living in.

There certainly was much to say in favor of Joppa. In the first place, it was remarkably salubrious. Its inhabitants died only of old age,—seldom even of that,—or of diseases contracted wholly in other localities. Measles had indeed been known to break out there once in the sacred person of the President of the village, but had been promptly suppressed; besides, it was universally conceded that being in his second childhood he should be considered liable. The last epidemic of small-pox even had swept by them harmless. Only two old and extremely ugly women took it, whereas Bethany and Upper Jordan were decimated. So Joppa was decidedly healthy, for one thing. For another, it was moral. There had not been a murder heard of in ever so long, or a forgery, and the last midnight burglar was such a nice, simple fellow that he did not know real silver when he saw it, and ran off with the plated ware instead. And Joppa was not only moral, but religious; went to church no end of times on Sundays, and kept as many of the commandments as it conveniently could. It had four churches: one Methodist, frequented exclusively by the plebeians; one Baptist, of a mixed congregation; one Presbyterian, where three fourths of the best people went; and one Episcopal, which the best quarter of the best people attended, and which among the Presbyterians was popularly supposed to be, if not exactly the entrance to the infernal regions, yet certainly only one short step removed from it. And added to all these good traits, Joppa was a beautiful place. There were a few common, ugly little houses in it, of course, but they were all tucked away out of sight at one end, constituting what was known as "the village," while the real Joppa meant in the thoughts of the inhabitants only the West End so to speak, where was a series of pretty villas and commodious mansions running along a broad, handsome street, and stretching for quite a distance along the border of the lake. For, oh! best of all, Joppa had a lake. To speak of Joppa in the presence of a Joppite, and not in the same breath to mention the lake with an appreciative adjective, was to make as irrevocable a mistake as to be in conversation with a poet and forget to quote from his latest poem; for next to their wives, their dinners, and their ease, the Joppites loved their beautiful little lake. And they had cause thus to love it, for apart from its exquisite charm as the main feature of their landscape, it gave them a substantial reason for existence. What could they have done with their *_dolce far niente_* lives, but for the fishing and rowing and sailing and bathing and sliding and skating which it afforded them in turn? It was all they had to keep them from settling down into a Rip Van Winkle sleep, this dear little restless lake, that coaxed them out of

their land-torpor, and forced them occasionally to lend a manly hand to a manly pursuit. For there was this distinguishing peculiarity about Joppa, that no one in it seemed to need to work, or to have any manner of business whatever. Its society, outside of the village, was formed wholly of cultivated, refined, wealthy people, who had nothing in the world to do, but idly to eat and drink up the riches of the previous generation. It is a widely admitted truth, that one generation always gathers for another, never for itself, and that the generation which is thus generously gathered for, is invariably found willing to sacrifice without a murmur any latent duty to harvest on its own account, consenting to live out its life softly upon the hard-earned savings of its predecessors, without regard to posterity, and calling itself "gentlemen" where its fathers were content to be known as "men."

So this was Joppa, a place mighty in its own conceit, and high too in the estimate of others, to whom it was becoming known as the gayest and the prettiest of all dear little summer resorts; and thither strangers were beginning to flock in considerable numbers each year, made warmly welcome by the Joppites as an occasion for breaking out into an unending round of parties and picnics and dinners and lunches and teas, and even breakfasts when there was not room to crowd in any thing else. The summer was one continual whirl from beginning to end. There were visitors and visits; there was giving and receiving; there were flirtations and rumors of flirtations; there was everything the human heart could desire in the way of friendly hospitality and liveliest entertainment. Saratoga might be well enough, and Newport would do in its way; but for solid perfection, said the Joppites, there was no place in the world quite like Joppa.

But unknown to itself, Joppa nursed one apostate in its midst, one unavowed but benighted little heretic, who so far from sharing these sentiments and offering up nightly thanksgiving that despite her great unworthiness she had been suffered to be born in Joppa, made it one of her most fervent and reiterated petitions that she might not always have to live there; that some time, if she were very good and very patient, it might be granted her to go. She was so weary of it all: of the busy idleness and the idle business, of the unthinking gayety and the gay thoughtlessness, and of the nothingness that made up its all. She wanted, she did not exactly know what, only something different; and to go, she did not quite know where, only somewhere else. But she had been born in Joppa, (quite without her permission,) and in Joppa she had lived for all of twenty-four healthful, tranquil, uneventful years, spending semi-occasional winters in New York, and, unlike all other Joppites, returning always more and more discontented with her native place. Who could ever have expected such treason in the heart of dear little Phebe Lane? Of course it would not have mattered much had it been suspected, since it was only Phebe Lane after all who entertained it,--little Phebe Lane, whose ancestors, though good and well-born enough, did not hail from Morocco, and who lived, not in the West End proper, but only on the borders of it, in a street where one could not get so much as a side peep at the lake. It was not a pretty house either where she lived. It was square and clumsy and without any originality, and, moreover, faced plump on the street, so that one could look right into its parlor and sitting-room windows as one strolled along the wooden sidewalks. And people were in the habit of looking in that way a good deal. Nothing was ever going on in there that could not bear this sudden outside inspection, and it was the shortest way to call Phebe when she was wanted for any thing of a sudden,--to bear a fourth hand at whist, or to stone raisins for Mrs. Adams the day before her luncheon, or to run on an errand down town for some lazy body who preferred other people's legs to

her own for locomotion, or to relieve some wearied host in the entertainment of his dull guest, or to help in some way or other, here, there, and yonder. She was just the one to be called upon, of course, for she was just the one who was always on hand, and always ready to go. She never had any thing to keep her at home. Her father had long been dead, and she lived alone with her step-mother and step-aunt in the house which was left her by her mother, but in which the present Mrs. Lane still ruled absolute, as she did when she first came into it in Phebe's childish days. Mrs. Lane was strong and energetic and commonplace; and she ran the little house from garret to cellar with a thoroughness that left Phebe no part whatever to take in it, while the remainder of her energy she devoted to nursing her invalid sister, Miss Lydia, a little weak, complaining creature, who had had not only every ill that flesh is heir to, but a great many ills besides that she was firmly persuaded no other flesh had ever inherited, and who stood in an awe of her sister Sophia only equalled by her intense admiration of her.

So what was there for Phebe to do? She was fond of music, and whistled like a bird, but she had no piano and did not know one note from another; and she did not care for books, which was fortunate, as their wee library, all told, did not count a hundred volumes, most of which, too, were Miss Lydia's, and were as weak and wishy-washy as that poor little woman herself. And she did not care for sewing, though she made nearly all her own clothes, besides attending at any number of impromptu Dorcas meetings, where the needy were the unskilled rich instead of the helpless poor, so that of course her labor did not count at all as a virtue, since it was not doing good, but only obliging a friend. And she did not care for parties, though she generally went and was always asked, being such a help as regarded wall-flowers, while none of the young girls dreaded her as a rival, it being a well known fact that Phebe Lane, general favorite though she was, somehow or other never "took" with the men, or at least not sufficiently to damage any other enterprising girl's prospects. Why this was so, was hard to say. Phebe was pretty, and lovable, and sweet tempered. If she was not sparkling or witty, neither was she sarcastic; and bright enough she was certainly, though not intellectual, and though she talked little save with a few. It was strange. True as steel, possessed of that keen sense of justice and honor so strangely lacking in many women, with a passionate capability for love and devotion and self-sacrifice beyond power of fathoming, and above all with a clinging womanly nature that yearned for affection as a flower longs for light, she was yet the only girl out of all her set who had never had any especial attention. Perhaps it was because she was no flirt. Bell Masters said no girl could get along who did not flirt. Perhaps because in her excessive truthfulness she was sometimes blunt and almost brusque; it is dreadfully out of place not to be able to lie a little at times. Even Mrs. Upjohn, the female lay-head of the Presbyterians, who was a walking Decalogue, her every sentence being a law beginning with Thou shalt not, admitted practically, if not theoretically, that without risk of damnation it was possible to swerve occasionally from a too rigid Yea and Nay. Perhaps,--ah, well, there is no use in exhausting the perhappes. The fact remained. Of girl-friends she had plenty, and of men-friends she had plenty; but of lovers she had none.

And this was why when the Rev. Mr. Denham Halloway was called to the vacant parish of St. Joseph's and fell down in its maidenly midst like a meteor from an unexplored heaven,--a young, handsome divine, in every way marriageable, though still unmarried, and in every way attractive, though still to the best of hope and belief unattracted,--this was why no girl

of them all thought her own chances lessened in the least when he and Phebe became such friends. No one gossiped. No one ah-ah'd, or oh-oh'd. No one thought twice about it. What difference could it make? If it had been anybody else now! But it was only Phebe Lane.

CHAPTER II.

PHEBE.

"Miss Phebe!"

"Oh, Mr. Holloway!"

"Hush. Don't let them know I'm here. I couldn't help peeping in as I went by. You look done up."

"I am."

"What's going on?"

"Come in and see."

"Heaven forbid! Gracious! Mrs. Upjohn will think that's a swear. Don't look this way, Miss Phebe. They'll discover me. What's Mr. Hardcastle saying?"

"The world is very evil."

"The times are waxing late.' Why doesn't he add that and go?"

"He never goes. He only comes."

"What is Mrs. Upjohn so wrought up about?"

"She caught one of her Sunday-school boys breaking Sunday."

"How?"

"Eating apples."

"Horrible! Where?"

"Up in a tree."

"Whose tree?"

"That's where the unpardonable comes in. Her tree."

"Poor boy; what a mistake! What are you doing with that hideous silk stocking?"

"Picking up dropped stitches."

"Whose stitches? Yours?"

"Mrs. Hardcastle's."

"Don't aid and abet her in creating that monstrosity. It's participation in crime. It's worse than eating apples up a tree. Do you always have such a crowd here in the morning?"

"Always."

"How long have they been here?"

"Nearly two hours."

"What do they come for?"

"Habit."

"Miss Lydia's asleep."

"Habit too."

"What shall you do when you are done with that odious stocking?"

"Sort crewels for Mrs. Upjohn."

"And then?"

"Iron out my dress for the party."

"Oh, at Mrs. Anthony's? Who'll be there?"

"Everybody who has dropped in here this morning."

"Who else?"

"Those who dropped in yesterday."

"But what will you do to make it party-like?"

"Simper. Aren't you coming too?"

"Not if you think it would do for me to say that I held party-going wrong for a clergyman. Could I? I might win over Mrs. Upjohn to the Church by so holy a statement."

"You had better take to round-dancing instead, then, to keep her out of it."

"Miss Phebe, is it possible you are severe on poor Mrs. Upjohn?"

"Very possible."

"As your pastor I must admonish you. Don't be. Besides, it's safer to keep on her blind side."

"She hasn't any."

"Unhappy woman! What a blaze of moral light she must live in! But I ought to have been in my study an hour ago. I must tear myself away. I wish you all ill-luck possible with those stitches."

"Ah, is that you, Mr. Holloway? I was wondering what kept Phebe so long in the window. Good-morning, sir. Good-morning, sir. Pray, come in." And having, by a turn of his slow old head, discovered the young man standing just outside the window, Mr. Hardcastle came pompously forward, waving his hand in a grand way he had, that seemed to bespeak him always the proprietor, no matter in whose house he chanced to be.

"Thank you, Mr. Hardcastle, not this morning. I was just telling Miss Phebe I ought to be at work. Good-morning, Mrs. Lane. Good-morning, Mrs. Upjohn--Mrs. Hardcastle--Miss Delano--Miss Brooks."

And with a cheery bow to each individual head, craning itself forward to have a look at the unusual young man who had work to do, the Rev. Mr. Holloway walked off to his rectory, which was directly opposite, giving a merry glance back at Phebe from the other side of the street. Phebe was still smiling as she went with the stocking to its owner.

"Thank you, my dear," said Mrs. Hardcastle, taking it from her without looking. "Oh, my child, how could you be so careless! You have let me pull out one of the needles. Well--well."

Phebe took the work silently back, and sat herself down on a stool to remedy the mischief.

"A nice young fellow enough," remarked Mr. Hardcastle, condescendingly, returning to the group of ladies. "But he'll never set the river on fire."

"No need he should, is there?" said Mrs. Upjohn, looking up sharply from her embroidery. She always contradicted, if only for argument's sake, so that even her assents usually took a negative form. "It's enough if he's able to put out a fire in _that_ Church. It doesn't take much of a man, I understand, to fill an Episcopalian pulpit." (Nobody had ever yet been able to teach the good dame the difference between Episcopal and Episcopalian, and she preferred the undivided use of the latter word.) "Any thing will go down with them."

"Yes, my dear Mrs. Upjohn. It's undeniably a poor Church, a poor Church, and I hope we may all live to witness its downfall. It must have been a hard day for you, Mrs. Lane, when Phebe went over to it. I never forgave old Mr. White for receiving her into it; I never did, indeed."

Phebe only smiled.

"Humph!" said Mrs. Lane, biting off a thread. "Phebe may go where she likes, for all me, so long as only she goes. Baptist I was bred, and Baptist I'll be buried; but it's with churches as with teas, I say. One's as good as another, but people may take green, or black, or mixed, as best agrees with their stomachs."

"That's a very dangerous doctrine," said Mrs. Upjohn. "Push it a little further, and you'll have babes and sucklings living on beef, and their elders dining on pap."

"Humph!" ejaculated Mrs. Lane again. "If they like it, what's the odds?"

"He-he!" snickered Miss Brooks.

"Well, now," resumed Mr. Hardcastle, "it stands to reason children should learn to like what their elders have liked before them. That's the only decent and Christian way of living. And as I said to my son,--to my Dick, you know" (Mr. Hardcastle had a son of whom he always spoke as if sole owner of him, and indeed solely responsible for his being),--"'Dick,' I said, when he spoke disrespectfully of Mr. Webb's prayers,--and Mr. Webb is a powerful prayer-maker, to be sure,--'Dick,' I said, 'church is like physic, and the more you don't like it, the more good it does you. And if you think Mr. Webb's prayers are too long, it's a sign that for your soul's salvation they ought to be longer.' And I said--"

Mrs. Lane knew by long experience that now or never was the time to stop Mr. Hardcastle. Once fairly started on the subject of his supposed advice to Dick on any given occasion, there was no arresting his eloquence. She started up abruptly from her sewing-machine with her mouth full of pins, emptying them into her hand as she went. "Those ginger-cookies--" she mumbled as she passed Mr. Hardcastle. "They ought to be done by this."

A promissory fragrance caught the old gentleman's nostrils as she opened the door, dispelling sterner thoughts. "Ah," he said, sniffing the air with evident approbation, "I was about going, but I don't mind if I stay and try a few. Your make, Phebe?"

"No," answered Phebe, shortly, moving just out of reach of the bland old hand, which stretched itself out to chuck her under the chin, and was left patting the air with infinite benevolence "mother made them."

"All wrong," commented Mrs. Upjohn. "All wrong. You should not leave your mother any work that you could spare her. One of the first things I taught our Maria" (Mrs. Upjohn in Mr. Hardcastle's presence always said our Maria with great distinctness),--"one of the first things I taught her was, that it was her privilege to save me in every thing. I don't believe in idleness for girls. Aren't you ready yet to attend to these crewels, Phebe? Miss Brooks is snarling them terribly."

"Phebe's really a very good girl in her way though," remarked Mrs. Hardcastle, indulgently, from her easy chair. "I will testify that she can make quite eatable cake at a pinch."

Phebe secretly thought Mrs. Hardcastle ought to know. She remembered her once spoiling a new-made company loaf by slashing into it without so much as a by-your-leave.

"That was very nice cake Miss Lynch gave us last night," piped in Miss Delano.

"Too much citron," pronounced Mrs. Upjohn, decisively. "You should never overload your cake with citron. It turns it out heavy, as sure as there's a sun in the heavens."

"There isn't any to-day; it's cloudy," Phebe could not help putting in, demurely, but no one paid any attention, except that Mrs. Upjohn turned on her an unworded expression of: "If I say so, it is so whether or no."

An animated debate on cake followed, in the middle of which Mrs. Lane reappeared with a trayful of cookies hot from the oven; and two more callers came in, Bell Masters and Dick Hardcastle, which last first woke up Miss Lydia with a boisterous kiss, frightening the poor soul half to death by assuring her she had been snoring so that he heard her way down

street, and then devoted himself to the cookies with a good-will and large capacity that filled one with compassionate feelings toward his mother's larder. With these new and younger elements the talk varied a little. They discussed last night's party, the supper, the dresses, the people, and then the probabilities of to-night's party, the people, the dresses, the supper. And then Dick made a sensation by saying right out, that he had just met Mr. Upjohn on Main Street with Mrs. Bruce, holding a parasol gallantly over her head. And everybody looked at once at Mrs. Upjohn, and then back at the graceless Dick, and an awful silence succeeded, broken by Mrs. Upjohn's reaching out her hand and saying in the tone of a Miss Cushman on the stage: "Dick, dear, I'll take another cookie." If Mr. Upjohn chose to walk down town shielding women's complexions for them, why in the world should she trouble herself about it, beyond making sure that he did not by mistake take her parasol for the kindly office? And so the talk went on, people coming and people going, and Mrs. Lane did up a whole basketful of work undisturbed, and Phebe inwardly chafed and fumed and longed for dinner-time, that at last the ceaseless, aimless chatter might come to an end.

She went to the party that night, because in Joppa everybody had to go when asked. To refuse was considered tantamount to an open declaration of war, unless in case of illness, and then it almost required a doctor's certificate to get one off. It was a good law and ensured the suppers being disposed of. There was no dancing to-night, it being an understood thing that when Mrs. Upjohn was asked there should be none or she would not come; but there was music. Bell Masters had a very nice contralto voice, and was always willing to sing, thus sure of securing one of Joppa's few young gentlemen to stand by and turn over her leaves; she thoughtfully took her music on that account, giving out that she could not play without notes. Phebe had been doing her best all unconsciously to herself to help her hosts entertain, but when the singing began she stole away to the nearly empty piazza, and stood leaning by the window, enjoying the cool air and softly whistling an accompaniment to the song; and there Mr. Halloway found her. She looked up at him and smiled as he joined her, but went on with her low, sweet whistling all the same.

"I like that better than the singing," he said, when at last it came to an end with the music.

"You ought not to, Mr. Halloway. Don't you know it's very unlady-like to whistle? Mrs. Upjohn puts Maria to bed for it."

"Dear me. I must take care she doesn't ever catch me at it. Ah! the dress has ironed nicely, hasn't it? Would you mind standing out a little from the shadow?"

Phebe moved a step forward into the stream of light that shot across the piazza from the open window, and stood so, looking up at him out of her soft white muslin draperies and white ribbons, not a ray of color about her anywhere, like a very material and sweet little ghost.

"Yes, you look very nice, very nice indeed," he said, after a grave inspection that took in every detail of face and figure. A young, innocent face it was, with soft brown hair as bright and as fine as silk, all turned back from a low forehead, around which it grew in the very prettiest way in the world, and gathered in loose braids in the neck; and she had such a fresh, clear complexion, and such honest, loving, gray eyes, and such a round, girlish figure,--how was it people never made more of her prettiness?

"I think you look nicer than any one here," Mr. Halloway added, in thorough conviction. "You must be an adept in ironing." Phebe laughed softly in pure pleasure. It was so new to have such pretty things said to her. "Would it be very wrong to slip away together for a rest?" he continued, leading her a little farther along. "Let us sit down on the steps here and recruit. I have talked my throat hoarse to each of the very deafest old ladies in turn,--I suppose they came here purposely to be screeched at,--and I saw you working valiantly among the old men. What a place this is for longevity!"

"You are finding out its characteristics by degrees, I see."

"Yes, am I not?" said he, with his pleasant laugh. "I know intimately every member of my parish and every member of every other parish by this time from sheer hearsay. Each house I visit gives me no end of valuable and minute information about all the other houses. I am waiting to come out with a rousing sermon against gossip, till I shall have gained all possible enlightenment and help from it. I mustn't kill my goose that lays the golden eggs before I have all the eggs I want, must I?"

"And knowing us all so well, what do you think of Joppa as a whole?" asked Phebe, curiously. "You always say it is too soon to judge, but surely you must really know by this time."

He did not answer for a moment, then turned to her very seriously. "I think," he said slowly, "it is a place that needs a much older, a much better, and a much wiser man than I am to be among its leaders in any sense. It is not at all what I thought it would be when I accepted the trust. It is beyond me. But since the Bishop sent me here, I mean to stay and do my best."

"How will you begin?"

"I will begin with you," he answered, lightly, with a smile that lit up all his face, the moment's seriousness quite gone. "You were my first friend, and I ought to take you first in hand, ought I not? I am going to do you a great deal of good."

"How?"

"I'm going to teach you to love books."

"You can't."

"Yes, I can. You don't know books, that is all. I intend to introduce you to each other. I have some so interesting you can't help liking them, and you'll find yourself crying for more before you know it. I am going to bring them over to you. You shall have something better to do than fill up all your mornings with promoting stockings of exasperating colors, and listening to tales of Sabbath-breakers. Just wait and see. I am going to metamorphose you."

"Oh, I wish you would!" sighed Phebe, clasping her hands and speaking so earnestly that he looked at her in surprise. "I am so sick of myself. I do want to be something better than I am. I am so dreadfully common-place. I amount to so little. I know so little. I can do so little. And there is no one here who cares to help me to any thing better. I don't know enough even to know how to improve myself. But I do

want to. Will you help me, Mr. Holloway? Will you really help me?" She positively had tears shining in her eyes.

Mr. Holloway leaned forward and gently took her hand. "Am I not here for that?" he asked. "Here purposely to help you and all who need me in any way? Will it not be my greatest pleasure to do so, as well as my best and truest work? You may be sure, Miss Phebe, I will do all I can for you, with God's help."

"Rather damp for you to be sitting there without a shawl, isn't it, my child?"

It was only Mrs. Anthony's friendly voice, as that lady passed hurriedly by, intent on hospitable duties, but Phebe started guiltily. What right had she to be out here with Mr. Holloway, keeping him from the other girls, when she ought, of course, to be in the parlors seeing that the old ladies got their ice-cream safely? "I'll go right in," she said, rising hastily; but Mr. Holloway drew her hand through his arm to detain her.

"Why? Because it is damp?"

"No; because I ought not to be selfish, ought to go back and help."

"Ah," said he, "I am getting new lights every moment. Then you don't go to parties just to enjoy yourself?"

She opened wide, serious eyes. "Oh, no." He smiled down at her very kindly, "You shall go right away," he said, releasing her. "I will not keep you another instant from dear Mr. Hardcastle and that nice Mrs. Upjohn. But before you go let me tell you, Miss Phebe, that, if only in view of your latest confession, I do not think you commonplace at all!"

CHAPTER III.

GERALD.

It was another article of the Joppian creed, that there was no such thing possible as a purely Platonic friendship between a young man and a young woman; there must always be "something in it": either a mitten for him, or a disappointment for her, or wedding-cake for all--generally and preferably, of course, the wedding-cake;--and belonging to such friendship as lawfully as a tail belongs to a comet, was a great, wide-spreading area of gossip. It was only in the case of Phebe Lane that this universal and common-sense rule had its one particular and unreasonable exception; and it was acting upon a speedily acquired knowledge of this by-law, that Mr. Holloway boldly pursued his plan for metamorphosing his young friend, right under the open eyes and ears of the Joppites. He lived so near that it was the most natural thing in the world for him to stop for a moment's chat, as every one else did, either inside or outside of the window as he went by; and as he was always sure of meeting others, call when he would, it certainly never could have been asserted of him that he went there only to see Phebe. Indeed, he often scarcely spoke with her at all when he so dropped in, and yet out of these frequent and informal meetings an intimacy had sprung up between

them such as Phebe at least had never known before. She submitted herself to him docilely, reading his books patiently even when they bored her unutterably, as not seldom happened, and endeavoring to form her opinion straightly upon his on all intellectual questions, recognizing her own fallibility with a humility that at once touched and charmed him. Real humility is rare enough the world over, but nowhere is it less conspicuously apparent than among the flourishing virtues of Joppa; and it was not long before this fact was discovered by Denham Holloway, who, with all his gayety and light-heartedness, was a keen and discriminating observer of character. He was one of those interesting people whom all other people interest; one of those who derive their peculiar charm more from what they find in you than from what they show you of themselves, though one might be ashamed to confess the truth so baldly. These are the people who, without any especial gift of either mind or person, wheedle your secrets out of you before you know it, possessing all your trust and your liking before they have given any real evidence of deserving your confidence, and yet, somehow or other, though rarely either great or talented, or even heroically good, never for one moment abusing it. Such characters are not at all unusual, yet are generally accounted so; one of their chief qualities, according to their friends, being that they are so unlike everybody else. But Phebe certainly had never met any one at all like Mr. Holloway, and she was soon of the settled conviction that she should never meet any one quite like him again. He was true to his promise to help her; (he never made a promise that he did not honestly try to keep;) and he applied himself to the by no means thankless task with the good-humored directness and energy that characterized all his actions. There was quite a number of young girls in his parish, more proportionately than in the others. Bell Masters and Amy Duckworth had long been hovering on its borders, and the advent of so young and prepossessing a rector had instantly removed their last scruples as to infant baptism, and settled forever their doubts as to the apostolic succession. They had come in at once. It was even whispered that Maria Upjohn had in an incautious moment confessed that she preferred the litany to Mr. Webb's spontaneous effusions, and had been summarily sat upon by her mother, whose Bible contained an eleventh commandment curiously omitted from the twentieth chapter of Exodus in other versions, and reading: "Thou shalt not become an Episcopalian, and if possible, thou shalt not be born one." Then there were Nellie Atterbury, and Janet Mudge, and Polly and Mattie Dexter; there certainly was no lack of active young teachers for the Sunday-school, and Phebe was well content to remain passively aside, as of old. But, as Mrs. Lane remarked, there were no drones allowed in Mr. Holloway's hive, and before long Phebe found herself insensibly drawn in to be one of the workers too, with any amount of business growing upon her hands, and herself, under this new and wise guidance, becoming more and more capable for it every day.

"A new broom sweeps clean," remarked Mrs. Upjohn, contemptuously, as she heard of the stir and life in St. Joseph's heretofore-dull little parish.

"For my part, I would rather have Mr. White back--if he weren't dead. He was a good, sensible old man, who knew his place, and was contented to let his Church simmer in the background, where it belongs. He didn't go flaunting his white gown in people's faces every Saint's day he could trump up, let alone the Wednesday and Friday services. Who's Mr. Holloway? What does anybody know about him beyond that the Bishop recommended him, as if a Bishop must know what's what better than other people, forsooth! Don't tell me!" said Mrs. Upjohn, in unutterable scorn. "He's a new broom, and he's raising a big dust, and I would liefer have Mr. White back and let the dust lie,--that's all!"

But the Joppites were far from sharing Mrs. Upjohn's sentiments. Mr. Holloway did, it is true, belong to the wrong Church, but there was a strong suspicion among them that neither had this man sinned, nor his parents, that he was born to so grievous a fate. It was rather his misfortune. And as for the rest, he was thoroughly a gentleman; was excellently well educated; and was, moreover, comely to look upon, and eminently agreeable in his bearing. No; Joppa was far from begrudging Mr. White his departure to the land of the blessed. It was time the good old man went to his reward, they said.

And as to Mrs. Whittridge, Mr. Holloway's sister, who kept house for him at the rectory, through all the length and the breadth of Joppa there were no two opinions with regard to her. She was a woman of about fifty, enough older than her brother to have been his mother, and she seemed indeed to cherish almost a mother's idolatrous affection for him. She had lost her husband many years before, and had been left with considerable fortune and no family besides this one brother. So much information, after repeated and unabashedly point-blank questions, had the Joppites succeeded in extracting from Mr. Holloway, who with all his apparent frankness was the most difficult person in the world ever to be brought to talk of himself and his own affairs. But just to see Mrs. Whittridge, with her sweet face and perfect manners, was to recognize her at once for a gentlewoman in every sense of the word, while to be in her society, if but for ten minutes, was to come very nearly to loving her. The Joppites saw but one fault in her; she did not and would not visit. All who sought her out were made more than welcome; but whether from the extreme delicacy of her health, which rendered visiting a burden, or because of her widow's dress of deepest mourning, which she had never laid aside, it came to be an accepted thing that she went nowhere. It was a great disappointment in Joppa; nevertheless it was impossible to harbor ill-will toward this lovely, high-bred lady, who drew all hearts to herself by the very way she had of seeming never to think of herself at all. She won Phebe Lane's affection at once and forever with almost her first words, spoken in the low, clear, sweet tones that sounded always like Sunday-night's music.

"Do you know, Mr. Holloway," Phebe said to him one day, "I think it does me more good only to hear your sister's voice than to listen to the very best sermon ever preached."

"Miss Phebe," he rejoined, with a merry twinkle in his brown eyes, "if you propagate that doctrine largely, I am a ruined man. I must hold you over to eternal secrecy. But as regards the fact,--there is my hand,--I am quite of your way of thinking! I am persuaded an angel's voice got into Soeur Angelique by mistake." Mrs. Whittridge's baptismal name was Angelica, but to her brother she had always been "Soeur Angelique" and nothing else.

"Yes, and an angel's soul too," said Phebe.

"Even that," replied Mr. Holloway. "She is all and more than you can possibly imagine that she is. But I positively forbid your putting her up on a pedestal and worshipping her. In the first place, too great a sense of her own holiness might mar her present admirable but purely earthly management of our little household, thus seriously interfering with my comforts. And in the second place, I feel it my duty to warn you from a habit of canonization, which, if too extensively indulged in, will inevitably warp your powers of frank and right judgment."

Phebe laughed, but did not forget.

One afternoon, some time later, she was at the rectory, whither she had gone, at Mrs. Whittridge's request, to explain a new and intricate embroidery stitch. They were upstairs in that lady's charming little sitting-room, Phebe on a low stool by her friend's side, and Holloway had just come in from a round of parochial visits and joined them there.

"Mrs. Whittridge," said Phebe, suddenly, "do you think it is possible to care too much for one's friends? Mr. Holloway says one can. I know he means that I do."

Mrs. Whittridge laid her hand caressingly on the girl's bonny brown hair. "How can I judge, my child? I do not even know who your friends are."

"Who are they, in fact?" said Denham, drawing up a chair and seating himself in front of the group by the table. "Oh, Miss Phebe is friends with the entire village in a way. They all call her 'Phebe,' and keep accurate track of her birthdays, from Dick Hardcastle up. And I am sure she hasn't an enemy in the world. But there is this remarkable feature in the case, that you could go over the entire population of Joppa by name without eliciting a single thrill of enthusiasm from this really enthusiastic young lady."

"I cannot help it," Phebe murmured, a little shamefacedly. "I bore them, and they bore me."

"That's a point in your education I am going to take up later," remarked Mr. Holloway, cheerfully. "The art of not being bored by people. Once acquired, the other, that of not boring them, follows of itself. Society hangs on it."

"I wish you would teach me that right away," said Phebe, earnestly. "I believe I need that more than any thing else."

"Well, I will, immediately,--after supper, that is. I am exhausted now with ministerial duties. You have asked Miss Phebe to tea have you not, Soeur Angeline? You cannot stay? Oh, but of course you must."

"Of course she will," said Mrs. Whittridge, with her tender smile. "Phebe only lives to give pleasure to others. Now tell me something about your friends. Who are they?"

"I haven't any here. Mr. Holloway is quite right," answered Phebe, locking her hands over one of Mrs. Whittridge's. "Not real, real friends. As a child I had ever so many, and Bell Masters and I quite grew up together, but somehow we have all grown away from each other, and--oh, I don't know!--it seems as if there wasn't any thing in the girls here. Not that there's more in me. They are brighter and better than I in every way, but we don't get on together; they don't seem to have any thing to give me, any thing they can help me to. I can't get at them. Oh! Mr. Holloway is quite right. In all Joppa I haven't a single friend--except just you and him."

"We are indeed your friends," said Mrs. Whittridge. "You need never doubt that."

The girl turned and threw her arms impulsively around the other's neck. "Oh, no, no!" she said. "I could not doubt it. I know it. I _feel_ it!"

Oh, you can't guess what it is to me to know it! I have so little in my life to make it grow to any thing, and I want so much! And you can give me all I want--all, all; and it makes me so happy when I think of it,--that I have got you and can have all I want!"

"And is this frantic outburst meant exclusively for Soeur Angelique?" asked Denham. "I am green with unutterable jealousy. I thought I was your friend too, Miss Phebe."

Phebe still knelt with her arms around Mrs. Whittridge, but she looked up at him with her frank, loving eyes and smiled. "You know I meant you both," she said softly.

An almost irresistible impulse came over the young man to lay his hand, as his sister had done, on the soft, bright-brown hair. Clergymen are but human after all. He bent forward, but only lifted one of his sister's thin white hands and held it a moment between his. "We must both do our best by this foolish little girl who trusts us so frankly with her friendship, must we not, Soeur Angelique?" he said gravely.

"I for one am very glad to assume the trust," said Mrs. Whittridge.

"And won't you ever tire of me? ever? ever?" asked the girl.

"Not ever."

"You won't ever be tired helping me, or tired of having me come to you for help, or tired of my loving you?"

"Where is your faith gone, my child?"

Phebe drew a deep sigh of content. "I am just as happy as can be," she said. "I don't want any thing else now in the world except just Gerald."

"Ah, Gerald again. I expected that," said Mr. Halloway, raising his eyebrows humorously.

"Gerald? Pray, who is Gerald?" inquired Mrs. Whittridge.

Her brother lifted his hands in mock amazement. "Is it possible you know Miss Phebe so long and need ask who Gerald is? I will tell you. Gerald is perfection individualized. Gerald has all the qualities, mental, physical, and spiritual, that it is possible to compress into the limited compass of even an overgrown human frame. Gerald, you must know, is intellectual to a degree, beautiful as an archangel, adorable as--as you, Soeur Angelique, and clever--almost--as myself."

Phebe clapped her hands and nodded, "Yes, yes, all that!"

"I can tell you all about Gerald," continued Halloway. "I have heard of nothing else since I came. Gerald, my dear sister, is Miss Phebe's idol; I rather think she says her prayers before Gerald's picture every night."

"Oh, please!" cried Phebe.

"But who is this Gerald?" asked Mrs. Whittridge. "Does he live here?"

"No, Soeur Angelique, and by the way he is not he at all, but she, and will be known in history as Miss Geraldine Vernor. She lives in New York,

rolls in wealth, and is one of a large family of whom she is the sun-flower. Let me give you her portrait as I have it from fragmentary but copious descriptions. She is, I should say, five feet eleven and three quarter inches in height--don't shake your head, Miss Phebe,--and slender in disproportion. She has the feet of a Chinese, the hands of a baby, and the strength of a Jupiter Ammon. She has hair six yards long and blacker than Egyptian darkness. She has a forehead so low it rests upon her eyebrows, which, by the way, have been ruled straight across the immeasurable breadth of it with a T square. She has eyes bluer one minute than the grotto at Capri, greener the next than grass in June, grayer the next than a November day, and so on in turn through all the prismatic colors. Her eyelashes are only not quite so long as her hair. She has a mouth which would strike you as large,--it is five and a half inches across,--but when she speaks, and you hear the combined wisdom of Solomon, and Plato, and Socrates, and Solon, and the rest of the ancients (not to mention the moderns), falling from her lips, your only wonder is that her mouth keeps within its present limits. Her nose--Miss Phebe, can it be? Is it possible you have left out her nose? Soeur Angelique, I am forced to the melancholy conclusion that Gerald has none. Miss Phebe would never have omitted mentioning it."

"You may make all the fun of her and of me that you like," said Phebe, half provoked. "But there is not anybody else in the world like Gerald Vernor. Wait till you see her. You will say then that I was right, only that I did not say enough."

"You shan't tease her, Denham. Tell me, Phebe, where did you know this friend so well?"

"Three years ago, when she spent a summer here, I saw a great deal of her,--oh, it made it such a happy summer, knowing her!--and I have corresponded with her ever since."

"Without meeting her again?"

"Oh, no. I saw her twice last summer. I went to the train both times to see her as she passed through."

"But our trains don't pass through; they stop here."

"Yes, I know; but I went to Galilee to meet her as she passed through there."

"Would she have gone as far as that to meet you, Miss Phebe?"

"That is very different, Mr. Halloway," answered Phebe, simply. "I am not worth going so far for. Besides, I don't expect people ever to do as much for me as I would for them."

"Denham, you are cruel," said Mrs. Whittridge. "Phebe, my child, your love for your friend is to me sufficient proof that she must be lovely. I know I should love her too."

Phebe looked at her gratefully. "Oh, you would,--you would indeed! You could not help it. You would admire her so much. There is so much in her."

"Ah, yes, I forgot," interrupted Denham, "I did not finish my portrait. This marvellous being is an athlete. She can ride any Bucephalus

produced, and rather prefers to do so bareback. She is a Michael Angelo at painting, and has represented striking scenes from his 'Last Judgment' on a set of after-dinner coffee cups. She drives, she skates, she swims, she rows, she sails, has a thorough knowledge of business, and is up in stocks, is femininely masculine and masculinely feminine, scorns novels, and can order a dinner, is a churchwoman, and dresses always in the latest style. Is there any thing else, Miss Phebe?"

"Only one thing else that I think you have rather forgotten, Mr. Holloway: I love her and she is my friend."

"Miss Phebe," cried the young man in instant contrition, "have I hurt you? Have I been thoughtless enough for that with my foolish fun? You know I did not mean it. Will you forgive me?" He held out his hand.

Phebe hesitated. "Will you not make fun of her any more? And will you like her if she comes? You know she may come here this summer; there is just a chance of it. Will you promise?"

"I can safely promise to like any one whom you like, I know, Miss Phebe. Soeur Angelique, make this stubborn child give me her hand. It is not fitting that I crave absolution so abjectly."

"You are two silly children together," said Soeur Angelique, rising and laughing. "You may settle your quarrels as you can while I order tea."

"Miss Phebe, have I really vexed you so much?" asked the young man, earnestly, as his sister left the room. "You must know I would not do that for the world."

"I don't think you could hurt or vex me in any way," said Phebe, "excepting only through Gerald. For you don't know how I love her, Mr. Holloway. I love her with all my heart and soul, I think, oh, more--almost more--than any one else in the world."

"I know you do," he answered. "It is a love to envy her." Phebe was still looking up at him from her low stool, her face raised as if in appeal. She always looked very young for her years, and now she seemed not more than a child of sixteen in the waning light. He could not help it this time; he laid his hand very lightly for one briefest instant on her pretty hair. "But you will not be less friends with me because I like _you_ best?"

"I will not ever be less friends with you," Phebe replied, soberly. "I don't change so."

"No," he said; "I know you do not. Nor do I."

And then he moved away from her, and began telling an irresistibly comic story about a call he had made on a poor woman that afternoon (he could not for the life of him help seeing the ludicrous side of every thing), and from one subject they passed to another, and when Soeur Angelique summoned them to tea, she found her reverend brother standing in the middle of the room in the full swing of a chorus from "The Pirates," with Phebe whistling the liveliest possible accompaniment, and both of them gesticulating wildly. He stopped with a laugh as his sister appeared in the door-way.

"Don't be shocked, Soeur Angelique. I shut the window lest Mrs. Upjohn

should chance to go by and hear me. She would telegraph the Bishop. I am only resting. It wore me out working for Miss Phebe's pardon. No; wait a moment, Soeur Angelique. Don't let's go to tea instantly. I would rather quiet down a little before I go in and say grace." He took up a chance book from the table, and turning to the window to catch the light, read a few lines to himself, then threw it down, and came forward with a smile. "There, I am ready now. Take my arm, Soeur Angelique. Miss Phebe, will you come, please?"

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. UPJOHN'S ENTERTAINMENT.

Mrs. Upjohn was going to give an entertainment. She was about to open the hospitable doors of the great house upon the hill, which seemed to have chosen that pre-eminence that it might the better overlook the morals of its neighbors. Joppa held its breath in charmed suspense. The question was not, Will I be asked? that was affirmatively settled for every West-End Joppite of party-going years; nor was it, What shall I wear? which was determined once for all at the beginning of the season; but, What will be done with me when I get there? For to go to Mrs. Upjohn's was not the simple thing that it sounded. She wished it to be distinctly understood that she did not ask people to her house for their amusement, but for their moral and spiritual improvement; any one could be amused anywhere, but _she_ wished to show her guests that there were pleasanter things than pleasure to be had even in social gatherings, and to teach them to hunger and thirst after better than meat and drink, while at the same time she took pains always to provide a repast as superior to the general run as her sentiments, quite atoning to the Joppites for the spiritual accompaniments to her feast by its material and solid magnificence, which lingered appetizingly in their memories long after they had settled their consequent doctors' bills. Yes, the Joppites were not asked to Mrs. Upjohn's to eat and drink only, or merely to have a good time, with whatever ulterior intentions of so doing they may have gone thither. They were asked for a purpose,--a purpose which it was vain to guess, and impossible to escape. Go they must, and be improved they must, _bon gre mal gre_, and enjoy themselves they would if they could.

So there were mingled feelings abroad when Mrs. Upjohn's neatly written invitations found their way into each of the West-End houses, embracing natives and strangers alike in their all-hospitable sweep, and even creeping into some outlying less aristocratic quarters, where confusion worse confounded, in the shape of refurbishing and making over, followed agonizingly in their wake. The invitations were indited by Miss Maria Upjohn, it being an opportunity to improve that young lady's handwriting which her mother could not have conscientiously suffered to pass, and stated that Mr. and Mrs. Reuben O. Upjohn requested the honor of your company on Thursday, July 14th, punctually at four o'clock. R.S.V.P. Joppa immediately R.S.V.P.'d that it would feel flattered to present itself at that hour, and then looked anxiously around and asked itself "What will it be this time?" The day dawned, and still the great question agitated public minds unsolved.

"There isn't a word to be coaxed or threatened out of Maria," said Bell Masters. "I believe it's something too awful to tell. Mr. De Forest,

can't you hazard a guess?"

Mr. Ogden De Forest was lazily strolling past the Masters' front steps, where a knot of girls had gathered after a game of lawn tennis, and were imbibing largely of lemonade, which was being fabricated on the spot, according to demand, by Phebe and Janet Mudge. The spoons stopped clinking in the various glasses as Bell thus audaciously called out to the gentleman. He was not a Joppite by either birth or education; indeed, he had but lately arrived on his first visit as a summer guest, and was hardly known to anybody personally as yet, though there was not a girl in the place but was already perfectly well aware of his existence, and had placed him instantly as "one of the very swellest of the swells." He was a short, dark, well-dressed man, and so exceedingly handsome that every feminine heart secretly acknowledged that only to have the right to bow to him would be a joy and pride indescribable. And here was Bell, who had accidentally been introduced to him the day before, calling to him as unceremoniously as if he were Dick Hardcastle or Jake Dexter. He turned at her voice and paused at the gate, lifting his hat. "I beg you pardon, Miss Masters, you called me?"

"Yes," said Bell. "Have some lemonade?"

"No, thanks."

"Come in."

"Thanks, not this morning. I shall see you later at Mrs. Upjohn's, I suppose."

"Yes, you'll see us all later," said Miss Bell, fishing out a lemon-seed from her goblet. "We shall have on different dresses, and you'll be offering us lemonade instead of our offering it to you. Take a good look at us so as to see how much prettier we are now than we shall be then."

Mr. De Forest obeyed literally, staring tranquilly and critically at each in turn, his glance returning slowly to the young lady of the house. "Unless you introduce me to your friends I shall not be able to tell them so," he replied, in the slow, deliberate voice that seemed always to have a ring of suppressed sarcasm in it, no matter what he said.

"Then I'll certainly not introduce you," said Bell, composedly, with a saucy shot at him from her handsome black eyes. "And so I'll be the only girl to get the compliment. Phebe, more sugar, please."

"I will endeavor to work one up between now and then regardless of cost. Four o'clock, I believe. What is it to be? A dance?"

"Holy Moses! at Mrs. Upjohn's!"

"Oh, she doesn't go in for that kind of thing? A card-party, then?"

"Great heavens! Mr. De Forest, are you mad? I don't doubt she struggles with herself over every visiting card that she uses,--and playing-cards--!"

"Theatricals, then?"

Bell gave a positive howl. "Theatricals! Hear him, girls!"

"We hear well enough. You don't give us a chance to do any thing but listen," said Amy Duckworth, pointedly.

"My dear, you'll converse all the more brilliantly this afternoon for a brief period of silence now," said Bell, sweetly. "Mr. De Forest, you are not happy in your guesses."

"I have exhausted them, unless it is to be a _musical_."

"No. That's what we are going to have to-morrow ourselves. I sing, you know."

"Do you? Well, a garden party perhaps?"

"That's what the Ripleys are going to have Thursday."

"Then, so far as I can see, there is nothing left for it to be except a failure," said De Forest, lifting his arms off the gate. "And, in view of so much coming dissipation, I feel constrained to retire and seek a little preparatory repose. Good-morning, Miss Masters."

"How hateful not to introduce him, Bell! And when he distinctly asked you to! How abominably mean of you! How selfish, how horrid! _I_ wouldn't have done so," broke out in an indignant chorus, as the gentleman walked off.

"Do you think I would be such a goose as to go shares in the handsomest man Joppa ever laid eyes on, so long as I can keep him to myself?" said Bell, honestly. "Fish for yourselves, girls. The sea is open to all, and you may each land another as good."

Phebe's lip curled very disdainfully. What a fuss to make over a man, and how Bell had changed in the last few years!

"Well, keep him, if you can, but I'll be even with you yet," said Amy, with an ominous smile. "And what luck! Here comes Mr. Moulton now, and I know him and you don't, and I'll pay you off on the spot. Good-morning, Mr. Moulton."

The young gentleman stopped, in his turn, at the gate as Amy spoke to him.

"Oh, Miss Duckworth, I was on my way to call on you."

"I will go home with you in a minute," said Amy, graciously. "I wouldn't miss your call for any thing. But first let me introduce you to my friends. Miss Mudge, Mr. Moulton,--Miss Lane, the Misses Dexter. You will meet us all again at Mrs. Upjohn's. Of course, you are going?"

"Certainly, now I am told that I shall meet you there, and if you will promise that I shan't be called upon to do any thing remarkable. I have heard alarming reports."

"That is out of anyone's power to promise," replied Miss Duckworth. "No genius is safe from her."

"Amy, love," broke in Bell, with infinite gentleness of tone and manner, "you have forgotten to present your friend to me, and I cannot be so impolite as to leave him standing outside my own gate. I am Miss Masters,

Mr. Moulton. Pray excuse the informality, and come in to share our lemonade."

Mr. Moulton, nothing loath, accordingly came in, took his glass, and sat himself just where Bell directed, on a step at her feet. Amy colored, and there was a subdued titter somewhere in the background, and Bell calmly resumed the reins of the conversation. "No, there is no knowing what we shall be put through this afternoon. One time when Mrs. Upjohn had got us all safely inside her doors, she divided us smartly into two classes, set herself in the middle, and announced that we were there for a spelling bee. We shouldn't say we hadn't learned something at her house. And upon my word we did learn something. Never before or since have I heard such merciless words as she dealt us out. My hair stands on end still when I recollect the horrors I underwent that day."

"I'll smuggle in a dictionary," declared Mr. Moulton. "I'll be ready for her."

"No use. She never runs twice in the same groove. It's only sure not to be a spelling bee this time."

"When we last went there it turned out to be a French _soiree_," said one of the Misses Dexter, "and she announced that there would be a penny's fine collected at the end of the evening for each English word spoken."

"Proceeds to go to a lately imported poor family," added the sister Dexter. "There was quite a sum raised, and the head of the family decamped with it two days after, for Heaven knows where, leaving his wife and infants on Mrs. Upjohn's hands poorer than ever."

But Mrs. Upjohn's entertainment proved to be neither orthographic nor linguistic. The guests arrived punctually as bidden, and their hostess, clad in her most splendid attire, received them with her most gracious manner. There was nothing to foretell the fate that awaited them. Her tall, awkward daughter stood nervously by her side. Mr. Upjohn, too, kept there valiantly for a time, then his round, ample figure and jolly face disappeared somewhere, under chaperonage of Mrs. Bruce, his latest admiration. But no one ever thought of Mr. Upjohn as the host, any way; beseeemed rather to be a sort of favored guest in his own parlor; and his place was more than made good by Mr. Hardcastle, who, standing in the centre of the room, exactly as he always stood in the centre of everybody's room on such an occasion, appeared himself to be quite master of ceremonies, from the grand way in which he stepped forward to meet each guest and hope he or she "would make out to enjoy it." The rooms filled rapidly, and before long Mrs. Upjohn turned from the door and stood an instant reviewing her guests with the triumphant mien of a victorious general. Then she advanced solemnly to the middle of the room, displacing Mr. Hardcastle, who graciously made way and waved his hand to signify to her his permission to proceed.

"My friends," said the great lady, with her deep, positive voice, drawing her imposing figure to its fullest height, "as you know, it is never _my_ way to give parties. I leave that for the rest of you to do. When I ask you to my house, it is with a higher motive than to make a few hours lie less heavily on your hands."

"Dear soul!" muttered Dick Hardcastle to his crony, Jake. "Nobody could have the conscience to charge her with ever having lightened them to us."

"And therefore," continued the lady, gazing around upon her victims with a benignant smile, "without further prelude, I will inform you for what object I have asked you to honor me with your presence this afternoon."

She paused, and a cold chill ran through the company. What would she do? Would she open on them with the Westminster Catechism this time, or set them to shelling peas for some poor man's dinner, or would she examine them in the multiplication table? A few had run it hastily over before leaving home to make sure that they were ready for such an emergency.

"I had thought first," Mrs. Upjohn proceeded, "of a series of games as instructive as delightful, games of history and geography, and one particularly of astronomy, which I am persuaded would be very helpful. It brought out the nature of the spectroscope in a remarkably clear and intelligent light, and after a few rounds I am sure none of us could ever again have forgotten those elusive figures relative to the distances and proportions of the planets. However, that must be for another time. For today I thought it would be a pleasure as well as a benefit to us all to learn something about a gifted and noble person who, I am surprised to find, is not so well known in Joppa as she should be, and whom, I am convinced, we should all be infinitely the better and happier for knowing. I have, therefore, persuaded Mr. Webb, with whose powers as a reader long years of acquaintanceship have so pleasantly familiarized us, to read to us this afternoon extracts from the 'Life and Letters of the Baroness Bunsen.'"

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Dick beneath his breath, "who's that?"

"Hush," whispered Jake. "I've got a novel of Miss Braddon's in my pocket. I thought it might come in handy. That'll help us through till feed time."

"You are all familiar with the name, of course," pursued Mrs. Upjohn, smiling graciously around the dismayed circle of her guests. "The book has been in the library this long time past, and observing with regret that only its first fifty pages had been cut, I caught at this invaluable opportunity to make you further acquainted with it."

Mr. Webb now came forward, a thick, green-bound volume in his hand, and a look on his face as if he were about to open the proceedings with a prayer, but Mrs. Upjohn held up her hand.

"One moment, please, before we begin. We ladies are so unaccustomed to sitting with idle hands, even when listening to so absorbing a theme as the virtues of this truly excellent Christian wife and mother, that I thought it would be a kindness to ourselves to provide some simple work which should occupy our fingers and at the same time be in itself a worthy object of industry. Maria, my dear."

The silence in the room was appalling; one could almost hear the shiver of apprehension running down the silk-and muslin-clad backs. The sign was given, however, by the docile Maria, and immediately two enormous baskets were brought in: one, the smaller, containing every possible implement for unlimited sewing by unlimited hands; the other, of alarming dimensions, filled to overflowing with shapeless and questionable garments of a canton-flannel coarse, so yellow, so indestructible, so altogether unwearable and hideous, that had it been branded "charity" in flaming letters, its object could not have been more plainly designated. Mrs. Upjohn lifted the top article and unfolded it lovingly. It was a

night-dress, atoning in lavishness of material for deficiency in grace of make, and would have been a loose fit for the wife of the giant Chang.

"These, ladies," she said, "as you will have guessed, are for the winter wear of our parish poor. Though you are not all so fortunate as to belong to our church, still I feel there is not one of you here but will be more than glad to help forward so blessed a charity as clothing the naked" (Mrs. Upjohn, in view of the nature of the garments, spoke even more literally than she intended), "who none the less need your ministrations whether you worship with us or apart. Maria, my child, Bell, Phebe, Mattie, will you kindly distribute the work among the ladies? There is another basket ready outside if the supply gives out. Dick, I would like you to carry around the thimbles. Jake, here are the needles and the spools and the scissors. If I may be permitted, ladies, I would suggest that we should all begin with the button-holes."

Nothing but the thought of the recompense in the coming supper could have sustained Mrs. Upjohn's doomed guests in the prospect before them. Extracts from Baroness Bunsen, and buttonholes in canton-flannel charity nightgowns, and a hot July afternoon, made a sum of misery that was almost too great a tax upon even Joppian amiability.

"I say it's a shame!" cried Bell Masters, in unconcealed wrath. "The idea of springing such a trap on us! Let Mrs. Upjohn's parish sew for its own poor, I won't crease my fresh dress holding that great, thick lump on my lap all the afternoon. I'm not going to be swindled into helping in this fashion."

"Oh, yes you are," said Mr. Halloway, bubbling over with suppressed merriment at the intense fun of it all. "There isn't one of you here who will refuse. I never knew any thing so delightful and novel in my whole life. This condensed combination, in one afternoon party of charity, literature, and indigestion is masterly. Miss Mudge, here is a seat for you right by Miss Masters. Miss Phebe, let me find you a chair."

And in a few moments, simply, it seemed, by the natural law of gravitation, without any engineering whatever, Mrs. Upjohn's guests had resolved themselves into two distinct parties, the elders all in the drawing-room, the younger ones in the parlor across the hall, too far off from Mr. Webb for their gay whispering to disturb that worthy as he boldly plunged headlong at his work, to do or die written on every feature of his thin, long face.

"So this is what the party turned out, Miss Masters, is it?" said Moulton, pulling his moustache as he stood up beside her. "A first-class Dorcas society."

"Charity covereth a multitude of sins," said Bell, crossly, giving a vindictive snap with her scissors, "but it won't begin to cover the enormity of Mrs. Upjohn's transgressions on this occasion. You gentlemen must be very devoted to atone to us for the button-holes. There's Mr. De Forest standing in the other room looking as if he wished he were dead. Go and bring him here."

Thus summoned, Mr. De Forest came leisurely enough, looking, if possible, a little more languid and blase than he did in the morning. Bell instantly made a place for him on the sofa by her side.

"Thanks, I would rather stand. I can take it all in better."

"Well?" asked Bell, after a pause, looking saucily up at him. "Was I right this morning? Didn't we look prettier then?"

"Infinitely."

Bell colored rather angrily, and Phebe laughed outright. Mr. De Forest favored her with a stare, chewed the end of his side-whiskers reflectively a moment, then deliberately walked over to her. "Miss Lane, I believe."

Phebe bowed, but somewhat stiffly.

"Excuse me," continued De Forest, imperturbably. "There doesn't seem to be any one to introduce us, and we know perfectly well who we each are, you know, and I wanted to ask about a mutual friend of ours,--Miss Vernor."

Phebe brightened and softened instantly. "Oh!" she exclaimed, dropping her work, "you know her? you have seen her? lately?"

"I know her, yes, quite well. I saw her some weeks since. I understood then that there was a little talk of her coming up here this summer. One of those fearful children, Olly, or Hal, or some one of the superfluous young ones, was a little off condition,--not very well, you know,--and the doctor said he mustn't go with the rest to the sea-shore, and she mentioned bringing him up here to recruit. I heard her mention your name, too, and didn't know but you might have heard something of it."

"I have, I have!" cried Phebe, her face all aglow, "She is coming,--she and Olly. She is going to stay with me. I wrote and begged her to."

"Ah, that will be very pleasant for you. Do you expect her soon?"

"To-morrow."

"Ah!" Mr. De Forest ruminated silently a moment. "She'll be bored to death up here, won't she?" he asked, presently.

"Then she can go home again," replied Phebe, shortly.

"True, true," said her companion, thoughtfully. "I forgot that. And she probably will. It would be like her to go if it bored her."

"Only there's Olly," said Phebe, grimly, the light fading out of her face a little. "She'll have to stay for him."

"Oh, no. She can put him to board somewhere and leave him. Miss Vernor doesn't concern herself overmuch with the young ones. They are an awful nuisance to her."

"She does every thing for them. You can't know her," said Phebe, indignantly. "Did you say you knew her well, Mr. De Forest?"

"I don't remember just what I said, Miss Lane, but it would have been the truth if I did, and I generally speak the truth when it's equally convenient. Yes, I do know Miss Vernor very well, and I have worsted her in a great many arguments,--you know her argumentative turn, perhaps? If you will allow me, I will do myself the honor of calling upon her when

she comes,--and upon yourself, if I may have the pleasure."

"Not if you come with the intention of putting Gerald out of conceit with Joppa. I want her to stay a long, long time."

"Don't be afraid, Miss Lane. I'll do my best to help keep her here, so long, at least, as I stay myself. '_Apres cela le deluge_'."

"I don't speak French."

"Ah? No? I regret it. You might have assisted me in my genders. I am never altogether sure of them."

"Mr. De Forest," called Bell, imperatively, from the other side of the room, displeased at the defalcation of her knight, "I want to introduce you to Miss Mudge."

Miss Mudge tried to make Bell understand by frantic pantomime that she hadn't meant just now,--any time would do,--but Bell chose it should be just now; and slightly lifting his eyebrows, Mr. De Forest took his handsome person slowly back to Bell to make an almost impertinently indifferent bow to the new claimant upon him.

Mr. Halloway had been standing near Phebe, too near not to overhear the conversation, and he turned to her now quickly.

"So this accounts for your beaming face," he said in a low tone, as he took a seat just back of her in the window niche. "The mysterious Gerald _is_ really coming, then. I wondered what had happened as soon as I saw you. Why did you not tell me?"

"I was only waiting till I had the chance," she answered, all the brightness coming back into her bonny face as she smiled up at him.

"Do you think I could keep any thing so nice from you for long? It seems to make every thing nicer when you know it too. She is coming to-morrow,--only think,--to-morrow,--just twenty-one hours more now. I can hardly wait!"

"It will be a great happiness to her, surely, to see you again," said Denham.

"That's what she writes in her letter. At least she says: 'I shall be glad to see you again, Phebe, my dear' Isn't that nice? 'Phebe, my dear,' she says. That is a great deal for Gerald to say."

"Is it? But I believe some young ladies are less effusive with their pens than with their tongues."

"It isn't Gerald's nature ever to be effusive. But oh, I'm so glad she's coming! I only got her letter last night. See, doesn't she write a nice hand?" And cautiously, lest any one else should see too, Phebe slipped an envelope into Denham's hand. He bent back behind the lace curtains to inspect it.

"Do you generally carry about your letters in your pocket, Miss Phebe?"

"No, only Gerald's. I love so always to have something of hers near me. Isn't it a nice hand?"

Halloway looked silently at the upright, angular, large script. "It's legible, certainly."

"But you don't like it?"

"Miss Phebe, I am torn between conflicting truth and politeness. It is like a man's hand, if I must say something."

"And so are her letters like a man's. Read it and see. Oh, she wouldn't mind! There is nothing in it, and yet somehow it seems just like Gerald. Do read it. Oh, I want you to. Please, please do."

And led half by curiosity, half by the eagerness in Phebe's pretty face, Denham opened the letter and read, Phebe glancing over it with him as if she couldn't bear to lose sight of it an instant.

"DEAR PHEBE," so ran the letter, "your favor of 9th inst. rec. I had no idea of intruding ourselves upon you when I asked you to look up rooms, but as you seem really to want us"--("seem!" whispered Phebe, putting her finger on the word with a pout)--"I can only say we shall be very glad to come to you. You may look for Olly and myself Friday, July 15th, by the P.M. train. Olly isn't really ill, only run down. He is as horrid a little bear as ever. All are well, and started last week for Narragansett Pier. I shall rejoice to get away from the art school and guilds, which keep on even in this intemperate weather, and I shall be glad to see you again, Phebe, my dear," (Phebe looked up triumphantly in Denham's face as she reached the words.) "Remember me to Mrs. Lane and Miss--, I can't think of her name,--Aunt Lydia, I mean.

"Sincerely yours

"GERALDINE VERNOR,

"P.S.--Olly only drinks milk."

Phebe took back the letter and folded it up. "Well?" she said.

"Well?" said Denham, looking at her and smiling.

"It's just like her," declared Phebe. "It's so downright and to the point. Gerald never wastes words."

"You said it was like a man's letter," said Denham. "But I must beg leave to differ with you there. I don't think it is at all such a letter as _I_ would have written you, for instance."

"Of course not. It wouldn't be proper for you to say 'Phebe, my dear,' as Gerald does. Yours would have to be a very dignified, pastoral letter."

"Yes, addressed to 'My Lamb,' which you couldn't object to in a pastoral letter of course, and which sounds nearly as affectionate, blaming you for having caused me to lose the valuable information I might have gained about the Baroness Bunsen. I never got much farther than her birth in that famous history. I see poor Miss Delano casting longing glances in here. I'll smuggle her in among you young people."

He departed on his errand of mercy, and soon had the timid little old

maid in the more congenial atmosphere of the parlor, where little by little, though in a very stealthy and underhand way, the talk grew more general, and the restraint slackened more and more, until sewing and reading were both forgotten and the fun became fast and furious, culminating in the sudden appearance of Jake Dexter dressed up as an ancient and altogether unlovely old woman, whom Dick Hardcastle presented in a stage whisper as "Baroness Bunsen in the closing chapter," and who forthwith proceeded to act out in dumb show the various events of that admirable woman's life, as judiciously and sonorously touched upon by Mr. Webb in the drawing-room opposite. Jake was a born actor, and having "done up" the Baroness, he proceeded to "do up" several other noted historical characters, not omitting a few less celebrated contemporaries of his own, each representation better and truer to life than the last; and winding up with snatching away their work from the young ladies' not unwilling hands, and piling it in heaps on the floor around him, he sat himself in the middle with an armful hugged close and an air of comically mingled resignation and opulence, and announced himself as "a photo from life of ye destitute poor of Joppa."

Mrs. Upjohn may have had suspicions that all was not going on precisely as she had planned in that other half of her domains which she had surrendered to Maria's feeble guardianship, but it certainly could not be laid to her blame if young people would amuse themselves even at her house. If they wilfully persisted in neglecting the means of grace she had conscientiously provided for them, so much the worse for them, not for her; and if Mr. Upjohn found the contemplation of Mrs. Bruce's profile, and her occasional smiles at him as she bent over her ugly work, not sufficient of an indemnity for his enforced silence, and chose to sneak over to the young people's side and enjoy himself too, as an inopportune and hearty guffaw from thence testified just at the wrong moment, when Mr. Webb had reached the culminating point of the Baroness' death, and was drawing tears from the ladies' eyes by the irresistible pathos of his voice,--why, Mrs. Upjohn owned in her heart that it was only what might be expected of him, and that she couldn't help that either.

So at last the reading came to an end. Everybody said it had been unprecedentedly delightful, and they should never forget that dear Baroness so long as they lived, and they thought Mrs. Upjohn herself might have sat for the original of the biography, so identical were her virtues with those of the departed saint, and so exactly did she resemble her in every particular except just in the outward circumstances of her life. And Mrs. Upjohn modestly entreated them to desist drawing so unworthy a comparison, and said it was an example of a life they should each and all do well to imitate so far as in them lay, and then she went about collecting the nightgowns, and (oh, cruellest of all!) inspecting the button-holes. It was an excellent day's work, she reported, fanning herself vigorously, and Miss Brooks, as champion button-hole-maker, having made three more than any one else, should have the post of honor and be taken in to supper by Mr. Upjohn, who was routed out from the parlor for the purpose, very red in the face, and still convulsed with laughter. Mrs. Bruce may have suspected this to be designed as a neat way of cutting her out, but there is no knowing to what lengths a flippant widow's imagination will not go, and any way Mr. Upjohn quite atoned afterward for any temporary neglect, by paying her the most assiduous attentions right in the face of his wife, who apparently did not care a straw, and only thought her husband a little more foolish than usual. Did not everybody know that it was only Mr. Upjohn's way, and that it did not mean any thing?

And so the doors were thrown open, supper was announced, and Joppa, as it swarmed around the loaded tables, felt that its hour of merited reward was come; and Mr. Hardcastle, when at last he could eat and drink no more, stood up and pronounced, in the name of the united assembly, that Mrs. Upjohn's entertainment had been a very, very great success, as all that dear Mrs. Upjohn undertook always was sure to be, and particularly those devilled crabs were unapproachable for perfection. Nobody could make him believe that even the Baroness Bunsen with all her learning could ever have spiced them better.

CHAPTER V.

FRIENDS.

Several days later, as Mr. Halloway was leaving the rectory one afternoon, he saw Phebe standing in her door-way, and crossed to speak to her.

"Alone?" he asked, smiling. "I supposed that now you would never be without a shadow."

"Gerald is up-stairs dressing. She is going to ride with Mr. De Forest. He has been to see her twice already, and you have not called yet." There was the faintest possible reproach in her voice and in her eyes.

"I have been really busy the last few days, Miss Phebe. You may know there is always some desperate reason when I am long absent. But here I am now. Shall I send in my card for Miss Vernor? Must I do it up in New York or Joppa style?"

Phebe laughed. "Never mind the card, Gerald will be down soon. It is nearly time, and she is always so punctual. What is it, Olly, dear?"

An ugly little boy, with a pale, pinched face and impish eyes, was pulling smartly at her dress.

"I say, Pheeb, can I have a cookie?"

"Does Gerald let you have cookies between meals, Olly?"

"Yes," answered Olly, unhesitatingly. "Always."

"What's that?" broke in an unexpected voice behind,--a clear, ringing, decided voice. "I will not have you tell such lies, Olly! Why will you do it!"

"I'll have the cookie anyhow," said Olly, starting on a run. "Pheeb said I could, and this is Pheeb's house, and I will."

"And you won't," said the voice, sharply. There was a scuffle, a rush, the sound of a smart box on the ear, a sudden childish howl, and Olly fled back to Phebe and buried his face in her dress. Phebe folded her arms protectingly around him, and looked up appealingly at the tall, slender figure approaching.

"Oh, Gerald, must you?"

"Phebe, I can't have you spoil that boy so. I won't have him a liar and a gourmand; he's bad enough without that. Olly, stop bawling this moment."

"I won't," screamed Olly. "You hurt me, you did, and if I can't have a cookie I'll cry just as loud as ever I can; so there!"

"Then you'll cry in the house and not on the front steps. I won't have it. Come in immediately."

And holding up her habit with one hand, the young lady reached out with the other,--a very small and white but determined-looking little hand Denham noticed (from where he stood he could not see her face)--and wrenching the child by no means gently away from Phebe, she dragged him with her toward the parlor.

"I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!" cried Olly, vociferously, doing battle valiantly with hands and feet as he went. "I hate you every day worse than ever!"

"Hate me all you like," said Gerald, with utmost coolness and disdain. "I leave you perfectly free in that direction, but you shan't tell lies or disobey me. Now stay in there and be still."

And closing the door on the sobbing culprit, she came slowly back to Phebe, still scowling and pressing her lips firmly together as she drew on her gauntlets. "Little wretch!" she muttered.

"Gerald, please," said Phebe, flushing scarlet with mortification, "here is Mr. Halloway. I want to introduce him to you."

Gerald stopped abruptly and looked up. She had not seen him before. A fleet, faint color tinged her clear cheeks an instant, but there was no other sign of embarrassment or annoyance as her dark blue eyes met his with the singularly penetrating gaze with which they looked out on all the world. There was no denying it. With her clear-cut, aristocratic face, and her slim, straight figure, stately perhaps rather than graceful, and a trifle haughty in its unbending erectness, Gerald Vernor was very, very handsome.

"I am happy to meet you at last, Miss Vernor," said Denham, with his pleasant smile. "But you are no stranger to me, I assure you. Miss Phebe made us all friends of yours long since."

Gerald's brows contracted. "Phebe is very kind," she said, with quite the opposite from gratitude in her voice, "but I hate to be talked about beforehand. One starts on a false basis from the first. Besides, it gives every one else the advantage over one."

"To be sure," replied Denham, "we cannot expect you to know us as well from hearsay. It would be too much to hope that Miss Phebe should have had as much to say for any of the rest of us." He turned laughingly to Phebe as he spoke, and she looked at him with eyes full of implicit faith.

"No," she said, simply; "I haven't told Gerald any thing about you, only your name. She will find it all out for herself so much better than I can

tell her."

"I am afraid I am not very good at finding people out," remarked Gerald, bluntly, "unless I am extraordinarily interested in them--"

"Which I imagine you generally are not," interrupted Denham.

"True," she answered, smiling a little, "which I generally am not; I am content with a very superficial knowledge. The world is crowded so full, where could one stop who set out to know thoroughly all he met?"

"It is a bitter thought that you will never know more of me than just the color of my beard," said Denham, reflectively, "but if such is your habit I suppose I must resign myself to it. Now, I am exactly the reverse from you; I am always extraordinarily interested in everybody."

"Ah, because as a clergyman you must be."

"No; simply because it happens to be my nature. One has one's individual characteristics, you know, quite independently of one's profession."

"Yes, in other professions; but in yours--"

"But we are men first, Miss Vernor, afterward clergymen. Why may we not keep our distinct idiosyncrasies, even in our clerical uniform?"

Gerald slashed her dress gently with her riding whip. "It seems to me as if you should all be clergymen first and men afterward, fitting yourselves to the profession rather than the profession to you; and so by all confessedly following one pattern, you would be necessarily drawn into a greater similitude with each other than any other class of men. Ah, here is Mr. De Forest at last."

"At last?" repeated that gentleman as he joined the group, or rather paused just beyond it, surveying Gerald with a critical glance which seemed to take in accurately at one swift sweep every least detail of her dress. "My watch stands at the minute, Miss Vernor."

"And here come the horses," added Phebe.

"Not much to boast of," said De Forest, turning the severe criticism of his look upon the animals as the boy brought them up. "I wouldn't let you be seen in Central Park with them. However, they are the best Joppa can do for us. They are not very good-natured brutes either, but I believe you look to a horse's hoofs rather than his head."

"I do, decidedly," laughed Gerald, as De Forest raised her deftly to the saddle and arranged bridle and girths to her liking, turning to tighten his own before mounting, and kicking away a small dog that had run up to sniff at his heels.

"What did you bring along this ugly little beast of yours for, Jim? I abhor curs."

"Tain't none of mine, Mister," said the stable-boy, grinning. "It's one of them street dogs that ain't nobody's." And he in his turn gave a push to the puppy, while Gerald leaned down and hit at it lightly with her whip.

"Get away, my friend. There isn't room both for you and for us here," she said, turning her horse toward it playfully as the little creature slunk aside. In another instant her horse kicked violently, there was a single sharp yelp, and the dog lay motionless in the road.

"Hi!" exclaimed Jim, quite in accents of admiration, as he ran up and bent over the poor thing. "That was a good un! Right on the head! He won't trouble any other genelman again, I'm thinking."

"What!" cried Gerald, sharply. "You don't mean the dog is dead?"

"Don't I?" said the boy, moving a little aside so that she should see. "That was a neat un and no mistake."

Gerald looked down with a cry of horror; then suddenly sprang from her horse and caught up the poor little limp animal in her arms.

"Take away the horse," she said to the boy, imperiously. "I shall not ride to-day."

"But, Miss Vernor!" expostulated De Forest, "for heaven's sake don't take it so to heart. It's unfortunate, of course, but no one is to blame. Do put the thing down. It's dead. You can't do any thing more for it."

"I know it," said Gerald. "I did all I could; I killed him. But you'll have to excuse me, Mr. De Forest, I can't ride."

De Forest caught her by the arm impatiently, as she turned from him. "What nonsense, Miss Vernor! What _is_ the good of playing tragedy queen over a dead dog? I'll have him buried in a silver coffin if you like and raise a memorial to his inestimable virtues, but in the name of all that is sensible, do get on the horse again and let us have our ride."

"Not to-day," replied Gerald. "I could not. It is impossible." She looked up at him, holding the little victim pressed close in her arms, utterly regardless of its rough and grimy coat. Her eyes were swimming with tears.

"As you decide, of course," said De Forest, sulkily, releasing her, and tossing his bridle to the boy. "Here you, Sim, or Tim, or Jim, or whatever you are, take away the horses, and as you value your tip, mind you don't have any more dogs around the next time I want you."

Gerald turned away without another word, gathering up her dress as she best could, and went into the house. Olly, who had witnessed the whole proceeding enchantedly from the window, ran to meet her. "I say, let's see him. My, ain't he dirty! Is he dead? just as dead as he can be?"

"Yes," answered his sister, very gently; "the poor thing is quite dead. Come and help me bury him decently somewhere. No, Phebe, stay there. I wish it. Don't let us have any more fuss about it, please."

De Forest lifted his hat and turned to leave as Gerald disappeared. "Pray don't let me detain you from the interesting ceremony, Miss Lane," he said, with his most cynical and mocking voice; "Miss Vernor as high-priestess will be worth a full audience. Good-morning."

"Gerald wouldn't like it if I went to her when she said not; I must stay here," said Phebe turning her distressed face to Halloway, who had

stood a silent spectator of it all. "Oh, I'm so sorry it happened! Isn't it too bad?"

"It certainly is,--for the dog."

"She won't get over it for ever so long, and it wasn't really her fault. She was only in fun when she turned her horse that way. Gerald is very tender-hearted."

"I see she is,--toward dogs."

"Mr. Halloway, you don't like her!"

"Miss Phebe, I am madly in love with her."

"Don't laugh at me, please. Isn't she handsome?"

"Well, I couldn't judge of the length of her hair."

"Nonsense, tell me what you really think of her."

Denham pondered a moment. "I think all sorts of things," he answered presently, with an amused laugh. "She is so contradictory she'll fit almost any opinion, and the worst I can say of her is that she'll never concern herself in the least to find out what my opinion may be."

"Ah," said Phebe, softly, "just wait. You don't either of you know each other yet!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE PICNIC.

Gerald's and Olly's visit was quite an event in the quiet Lane household. Olly flagrantly broke every existing custom in it with the sublime autocracy of childhood, and regained his health at the cost of the peace of mind of every individual with whom he came in contact, from nervous Miss Lydia down to the protesting servants; while Gerald was one of those intense personalities whose influence seems to recreate the entire atmosphere about them at once, go where they will. Poor Miss Lydia was afraid of her quick speech and brusque ways and decided opinions, and spent more hours than usual upstairs alone in her own little room, and wore her best cap whenever she appeared below, as a sort of mute appeal to the young lady's indulgence. But Gerald, in her robust health, had no sympathy whatever with invalids as a class, and for "chronic nerves" she had an absolute contempt, unmitigated by even the best cap's gay ribbons. "It's altogether a matter of will," she asserted. "People needn't be ill if they are only resolved not to be so."

"Humph!" said Mrs. Lane, who had chanced to overhear; and there was a trifle more tenderness than usual in her manner when she went up later to put the mid-day cup of beef-tea into her sister's thin hands, and stood looking compassionately down at her. "Nothing is easier than to insist that a thing is so and so, just because there's no way to prove that it isn't so."

"How you do always talk in proverbs, Sister Sophy!" said Miss Lydia, admiringly. "I only wish Solomon could have heard you. I do believe he would have put some of them in."

"He would have been far too busy taking down Mrs. Upjohn's fine speeches to mind _me_," grunted Mrs. Lane. "And I never did think much of Solomon, anyway. He was too much of a Mormon with his hundred wives and that. Want any thing else, Lyddy?"

"No, thank you. The house is very nice and still this morning. There's a picnic up at the Dexter's farm, isn't there? I suppose they've all gone to it."

"Of course. Who ever heard of a picnic unless Phebe went along to do all the fussing and mussing that everybody else shirks? Don't tell _me_ there's any fun in a picnic,--going off in the woods like that, to do for yourself what you'd sell the clothes off your back to have somebody else do for you at home, and eating all kinds of heathenish messes with your fingers because you've forgotten the forks. But what people like let them have. They'll get experience out of it if nothing better. And of course Phebe had to go."

True enough, Phebe was as essential to any picnic as the feast, though much less obtrusively so, and Gerald watched her friend's quiet helpfulness with lazy interest. She herself was stretched at ease on the clean, fresh grass under some glorious old trees. The place chosen was a lovely spot at the head of the lake; the drive there had been long and hot, and now she lay enjoying to the full the refreshment of the shadow and the breeze, and the perfection both of the view and of her immediate surroundings. Bell Masters sat near her, having discovered that she was generally surest of Mr. De Forest's company when in Gerald's neighborhood. Nor had she been mistaken this time. He had openly abandoned the greedy band of berry-pickers, and the artistic knot of sketchers, and the noisy body of pleasure-seekers, who were paddling frivolously around the shores of the lake and screaming with causeless laughter, as soon as he found that Gerald did not intend attaching herself to any of them but had struck out the new and independent line of doing absolutely nothing at all. Halloway had been helping industriously with the fire, but he came toward the group under the trees when his services seemed no longer required.

"You look most invitingly comfortable," he said, fanning himself with his hat. "We must try to coax Miss Phebe here for a rest."

"Pray don't," said De Forest, lifting a lazy hand with an air of finding even that motion too great an effort. "At least not till the coffee is well under way. I tasted a cup of her make yesterday. Don't call her off. We are all benefiting in a manner by her absence."

"I can make good coffee too, when I choose," said Bell, biting at the rim of her straw hat.

De Forest contemplated her with new interest. "Ah, can you. 'Tis a gift of the gods given to few. And when do you choose, may I ask? Apparently not to-day."

""Tisn't my picnic."

"Oh! Is it Miss Lane's?"

"One would say it was, from the way she slaves for it," remarked Gerald.

"Why don't you help too?" asked De Forest, breaking off blades of grass and flinging them out singly upon the air.

"For Miss Masters' excellent reason: it is not my picnic."

"You contribute your valuable aid solely to your own undertakings then?"

"Why am I called upon to contribute it to any other?"

"'Tis a problem for philosophers. But for argument's sake, let us say for the good of humanity at large, and of the Dexters in particular."

"I am not bound to the Dexters by any obligation that I can see to help them carry out their entertainment. If they are not equal to it, they should not give it."

"Nothing Quixotic about you, is there?" said De Forest, looking at her quizzically.

"Nothing whatever," replied Gerald, easily. "Why should there be? Let every one look out for himself."

"And if some can't?"

"That is no business of mine. It's simply my business to make sure that I can look after myself."

"What an outrageously frank exposure of a universally concealed sentiment! Mr. Halloway is scandalized. He is thinking how he can fit a scorching text to it to wither you with next Sunday."

"No; here is a sermon ready made on the spot," said Denham, as Phebe came slowly toward them. "Miss Lane in herself is a sufficient illustration of the opposite doctrine."

"Prove it," answered Gerald, shrugging her shoulders. "Prove that Phebe, who toils for everybody, is any happier than I, who only follow my inclination."

"You certainly look vastly the more comfortable at present," said De Forest, looking from Gerald's cool cheeks and unruffled muslin flounces to Phebe's flushed face and tumbled cambric. "You are a practical embodiment of the beauty and expediency of selfishness."

"What are you talking about?" asked Phebe, coming up and leaning wearily against a tree.

"About you and Miss Vernor," explained Bell. "Which of you is happier? _I_ should say Miss Vernor decidedly."

A loving look came into Phebe's eyes, as she glanced down at Gerald.

"Miss Vernor, _of course_," she said, with a very tender inflection of voice. "Being what she is, how can she help being the happier?"

"Virtue advocating vice," said De Forest. "Mr. Halloway, your sermon is a dead failure,--as a sermon."

"By no means," answered Denham, smiling. "I don't expect to convert you in a single lesson. Will you not sit down with us, Miss Phebe? You look tired."

"Not just yet, thank you."

"And why not?" asked Gerald.

"I want to see a little after Miss Delano first. She's off there all alone hunting for ferns."

"Well," persisted Gerald, "what of it? Are you fonder of her society than ours, that you must run after her?"

"I am not fonder of any one's society than of yours, Gerald."

"But are you fond of that tiresome creature at all? Confess it; doesn't she bore you to death with her interminable grasshopper chatter?"

Phebe glanced at Halloway, and laughed a little as she moved away. "Oh, I am learning by degrees not to be bored by people,--not even by Miss Delano."

"Now, will any one explain why she should wish to teach herself not to know a bore from a Christian?" exclaimed Gerald, impatiently. "It is quite beyond me."

"But do you really never talk to anybody unless you want to, Miss Vernor?" asked Bell, disagreeably conscious that Gerald had not voluntarily addressed her once that morning.

"Never," replied Gerald, staring out at the lake.

"Don't you ever do any thing you don't want to, because you ought to?"

"I don't always see the ought. For instance, why should I put myself out to entertain Miss Delano as Phebe does?"

"I don't know," muttered Bell. "I wouldn't, I am sure. She is mortally dull."

"One might imagine reasons for the self-sacrifice, I suppose," said De Forest, making a languid snatch at a butterfly fluttering near. "The possibility, we will say, that it might please the gentle old babbler to come under the condescension of your notice. How would that do for a motive?"

"Why should I want to please her?" insisted Gerald, removing a hideous beetle from her dress with all possible care lest she should hurt it. "I don't want to. I don't care for her, nor she for me. Why should I put myself out for her? What claim has she on me that I should displease myself to please her?"

"Let us see," said Denham, ruminatingly. "Miss Delano's pleasure against Miss Vernor's displeasure, or vice versa, Miss Vernor's pleasure against Miss Delano's displeasure. Yes; the balance of pleasure remains quite

the same whichever lady has it. Apart from principle, the logic is unanswerable."

"It is admirable," commented De Forest. "I always did like logic so much better than moral philosophy. Hello, what's the matter now?"

There was a wail of distress somewhere in the distance.

Gerald turned her shapely head and listened a moment. "It's only Olly," she said, composedly. "I recognize the cry. He isn't hurt. Oh, you needn't go, Mr. Halloway; Olly never comes to any harm. He's only quarrelling with some one."

De Forest raised himself on his elbow to listen, while Halloway walked off in the direction of the outburst. "There are possibilities lurking in picnics, you know," he remarked, resuming his recumbent position, "mad bulls, and rabbit traps, and fine chances for a drown now and then. But I suppose we needn't trouble ourselves, Mr. Halloway'll see to it. Besides, Olly bears the charmed life of the wicked. Miss Masters, I hope you remember to give daily thanks that you haven't any small brothers."

"I do devoutly give thanks that I haven't any sisters," said Bell, with an unaffectionate glance toward Gerald. "I should hate them."

And so the desultory talk rambled on, the little group growing larger by degrees as the approaching luncheon hour brought back the stragglers, and with them Olly, trotting contentedly along, clinging to Halloway's hand, meek as any lamb.

"What were you doing when you cried out so a little while ago?" asked Gerald, going up to the child.

Olly looked at her with instant defiance in his eyes. "I hurt my foot."

"You know perfectly well you can't deceive me, Olly. Tell me the truth. What mischief were you at?"

"I tell you I hurt my foot, and it hurt like mischief, and that's all the mischief there was. I wish it had been _your_ foot, and I wouldn't have cried a bit."

Halloway was turning aside, but Gerald appealed to him. "Is he telling the truth?"

"Yes," answered Denham, dryly. "He was racing with the Anthony boys and fell, but, as you see, he's right enough now."

"Ya-ah!" said Olly, and leered into her face with brotherly disrespect. "I'll tell you a lie next time if you'd rather. Ya-ah!"

Gerald looked as if she were going to shake him on the spot, and to prevent any such catastrophe Denham suddenly seized the little fellow and put him through a number of acrobatic feats in breathless succession, till he was fairly hustled into good temper and everybody around was laughing, even Gerald. Jake Dexter was instantly incited to display some marvellous limber-jointed powers of his own, and had just demonstrated to the assembled company, to his and their entire satisfaction, that the impossible is after all sometimes possible, when luncheon was announced by the ringing of a cow-bell, and a gay onslaught upon the usual picnic

table, rich in luxuries and poor in necessities, superseded for the nonce all less material forms of amusement.

Later in the afternoon Holloway wandered off from the rest for one of the solitary strolls that he preferred to companionship as being less lonely,--a feeling often experienced when fate and not choice appoints one's comrades,--and returning leisurely along the banks of the lake, he came upon a little group of picnickers, and stopped unperceived beyond them, to enjoy for a while that comfortable sense of being in the world yet out of it, which is the birthright of all spectatorship. Gerald and Phebe were skipping stones, thoroughly absorbed in energetic enjoyment of the simple game; their two contrasting figures, Gerald dark and tall and slim, and Phebe so round and fair and supple, making a pretty-enough picture for any artist. Olly, little Maggie Dexter, and an assortment of sturdy urchins known throughout Joppa only as the Anthony boys, were dancing and chattering aimlessly around, and near by was drawn up a clumsy old boat where Phebe had made a comfortable niche for Miss Delano, who every day at about this hour was afflicted with a remarkable disorder which had grown upon her wholly of late years, and whose symptoms, so far as she was willing to admit them, consisted of a painful heaviness of the eyelids, a weakness in the nape of the neck, and an irresistible tendency to retire for a brief season within herself. A little farther off still, having taken fortune at the flood and secured De Forest at last, Bell Masters was embarked on another kind of craft, a thorough-going, fully-freighted flirtation, all sails set; and through the trees were glimpses of lazily moving figures beyond, generally in twos and twos, following some occult rule of common division peculiar to picnics. By degrees the children wandered off up the bank, and presently there came a shout, followed by an evident squabble. Phebe looked around uneasily. Gerald kept on with her sport.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven times, Phebe. Now do better than that."

At this juncture little Maggie ran up, her pretty brown eyes wide and her red lips quivering. "Oh! Miss Vernor, Olly shan't do it, shall he? Do say he shan't!"

"Do what?" asked Gerald, pausing in the act of searching for another pebble.

"Put it in the water to swim like a duck. It isn't a duck, it's a little, little young bird he's found in a nest, and it can't swim, it can't hardly fly. Oh, don't let him!"

"Let him!" echoed Gerald sharply. She sprang toward the children with a bound, almost lifting Olly off his feet as she drew him back from the water's edge. "You cruel boy!" she cried. "Give it to me directly."

"I won't!" answered Olly, trying to shake himself free from her grasp. "It's mine, I found it."

But the small hands held him in a grip as strong as a man's, and in another moment Gerald had taken the poor little half-feathered creature from him, and bidden Maggie restore it carefully to its nest.

"It's mine! It's mine! I'll have it back!" shouted Olly, angrily, after the little girl.

Gerald took hold of him by the shoulders and turned him round toward her. There was a great deal of hatred for the sin, and not overmuch love for the sinner, in her face, as she looked down at him. "If you dare touch that bird again, Olly, I'll find a punishment for you that you will not soon forget, do you hear?"

A hidden thought of revenge for the spoiled sport came into Olly's mind. He twisted himself away from his sister with a little grunt, and stood peevishly playing a moment with a couple of marbles; then suddenly darting aside, seized the boat in which Miss Delano was established, still struggling, but more feebly, with the mysterious trouble that held her in thrall; and with a strength with which one would hardly have credited his slight form, he pushed it off into the water. There was, of course, not a particle of real danger for Miss Delano, even though this chanced to be the only boat at that point, and she was no oarswoman; but the poor little old lady, thus suddenly roused from the strange hallucinations (as she called them) which were the most marked feature of her complaint, and finding herself afloat upon the unstable deep, instantly supposed that her last hour was come. She sprang up, too terrified to scream, with a look of deadly horror in her face, and then sank again all in a heap in the bottom of the boat. Olly gave a fiendish laugh, but before any one else could move to the rescue, Gerald, with one fierce, unutterable look at her brother, and no thought but how soonest to end Miss Delano's speechless agony, quick as a flash, caught hold of an overhanging bough and swung herself on to a rock quite far out in the water, and thence, with a light, bold spring, landed safely in the middle of the boat as it drifted past.

"All right, Miss Delano," she said, briskly, seating herself and laying hold of the oars with accustomed hands; "I'm a born sailor, and we'll have a little row first before we go back."

Had an angel visibly descended from heaven to assume the helm, Miss Delano could not have been more grateful and overcome. "Oh, my dear, my dear!" she said, and, in the intensity of her relief, began to cry a little softly. Gerald pretended not to notice her emotion (she was very awkward as a comforter, and as shy before tears as a man), and rowed around for a while in utter silence; and then feeling that conversation might aid in quieting her companion's unnecessarily excited nerves she began abruptly charging her with questions as one loads a gun with cartridges, dropping down one after another with cruel directness into the harmless vacancy of Miss Delano's brain. How many inhabitants had Joppa in precise figures? what was the height of those farther hills to the left? upon what system was the village-school governed? what was the mineral nature of the soil? what was the fastest time ever made by that bay mare of Mr. Upjohn's with the white hind foot? etc. etc., etc., on all which points poor Miss Delano could only assure her timidly: "I don't know, dear; it would be well if I did," and relapsed into an alarmed and most uncharacteristic silence.

Phebe stood watching the boat as Gerald rowed off, then, as if recollecting some neglected duty, turned suddenly, and found herself face to face with Mr. Halloway.

"No farther," he said, playfully barring her passage.

"Oh, but I must! I want to find Olly and talk him into a better frame of mind before Gerald comes back."

"Leave Olly to me, please. I am a perfect child-tamer, and guarantee to exorcise his seven evil spirits in less than no time. Meanwhile, sit you down and rest."

"Oh, I don't need rest. If you'll undertake Olly I'll help put back the lunch things. Picnics are quite like the Biblical feasts: five loaves and two fishes somehow always make twelve basketfuls to take up."

"And you are always a true disciple at the feast, Miss Phebe, intent only upon ministering to others."

Phebe laughed her own peculiarly light-hearted, gay laugh. "That is a much prettier way of putting it than Gerald's. She says I make myself maid-of-all-work."

"Miss Gerald, of course, doesn't approve of such service."

"But you do. So I needn't mind her blame."

"But I shall blame too, Miss Phebe, when you overdo yourself. I don't see why others' recreation need be all work for you. Let each take his share of both the pleasure and the toil."

"But you see this is my share, Mr. Halloway, because I can't help in any better way. I don't know enough to entertain people's guests just by talking to them, as Gerald does. You forget how dull I am."

"So I do," said Denham, gravely. "I forget it all the time. Indeed, the forgetfulness has quite become chronic. Now I'll find Olly, and we'll all go at the dishes together and make a game of it."

Certainly Denham Halloway must have possessed some secret charm in his management of children, for by the time Gerald turned her boat to the shore, he stood at the bank to meet them, with Olly by his side, as amiable a little fellow as any Sunday-school-book hero ever born.

"I am glad your sail turned out such a success, Miss Delano," said Halloway, cheerily, as he lifted the little old lady carefully out on to the pebbles. "You have been envied of us all. But here is a little boy come to tell you all the same how sorry he is that he gave you such a fright. Olly, my lad, I think Miss Delano looks as if she had forgiven you through and through."

"Oh, indeed, indeed yes," answered Miss Delano, hurriedly. "It was only my silly way of being scared, particularly when I'm roused up so sudden out of one of those turns of mine. And it's all right, my dear, all right."

"But I'm sorry, real and honest," declared Olly, stoutly, looking squarely in Miss Delano's kindly face. "And I didn't mean to scare you."

"You meant it for a revenge on me, I suppose," said Gerald, in a low, harsh voice. She took hold of his arm as she spoke. "Give me those marbles of yours."

Olly looked at her, hesitated, and then reluctantly produced three very handsome agates from some outlying storehouse of his jacket.

"I bought you six," said Gerald. "Where are the rest?"

"I lost one," answered Olly, sullenly. "It fell down a hole."

"Then give me the other two."

Olly obeyed still more reluctantly, fixing great, anxious eyes upon his treasures as he laid them, each one more slowly than the last, in his sister's hand.

"There," said Gerald. "Perhaps this will teach you to behave better another time. I shall not buy you any more this summer." She flung out her hand suddenly, and the five pretty stones fell with a splash far out in the lake and disappeared forever, five little cruel sets of circles instantly beginning to widen and widen over their graves in a perfect mockery of roundness. Olly gave one sharp cry, and then stood stock-still, a bitterly hard look coming over his face; those marbles had been very, very dear to his heart. Halloway put his arm tenderly around the little fellow, and drew him close in a very sympathetic way.

"Olly," he said, gently, "you know you deserved some punishment, but now that your sister has punished you, I am sure she will forgive you too, as Miss Delano has done, if you only ask her."

Olly buried his face in his friend's coat, and burst into a fit of heart-broken tears. "I don't want her to forgive me," he sobbed. "I only want my agates,--my pretty, pretty agates!"

"Surely you will forgive him?" pleaded Halloway, looking up at Gerald over Olly's head, and holding out one of the boy's hands in his own. "He was really penitent when you came up. Let me ask for him."

Gerald moved a step away, ignoring the hand. "Certainly, if you wish it," she said, coldly.

Halloway bent and kissed Olly's flushed face. "Do you hear, my boy? It is all right now, and there is Maggie calling you to swing her. Don't forget you promised to make me a visit at the rectory to-morrow."

Olly threw his arms around Denham's knees and gave him a convulsive hug. "I like you though you _are_ a minister," he said, through his tears. "I just wish you were my sister!" And then he went slowly off to Maggie, and Denham and Gerald stood silently where he had left them. Gerald was the first to speak.

"You think I am hard on Olly. I see it in your face."

"I do think," replied Denham, slowly, with a faint smile curving his well-cut lips, "that perhaps it might be happier for Olly if you would try to consider him less in the light of a boy, and more as--as only a little animal. You are so tender-hearted and pitiful toward animals."

Gerald flushed angrily. "I like plain speaking best. You think I am hard on him. Why don't you say so?"

"I will if you prefer it. I do think so."

"Thanks. Is there any thing else you would like to say to me in your capacity as clergyman before we join the others?"

"Yes, if I may really venture so far. Your hat is quite crooked."

Gerald straightened it without a smile. "Thanks again. Anything else?"

"Absolutely nothing." He turned to escort her back, but Gerald stood still, frowning out at the lake.

"You don't know Olly," she said, curtly.

"Maybe not, but I know childish nature pretty well, perhaps because I love it."

"Ah! I don't love it. It isn't lovable to me. It is all nonsense to call it the age of innocence. It is vice in embryo instead of in full leaf, that is all."

"But that is an inestimable gain of itself. A little of a bad thing is surely much better than a great deal of it. For my part I confess to a great partiality for children. There is something pathetic to me in the little faults and tempers that irritate us now chiefly because they clash against our own weaknesses, and yet on the right guidance of which lies the whole making or marring of the child's life."

"Doesn't guidance include punishment?"

"Yes, it includes it. But it does not consist of it."

Gerald still stood half turned from him, frowning out over the placid blue water. "Ah," she said, "it chiefly consists of good example and that sort of thing, I suppose."

"I think it consists chiefly of love," said Halloway, simply.

Gerald made no answer at first, then turned and looked at him almost defiantly. Her changeable eyes seemed black as she raised them to his. "Would you have thrown Olly's marbles into the lake?"

"No," replied Halloway, looking steadily back at her.

"Then you would have been very foolish," said Gerald, haughtily. "It was the only way to touch him. I was quite right to do it."

"You should be the best judge of your actions, Miss Vernor."

Gerald bowed without answer, and moved past him like an offended duchess. Halloway stood looking after her with an amused sparkle in his eyes. "Miss Geraldine Vernor," he said to himself, "with all your beauty and your reputed accomplishments and intellect, you would yet do well to take a few lessons of my little friend Phebe Lane."

CHAPTER VII.

TRIED AS BY FIRE.

"Gerald, what are you thinking of?"

"I was wondering how soon you would let us have the lamp."

"I'll get it immediately, if you like, but it's so pleasant talking in the twilight. I could spend hours contentedly sitting here so with you."

"How reprehensibly idle!"

"No, I should be learning something all the time. You have always something to teach me. Or if you didn't feel like talking, I could just sit still and hold your hand and not need any thing more."

Gerald put her hand instinctively out of reach. "I beg you won't try it. I hate having my hand held."

"Yes, I know you do. You hate being kissed, too. You hate being admired and made a fuss over. I don't suppose any thing would induce you to let me call you a pet name. O Gerald, I do wish you liked being loved!"

"But I do like it well enough. Of course every one likes being cared for and all that sort of thing. It's only the gushing and spooning and sentimentalizing that I can't endure. I never could, even as a child."

Phebe sat suddenly upright, away from Gerald. Perhaps even the mute caress of her attitude jarred upon her friend. "To me the half of being loved would be the being told so," she said. "I should never weary of hearing it said over and over again."

"Bah!" ejaculated Gerald, "it would make me sick!" She got up as if the very thought were too much for her, and going to the window stood still there looking out. Phebe followed her with her eyes.

"I am afraid you are fated to be deadly sick all your life through, Gerald. What _will_ you do with your lovers?"

"Dismiss them."

"All?"

"All but one."

"What will you do with him?"

"Marry him, of course. That is what he will be there for, won't it? I expect to marry some one some time. Marriage makes a woman's life fuller and freer, though not necessarily happier. I want to get all into my life that I can."

"I wonder whom you will marry," mused Phebe, where she sat curled up on the sofa. "I wonder what he could be like. Gerald, how I should like to see you in love!"

"You won't see it," replied Gerald. "No one will ever see it. It wouldn't be my way to make a display of the insanity, supposing, that is, that I have it."

"I hope at least you will show it to _him_."

"Not overmuch even to _him_. He'll have to take it on faith. I haven't

the faintest intention of informing any one of the state of my affections a dozen times a day. Once for all ought to be sufficient with the declaration, as it is with the marriage vow."

Phebe puckered up her forehead. "Ah, how different we are! If I am ever engaged to any one I shall want to keep telling him all the time how much I love him, for fear he wouldn't guess it."

"You will bore him to death then."

"I suppose I shall," replied Phebe, dejectedly. "I don't suppose any one living wants to be loved so much as I would want to love him. I couldn't be cool and deliberate and wise at loving as you would be. I should have to do it with my whole heart and just give myself up to it for good and all."

"That's the story-book way of loving," said Gerald. "I don't believe in it for real life. Blind adoration doesn't do either the lover or the loved any good. There should be sense in one's emotions as well as in one's opinions."

Phebe was silent a moment or two. "You are so self-possessed, and so self-controlled, Gerald," she said at last. "It must be very nice to have one's self so perfectly in command as you have. And yet I don't know. I think it would be rather nice too to find one's self suddenly under the power of some one a great deal better and stronger and wiser than one's self, who compelled one to love him, not because one would, but just because one could not help it."

The girls were alone in the sitting-room, Mrs. Lane having gone out to a neighbor's, taking Olly with her, and Miss Lydia not having yet appeared for her usual hour downstairs. It was a few days after the picnic, and was one of those suddenly cool August evenings that sometimes drop down so unexpectedly upon the summer heat, and a wood-fire lay upon the hearth ready to light at the invalid's coming. Phebe too sprang from the sofa as she spoke, as if her words had evoked too vivid a picture, and kneeling down by the hearth, applied a match. The bright flame leaped swiftly up and filled all the room with a flickering golden glow. Gerald turned in the window to watch it. How quickly it had flushed Phebe's cheeks, and how soft her eyes looked in its light!

"It's downright cruelty to spoil our first cool evening with a fire, Phebe, but I'll forgive you, it makes you look so pretty," she said, quite unconscious of her beauty as she stood against the dark background of the curtain in picturesque stateliness, her dress of soft cream-white cloth falling in clinging folds about her, and her clear pale face turned dreamily toward the light, which gleamed out in fitful reflection from the heavy gold ornaments at her throat and wrists.

"Ah, you do not see yourself!" murmured Phebe, looking adoringly back at her. "No one else could look pretty to you if you did."

"How foolish!" said Gerald, scornfully. "Pray don't let us begin bandying compliments back and forth. That's next worse to eternally discussing love. Why it is that two girls seem never able to talk together half an hour without lugging in that threadbare subject as if it were the one most important thing in the world, I don't understand."

"Well, isn't love the most important thing,--to women?" asked Phebe,

sitting down on the floor to nurse the fire, her thin muslin making a little ripple of pretty lightness around her.

"No, it isn't," replied Gerald. "It may be to some few perhaps, but certainly not to all women. It isn't to me. It's one thing; not every thing; and not even the best thing. Knowledge is better, and goodness is better, and to come down to purely personal blessings, health is better, and so is common-sense better, and in the long run there are dozens of things infinitely better worth having and better worth aiming for. It's a good enough thing to have in addition, but as to its being the sum and substance, the Alpha and Omega, of any sensible woman's life, that's all foolishness. Let's have done with it and order in the lights. I want to get at Euclid again. It will never do for that conceited Yale brother of mine to get ahead of me. Shall I call to Nancy?"

"No use. The servants are out. Wait a moment till the fire is well started, and I'll bring in the lamp."

"The servants are out?" repeated Gerald. "Both? At the same time? Is that the way you keep house in Joppa?"

"Oh, they like running out together, and we never want any thing in the evenings, you know. The front door always stands ajar, and visitors let themselves in."

"And you make your own fires and bring in your own oily lamps; or do your evening guests assist you perhaps in lieu of the servants?"

"But we don't generally have fires," laughed Phebe, greatly amused at Gerald's disgust. "Only to-night it would be too chilly for Aunt Lydia here without one. I feel cool too. I was not so sensible as you, and put on too thin a dress. Isn't it a pretty blaze? Wait just till I throw on another log. How it snaps and crackles!"

"Take your time," said Gerald, turning back to the window. "But what a way to manage! Why should you hire servants, if you do their work for them?"

Phebe only laughed, and a little shower of sparks flew over her from the hearth as if the fire laughed too.

"It's being needlessly indulgent," pursued Gerald. "One can give servants proper liberties without making one's self a slave to their caprices. If you yield to them in one instance because it chances to be convenient, they'll certainly exact it of you another time when it is not convenient. Gracious heavens! Phebe, what is it?"

There was a sudden outburst of light behind her, and a sharp scream of mingled terror and pain, and she turned to find Phebe standing the centre of a pillar of fire. Her light dress had ignited from the flying sparks, and the devouring flames seemed to burst forth in a hundred places at once and rush exultantly together. Phebe gave another wild cry and started for the door in that blind agony of despair which seems to hasten people at such times to their doom, as if by aimless flight they could escape the awful demon who possesses them. Too horror-stricken to utter a sound, Gerald sprang at her, and seizing her with fearless hands, forced the poor struggling girl by main strength down on to the floor. No one near to help! No water at hand! Not so much as a rug or a shawl to throw over her and stifle the flames! Yes! there was the table-cover, heavy and

thick, as if created for this very life-service. Gerald tore it off,--books, boxes, china cups, and glass vases crashing to the ground together,--and flinging it over Phebe, threw herself on top of it, pressing it close in every direction with hands and limbs, and smothering the flames resolutely beneath it. It was but a moment, though a moment of lifetime horror, and all was over. There was only the fire on the hearth hissing and leaping as if in anger at its defeated design.

"Phebe!" whispered Gerald, hoarsely; "Phebe!"

Phebe had ceased to struggle, and lay perfectly motionless, apparently scarcely breathing, but she opened her eyes and smiled faintly as Gerald called her. The fright and the pain had taken her speech away. She could not find it at once. But the smile gave new hope and energy to Gerald.

"Never mind talking," she exclaimed, springing briskly to her feet. "If you are only alive it's all right. Don't attempt to stir. I'll get some one."

"Aunt Lydia--don't let her know," Phebe managed to gasp.

"No, no, of all people!" cried Gerald. She paused an instant. Not a servant in the house! whom was she to summon? A vague idea seized her of running into the street and catching hold of the first passer, when at the moment the door opened, and Mr. Halloway appeared on the threshold.

"Is there any one at home? Shall I come in, please?" called the bright, cheery voice.

"Mr. Halloway! oh, thank Heaven!" And seizing him by the arm, Gerald dragged him over to where Phebe lay. "Help me to take her up-stairs to her room."

Denham staggered back unutterably shocked and horrified as he recognized the prostrate form at his feet, the fire-light playing mockingly over it and revealing the white face and loosened hair. For the instant he thought her dead. He caught his breath and put his hand up over his eyes. "My God! what has happened?"

"Her dress took fire--she is burned, no, not badly I am sure, but let us get her up-stairs without losing time. Quick!"

Denham put Gerald aside almost roughly, and stooping down lifted Phebe tenderly in his arms. She moaned as he touched her, but smiled up at him as she had done at Gerald.

"Do I hurt you, dear?" he asked, with infinite pity and tenderness in his voice. "I will be as gentle as I can. Poor child! poor child!"

"Let me help you," said Gerald. "The stairs are steep and I am very strong."

She came nearer, but he shook his head. "I need no help."

"This way, then," said Gerald, shortly. "And don't speak. Miss Lydia mustn't know."

She led the way to Phebe's room, and he followed slowly, laying his burden carefully down on the bed and arranging the pillows under her head

with all of a woman's gentleness of touch.

"Now go for the doctor," ordered Gerald, turning to the bureau to light the candles. "Dr. Dennis. If he is out, Dr. Harrison. Only find some one immediately."

Denham lingered an instant, bending down over the bed.

"I thought we had lost you to-night, Phebe," he said, so low the words were but just audible. "God be thanked if only that you are still here!" And stooping nearer yet he added: "We could not let you go, dear child."

Gerald came anxiously back to the bedside as he left the room. "Are you in much pain now?" she asked, lifting off the heavy braid that lay across Phebe's bosom like a great rope of loosely twisted silk. "You do not think you are badly hurt, do you, dear?"

Phebe looked up at her, smiling strangely.

"Oh, Gerald," she whispered, while two big tears rolled slowly down on to the pillow, "I wish I might die to-night! I don't think I can ever be so happy again!"

"Nonsense!" said Gerald, with utmost sternness. "Don't talk about dying. I won't allow it." And then she suddenly put down her head beside Phebe's, and burst into tears.

CHAPTER VIII.

GERALD OBEYS ORDERS.

In an incredibly short time Denham brought back not only Dr. Dennis, whom he had caught just setting out for a stolen game of whist with Mr. Upjohn, during the absence of that gentleman's wife at prayer-meeting, but also Soeur Angelique, whose mere presence in a sick-room was more than half the cure. And then he sat in the dark, disordered room below, impatiently enough, anxiously waiting for news from Phebe. The time seemed to him interminable before at last the door opened, and Gerald entered, bearing a lamp. The vivid light, flung so full upon her, showed traces of passionate weeping; and her white dress all scorched and burned and hopelessly ruined, with the rich lace hanging in shreds from the sleeves, made her a startling contrast indeed to the usually calm, self-possessed, perfectly-dressed Gerald Vernor.

Denham sprang forward to take the heavy lamp from her. "How is she, please?"

Gerald started. "What, you here?"

"Did you think I could leave till I knew?"

"Oh, of course not, I had forgotten you. I was only thinking of Phebe."

"But how is she?"

"Better. She is burned about the shoulders and a little on the arms, but not seriously, and nothing that will disfigure. It is so fortunate. The doctor is still with her, but she is much easier now, and there is nothing to fear."

"Ah, what a relief! It seemed as if I should never hear. She is really in no danger then?"

"None."

"Thank God! As you came in you looked so distressed I feared--"

"When it was all over and there was nothing to cry about, I cried," interrupted Gerald. "Women are always fools. I'll except Mrs. Whittridge, however. She has been the greatest comfort to Phebe."

"It is Soeur Angelique's characteristic privilege always to be a comfort, I believe," answered Denham, recovering his light-heartedness in a flash. "Might I inquire if you have any especial object with this lamp? Shall I do any thing particularly with it?"

"Let it down, please--anywhere. I remembered the room was dark, and ran down to put it to rights before Mrs. Lane should come back. Her orderly soul would have a spasm if she came upon it suddenly like this."

"It was well I had no light," said Denham, looking around him. "It would have frightened even me. Shan't I call some one?"

"It's the ridiculous fashion of the house to suppose it never needs servants at this hour. There's not one within reach."

"You must let me help you then. Is this the table-cover?"

"Thanks. I am afraid the fire has done for it, but we can't help that. Pull it a little farther to your side, please. Farther still. That's too far. So. That's right. Now the lamp here. Now the books. Cover up the holes with them."

"Ah, Miss Lydia's pet cup! and her little favorite statuette!"

"Hideous things! I'm glad they're smashed."

"Will you equally enjoy imparting to her the fact of their loss?"

"Somebody else may do that. I had my share telling her about Phebe."

"I suppose she was terribly shocked, poor old soul. I don't wonder."

"She had an instant attack of hysterics, and I did wonder," rejoined Gerald, tartly. "But as I told you, women are always fools, and nervous women the worst ones, I haven't any patience with them. I was vexed enough with her for keeping me from Phebe. I don't believe she was ever hurried so out of an attack before."

"I'm afraid there's need of a broom or something here, Miss Vernor. This vase is in a thousand pieces."

Gerald seized the hearth-brush and was on her knees by him in a moment. "The lamp, please, Mr. Halloway. Set it on the floor an instant."

Denham moved it as desired, and stood looking down at her as she began deftly brushing up the scattered bits.

"Miss Vernor!" he suddenly exclaimed in a shocked voice. The bright light, falling broadly across her hands, showed two great angry-red blotches just above one of the delicate wrists. He stooped and laid masterful hold of the long handle of the brush.

"Well?" she said, stopping perforce and looking up in surprise.
"What is it?"

"Your arm--you are burned, badly burned."

Gerald made a little sound of contempt for all reply.

"It should be dressed at once. How it must pain you!"

Gerald looked at her arm reflectively. "I haven't had time to feel," she said, vainly trying to pull her sleeve over it. "It will make an ugly scar, won't it? I shall have to abandon elbow sleeves. Now please let go the brush."

"Miss Vernor, why should you be so cruel to yourself? Do go up to the doctor at once!"

"And take him away from Phebe? I will not. It won't hurt any more now than it has done already. I must ask you to let me have the brush, Mr. Halloway. I am losing time."

Halloway relinquished it without speaking, and went quietly out of the room, and Gerald unconcernedly resumed her work, scarcely pausing to wonder where he had gone or what he intended. He returned just as she had finished, and lifting the lamp back to the table, called to her: "Will you come here, please?"

"What in the world have you there?" she inquired, coming up to him in sheer curiosity.

"Soap. I found the way to the kitchen, you see. I had to bring the water in this tin thing. I didn't know where to look for a cup."

"Pray what is it for?"

"For you. Soap is good for burns. Will you let me take your hand, please?"

Gerald put the wounded member behind her. "Thank you. I neither require nor desire assistance."

"Pardon me, you do require it, and if you refuse to see the doctor--"

"Is that any reason why I should resort to you--and kitchen soap?"

"I grant it is a very homely remedy, Miss Vernor, but it is an excellent one and the only one I know."

"I daresay. It is one more than I know of."

"You will not try it?"

"No."

"Perhaps you are afraid of the pain attending the dressing?"

It was a masterly stroke. Gerald gave him one look of intense scorn, almost of anger, and immediately reached out her hand. "I am afraid of nothing--not even of your lack of skill."

Denham took her hand without further ceremony, and holding it firmly, pushed back the hanging lace from her arm and began rubbing the soap over the burns, without so much as a word of pity for the pain he knew he was giving her. She winced involuntarily at the first touch, but set her teeth tightly lest she should cry out. It hurt her cruelly. "I was not aware before that the custody of souls extended to that of the temples they inhabit," she said, when she could command herself sufficiently to assume a supreme indifference of tone. "You believe in purely household remedies, I see."

"I believe always in doing what I can with what means I have. One moment more, please. I am not quite through."

Gerald held out her hand again. "Perhaps you had better try sandstone on it this time, or a little burning oil."

Halloway did not answer, but hastily tearing his handkerchief into strips, bound the arm as closely as he could. "There," he said, surveying the bandages critically, and inwardly well pleased with his success; "at least that will do till you can see the doctor."

"Are you sure you are quite through now?" asked Gerald, in mock submission. "You don't think it necessary to put the arm in a splint, or to fasten weights to it, or to amputate the first joint of the thumb?"

"I am sorry to say that is all I know how to do for you, Miss Vernor."

"Then I will go back to Miss Lydia. By the way, would you recommend soap also for hysterics?"

"Applied with a close bandage over the mouth? Certainly, it will be both effectual and immediate."

"Thank you. Good-night."

"Will you not shake hands with me?"

Gerald turned as she was moving off and held out her hand, more as a queen might have extended it in motion of dismissal than as friend to friend. Denham took it between both his. "Before you go, I want to thank you in the name of all Miss Phebe's friends," he said, earnestly. "You have saved her life to-night, and at the risk of your own."

"The table-cloth was her savior, not I," returned Gerald, lightly, but with a softened voice. "And anyway, is it not quite thanks enough only to know that Phebe is safe? Now good-night in earnest."

CHAPTER IX.

JOPPA'S MINISTRATIONS TO THE SICK.

All news, good, bad, and indifferent, flies equally fast in Joppa; and had there been a town-crier deputed for the purpose, Phebe's accident could not have sooner become a household tale in even the most distant districts of the place. After a contradiction of the first rumor, reporting her burned to a crisp and only recognizable by a ring of her mother's on her left hand,--which ring by-the-way she never wore,--and after a contradiction in due course of the second rumor, reporting Gerald to be lying in the agonies of death and Phebe to have escaped without a hair singed, followed a period of dire uncertainty, when nobody knew what to believe, and felt only an obstinate conviction that everybody else had got it entirely wrong. But at last the story straightened itself out into something bearing a family resemblance to actual facts, and then Joppa settled itself resolutely down to doing its duty. My duty toward my sick neighbor in Joppa consists in calling twice a day, if not oftener, at his house; in inquiring after his condition down to minutest and most sacred details; in knowing accurately how many hours he slept last night, and what he ate for breakfast, and what is paid the sick-nurse, and if it includes her washing. My second duty toward my sick neighbor is to bring him something to eat, on the supposition that "outside things taste differently;" or something to look at; or, if nothing better, at least something to refuse. My third and last duty toward my neighbor,--the well neighbor who possesses the sick one,--is to narrate every somewhat similar case on record, with all its circumstances and the ultimate career of the sufferer; to prescribe remedies as infallible as the Pope; to disapprove wholly, and on the best grounds, of those in actual use; to offer every assistance in and out of my power; and to say at leaving that I hope it may all turn out well, but that I should have called in the other doctor. Joppa had learned by heart its duty toward its neighbor from its earliest, stammering infancy, and it adhered strictly to the path therein marked out. It inquired after Phebe diligently; it thoroughly mastered all possible intricacies of her case; it made her gifts digestible and indigestible; and it said that, by all odds, it was Dr. Harrison who should have attended her from the first. Dr. Dennis took very good care of her, nevertheless, and it was not long before he pronounced that all she needed was quiet and rest to complete the cure.

"We shall have her out of bed in a few days now, Mrs. Lane; in a week or so perhaps," he said, as he passed out at the front door where Mrs. Lane was standing talking with Mrs. Hardcastle. "She is doing very well, as well as I could wish. All she needs is rest. Keep her perfectly quiet." And the doctor bowed himself off, first politely inquiring of Mrs. Hardcastle after her husband's gout and her own dyspepsia.

"He is a fair-spoken man, certainly, very," said Mrs. Hardcastle, "though I won't say that I shouldn't prefer Dr. Harrison in the long run as surest to bring his patient through. I think I'll just go up with this myself to Phebe, Mrs. Lane. I suppose she's longing for visitors by now, poor soul!"

"Well, I dare say. You know her room,--just at the head of the stairs. Go right up, and I'll step out to market."

"Now, my dear," said Mrs. Hardcastle, rustling into Phebe's room, "I

thought I would come up and have a look at you myself to make sure how you were. No, don't move. You do look pale, but that's all. Glad to see your pretty face isn't harmed. Why, I heard one whole side of it was about burned off. I've brought you some wine-jelly, my dear."

"She had a lot yesterday, Pheeb did," said Olly, who was curled up with a geography in a corner of the room and furtively cutting Europe out of the maps. "She doesn't need any more."

"Oh, but this is some of my own make. This is quite different from anybody else's," declared Mrs. Hardcastle. "Phebe remembers _my_ jelly of old, don't you, dear?"

Phebe smiled faintly. All she remembered at the moment was being invariably requested by the good lady to come and make it for her whenever she gave a party.

"I thought I heard talking and so I ventured to come up too," said a timid voice, and Miss Delano tiptoed softly in. "Phebe, my dear child, my dear child!" and the soft-hearted little old maid stooped to kiss Phebe's pale cheek, and straightway began to whimper.

"Come, none of that," said Mrs. Upjohn's peremptory tones, as that lady swept into the little room, seeming to fill it all to overflowing. "I met the doctor just now and he said Phebe was to be kept perfectly quiet. Don't let's have any weeping over her. She wants cheering up, and she isn't quite dead yet, you know, though really the evening before last, Phebe, I heard that you weren't expected to live the night through."

"How ridiculous!" said Gerald, impatiently. "Miss Delano, will you have a chair?"

"Thank you, no, dear. I'll just sit here on the bed," said the little old dame, humbly, anxious not to make any one any trouble. "O Phebe, my dear!"

Phebe smiled at her affectionately, and Mrs. Hardcastle, who was on the point of leaving when Mrs. Upjohn came in, sat down again to ask that lady about the character of a servant whom she had just engaged.

"I thought I should have died when I heard it," said Miss Delano, patting Phebe's cheek. "Poor dear, poor dear! And they say you won't ever be able to walk again!"

"Who says that?" asked Phebe, laughing. "I shall be a terrible disappointment to them."

"Tain't her legs at all; it's her shoulders," said Olly, as he emerged from his corner, chewing Europe into a pasteboard bull. "What have you got in that paper?"

"Oh, the blessed child, and I was forgetting it. My dear, it's just a little sponge-cake I made free to bring you, it turned out so light. Don't you think you could eat a bit perhaps?"

"My, but it looks good!" said Olly, approaching a hungry finger and poking at it softly. "I'll get a knife."

"I hope you don't allow any such trash as that about, Miss Vernor," said

Mrs. Upjohn, sharply, in the middle of her discussion of Jane's demerits. "Phebe ought to be exceedingly careful what she eats for a great while to come. It's doubtful, indeed, whether her stomach ever recovers its tone after such a shock. I knew one woman who died just of the shock alone some two months after precisely such an accident as this, when everybody thought she had got well, and Phebe must be very careful. Her appetite is not to be tempted, but guided."

"Well, ladies, I must be going," announced Mrs. Hardcastle, rising. "You really think I am safe, then, in engaging her, Mrs. Upjohn?" But just then Mrs. Dexter came in with two of her daughters, and Mrs. Hardcastle sat down again.

"There was no one downstairs, and as the doctor says Phebe is so much better, we thought we might just come up," said the new comer. "Why, Phebe, you are as blooming as a rose, and I understood you had lost all your pretty hair. I've brought you some grapes, my dear, and a jar of extra fine brandy peaches, and little Maggie insisted on sending some molasses candy she had just made."

"Well, well, I did look for more sense from you," said Mrs. Upjohn, tapping Mrs. Dexter rather smartly on the shoulder. "Where'll you sit? Oh, on the bed. Yes, Phebe's had a narrow escape, and one she'll likely bear the marks of to her dying day. Let it be a warning to you, young ladies, to be prepared. There's no knowing how soon some one of you may not be carried off in the same way,--just as you are dressed for a dance, maybe." Her tone implied that death could not overtake them at a more sinful moment.

"Hullo, up there! I say!" shouted a voice in the hall below, "how's Phebe?"

"Oh, it's Dick!" cried the Dexter girls in a breath. "You can't come up, Dick."

"Ain't a-going to. But a fellow can speak, can't he, without his body a-following his voice? How's Phebe?"

"She's splendid."

"What's the doctor say?"

"He says she only needs to be kept perfectly quiet."

"Hooray!" said Dick, and apparently executed a war-dance on the oil-cloth, while Olly profited by the general hubbub created by the entrance of two more ladies, to satisfactorily investigate the sponge-cake.

"Why, quite a levee, isn't it, Phebe?" said one of the last arrivals, looking in vain for a chair, and forced to seat herself on a low table, accidentally upsetting Phebe's medicines as she did so.

"Yes, altogether too much of one," said Gerald, knitting her brows as she rescued a bottle just in time, and darted an angry glance around the crowded room. "Phebe isn't at all equal to it yet."

"You are right, Miss Vernor," agreed Mrs. Upjohn, drawing out her tatting from her pocket, and settling herself at it with an answering

frown. "There are quite too many here. Some people never know when to stay away."

"Oh, there's Bell. I hear her voice," called Mattie, running to look over the banisters. "She's got both Mr. De Forest and Mr. Moulton with her."

There was a sound of many voices below, a giggling, a rush for the stairs, and a playful scuffle.

"It's me" (Bell's voice); "Dick won't let me pass."

"Me is Bell" (Dick's voice); "she wouldn't pass if she could. Too many fellows down here for her to want to leave 'em. Send us down a girl or two from up there, can't you?"

A girl or two, however, apparently appeared from outside, greetings were called up to Phebe, offerings of flowers and delicacies transmitted _via_ Dick on the stairs to Olly at the top (who took toll by the way), and the liveliest kind of a time went on. It was quite like a party, Dick shouted up, only that there was no ice-cream and a singular scarcity of girls.

"It's a shame," said Mrs. Upjohn, severely, in her chair, while Gerald held her peace, too wrathful to speak, and conscious of her inability to mend matters. "I should think people might have sense enough not to crowd all the air out of a sick-room in this fashion."

"It's exceedingly inconsiderate of them, I am sure," answered Mrs. Hardcastle, drawing a sofa cushion behind her back. "She ought to be so quiet."

"Phebe!" shouted Dick. "Here's the parson. He wants to know if you're dead yet. Shan't I send him up? It will be all right, you know, quite the thing. He's a parson, and wears a gown on Sundays."

"Dick, Dick!" screamed his mother. "Was there ever such a lad!"

"He's coming. Get ready for him. Have out your Prayer-books," called Dick.

Phebe flushed crimson, and looked imploringly at Gerald. An indignant murmur ran through the room. Mrs. Upjohn drew herself up to her severest height. "What shameless impertinence! How dare he intrude!" A shout of unholy laughter downstairs followed Dick's sally.

"Mr. Halloway isn't there at all," cried Olly, his fine, clear-voice pitched high above the rest, "He only asked about Pheeb at the door, and went right off."

"Well, he left this for her with his compliments, and this, and this," called Dick, rummaging in his pockets, and tossing up an apple, and then a hickory nut, and last a good-sized and dangerously ripe tomato. Olly caught them dexterously with a yell of delight, and was immediately rushed at by three of the nearest ladies and ordered not to make a noise, for Phebe was to be kept perfectly quiet.

"Such doings would never be permitted a moment if she had only been in Dr. Harrison's hands," said Mrs. Upjohn, in denunciatory tones. "He would have forbidden her to see any one. It is scandalous."

"It is outrageous," added Mrs. Hardcastle. "Most inconsiderate."

"Ah, I can't get over it that it isn't your legs, poor dear!" murmured Miss Delano, still plaintively overcome. "And you will walk, after all?"

"Dr. Dennis is an excellent physician," said Mrs. Dexter, somewhat defiantly. It was impossible not to enter the lists against Mrs. Upjohn. This last lady was immediately up in arms, and a heated discussion as to the respective skill of the two practitioners took place, everybody gradually taking sides with one or the other of the leaders, and forgetting both poor exhausted Phebe and the noise downstairs, which finally culminated in a rousing lullaby led by Bell, and lustily seconded by half a dozen others:

"Slumber on, Phebe dear;
Do not hear us fellows sigh!"

The song, however, suddenly stopped in the midst. Some one seemed speaking very low and softly, and neither the chorus nor the laughter nor the tumult was resumed. Phebe drew a deep breath. Was relief really coming at last? Yes. Soeur Angelique stood in the door-way.

"Will you excuse me, ladies," she said, in that soft, irresistible voice of hers, as she laid aside bonnet and shawl in a quiet, business-like way. "I came to relieve Miss Vernor and play nurse for a while, and I think Phebe looks as if she needed a little sleep. If you will kindly take leave of her, I will darken the room at once."

She stood so evidently waiting for them to go, that in a few moments they all found themselves somehow or other outside the door, with Gerald politely escorting them down-stairs, and Olly dancing joyously ahead, crying that Mr. Halloway had sent for him to the rectory. Left mistress of the situation, Mrs. Whittridge proceeded to draw down the shades, straighten the chairs, smooth the bedclothes and rearrange the pillows, all with the noiseless, graceful movements peculiar to her. Then she drew a low chair up to the bedside, and laid her cool hand soothingly on Phebe's forehead. A great peace seemed suddenly to fill the room.

"Now, my darling, you must sleep. Between them they have quite worn you out."

"Who told you I needed you?" asked Phebe, drawing the gentle hand down to her lips. "How did you happen to come just when I wanted you so?"

"Denham sent me over," answered Soeur Angelique. "He thought perhaps I could make it a little quieter for you."

"Ah," murmured Phebe. A faint tinge crept up into her white cheeks. She turned her head away and closed her eyes. "I knew it was he who sent you."

CHAPTER X.

AN APOLOGY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

It was some days after Phebe's accident before Halloway saw Gerald again. She was generally upstairs when he called, or driving or sailing with De Forest, who was in daily attendance upon her, paying her persistent, blase devotion. She was in the parlor one evening, however, sitting with De Forest near the door, when Denham came in, but he merely bowed to her and passed on to the other end of the room, where Mrs. Lane was seated with Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle. Mr. Hardcastle rose at once to receive him. "Ah, good-evening, good-evening. Pray take a seat. I am delighted to see you. I suppose you came to ask after our little invalid. Sad accident, sir; sad accident, very. It has kept us most anxious and busy seeing after her. But she is doing nicely now. We shall have her about again before we know it." He spoke as if her recovery were altogether due to himself, for the regularity with which he had fulfilled his neighborly duties toward her, and he paused and looked at Halloway for a recognition of the same.

"It will be a bright day for us all when we have her among us once more," Halloway said in answer to the look. "You must tell her how much we miss her, Mrs. Lane."

"Ah, that we do," murmured Mrs. Hardcastle. "My knitting has been at a standstill ever since the poor dear child's misfortune. I have been so thankful her hands were spared. There's always some cause for gratitude in every evil, after all."

"That's one way of looking at it," said Mrs. Lane, turning up the lamp and drawing her work-basket nearer. "The Lord make us thankful for all our mercies, but a misfortune's a misfortune, and I don't know as we're called upon to look at it as any thing else. Won't you sit down, Mr. Halloway?"

"Thank you, not this evening. It is nearly time for service. I only wanted to know that Miss Phebe was doing well."

Mr. Hardcastle rose again to bow off the guest. "Sorry you can't stay, sir. In spite of our difference of faith,--and how great it is I am in hopes you will appreciate some day when you have come to see the errors of the way you are walking in,--in spite of our material differences, I say, you are always very welcome at any time. But pray don't let us detain you from what you deem your duty."

"Mr. Halloway, a moment, please," said Gerald, rising as he was going by. He stopped, and she came toward him holding out her hand. "I want to thank you for your kindness of the other night. I believe I was ungrateful and perhaps rude at the time, and I have not seen you since to apologize."

"Pray do not speak of it!" said Denham, flushing a little as he took her hand. "There was no occasion whatever for gratitude, and therefore no possible lack of it. I trust you are quite well now."

"There was occasion for gratitude," persisted Gerald, "or at least for an acknowledgment of your kindness, and it is because I am ashamed of my remissness that I take this first opportunity to thank you."

"You embarrass me," said Denham, laughingly. "I am not at all accustomed to having public restitution made me in this manner, and especially for purely imaginary slights. But may I not be permitted now--as a sort of reward if you will--to inquire if you have quite recovered?"

"At least I have sufficiently recovered to retract my disbelief in kitchen soap, and--and in your skill," she added, with a little visible effort.

"You honor us above our deserts,--the soap and me," answered Denham, playfully. "I don't know how deleteriously it may affect the soap, but as for me I feel myself growing alarmingly conceited. So good-night."

"What a very elaborate apology," said De Forest, as Denham went out. "If the offence were at all proportionate, I tremble to think of the enormity of your crime; or is it because he is a Reverend, that you demean yourself so humbly before him?"

Halloway was still hunting for his hat in the hall, and could scarcely help overhearing De Forest's remark and Gerald's answer.

"I demean myself before nobody in seeking to make amends for a previous neglect. The humiliation is in the misconduct, not in the confession of it; and whether I owed the apology to Mr. Halloway or to a beggar in the street, I should have made it quite the same, not at all for sake of his pardon, but simply for sake of clearing my own conscience."

"Not at all for sake of my pardon," said Denham, as he strode on toward the church, with the uncomfortable sensation of having been an involuntary eavesdropper. "It is fortunate that my conceit was only veneered on."

The following Sunday Gerald was in church both morning and evening, sitting in Phebe's accustomed place. She was one of those noticeable presences impossible to overlook, and as Denham mounted into the pulpit he felt as if he were preaching solely to her, or rather as if hers were the only criticism he feared in all the friendly congregation. He was annoyed that he should feel so, and quite conscious at the same time that he was far from doing his best, and once or twice he caught a flash in the serious eyes fastened on his face, that seemed to say she knew this last fact too, and was impatient with him for it. What excuse had any one, in Gerald's eyes, for not doing his best always? De Forest was with her in the evening, and as Halloway came out of the vestry after service, he found himself directly behind them.

"He's not a mighty orator," De Forest was saying with his cynical drawl. "I doubt if he is destined to be one of the pillars or even one of the cushions of the church."

"He was not doing his best to-night," answered Gerald.

"Thank you," said Halloway, coming quickly to her side, anxious to avoid further eavesdropping. "Thank you--I mean for thinking I might do better."

"That is not much to be grateful for, I am afraid," replied Gerald, "since it implies, you know, that you have not done well."

"I hope you like uncompromising truth, Mr. Halloway," said De Forest, leaning forward to look at him across Gerald. "It's the only kind Miss Vernor deals in."

"I prefer it infinitely to the most flattering falsehood imaginable,"

answered Denham.

"I believe clergymen are usually the last people to hear the truth about themselves," continued Gerald. "Their position at the head of a community, pre-supposes their capability for the office, and naturally places them outside of the criticism of those under their immediate charge, who are nevertheless just the ones best qualified to judge them. But of course scholars may not teach the teacher."

"What an invaluable opening for you who are not one of Mr. Halloway's flock," said De Forest, "to undertake to remedy the deficiency, and to be in yourself a whole critical public to him, a licensed Free Press as it were, pointing out all his errors with the most unhesitating frankness and unsparing perspicuity!"

"Do you think your love of truth would hold out long under such a crucial test?" asked Gerald, turning quite seriously to Denham. The moonlight shone full on her clear-cut, cameo-like face. Her eyes, with their shadowy fringe, looked deeper and blacker than midnight. It did not seem possible that truth spoken by her could be any thing but beautiful too. Denham smiled down at her seriousness.

"Try me."

"Well, then, it seems to me you do not often enough try to do your best. You are contented to do well, and not ambitious to do better. You are quite satisfied, so I think, if your sermons are good enough to please generally, instead of seeking to raise your standard all the time by hard effort toward improvement, and I doubt, therefore, if at the end of a year your sermons will show any marked change from what they are to-day. Am I too hard?"

"You are very just," answered Denham, pleasantly, though the blood mounted to his face. "You have found out my weak spot. I confess I am not ambitious. I aspire to no greatness of any kind."

"You have discovered the secret of contentment," said De Forest, with effusive approbation. "I am glad to have met you, Mr. Halloway. You are the one happy man I know."

"The secret of contentment?" repeated Gerald. "Say rather the principle of all stagnation, mental and spiritual. Not to aspire to become greater than one can be is to fall short of becoming all that one may be; to be satisfied with one's powers is to dwarf them hopelessly."

"A powerful argument against conceit," reflected De Forest. "Still, upon my word, I think I would as lief be conceited in every pore as eternally in a state of dissatisfaction with myself about every thing."

"It is well, above all, I think, to have a just appreciation of one's own powers or lack of powers," said Denham, slowly. "Ambition, without the corresponding strength to gratify it, is a cruel taskmaster."

"How can you tell, till you have tried, that there is no corresponding strength?" asked Gerald, turning full upon him again. How marvellously expressive her face was, with its earnest eyes and mobile mouth! "If I were a man,--and great heavens! how I wish I were one!--I would create the strength if it were not there of itself. I would force myself upward. I would never rest till I had become something more than nature

originally made me."

"Then Heaven be thanked, who has spared us the monstrosity you would have developed into under the harrowing circumstances of a reversal of your sex," said De Forest, devoutly.

"I was always glad you were a woman. Now I am positively aglow with gratitude for it."

Denham was silent. They had reached Mrs. Lane's now, and Gerald and her cavalier paused.

"I have not hurt you, Mr. Holloway, have I?" said Gerald, more gently. "I know I sometimes speak strongly where I am least qualified to do so."

"A very womanly trait," put in De Forest. "Don't apologize for your one redeeming weakness."

"No, you have not hurt me," said Denham, in a low voice. "I hope you have done me good." And without adding even a good-night or a message for Phebe, he lifted his hat and crossed over to the rectory. His sister was not there as he entered her sitting-room, and throwing himself down on the sofa, clasped his hands over his forehead and stared thoughtfully up at the ceiling. She had been sitting with Phebe while the Lane household went to its various churches, Phebe was tired, in consequence of the entire population of Joppa having run in to ask after her between services "on their way home," and she was not talking much. But only to look up and smile into Soeur Angelique's sweet face was pleasure enough for the girl, and she lay very quietly, holding a rose that Denham had sent her over by his sister, and feeling supremely contented.

"How would you like me to read to you?" asked Mrs. Whittridge at last, taking up a book. "Shall I try it?"

"No, thank you. I am afraid my thoughts would be louder than your words, and I should be listening to them and losing what you are saying."

"And, pray, what are these remarkably noisy thoughts?" asked the lady. "Let me listen and hear them too."

"I don't think I could say just what they are," replied Phebe, dreamily. "They are running through my head more like indistinct music than like real thoughts. And I never was clever at saying things, you know. But, oh! I do feel very happy."

"You look so," said Soeur Angelique, tenderly. "You poor little one, is it just the getting well again that makes you so?"

Phebe flushed ever so slightly. "I don't know just what it is," she answered, lifting the rose to her face. "Perhaps it is only the listening to that indistinct music. It seems to have put all my soul in tune. Oh, dear Mrs. Whittridge, what a beautiful world this is, when only there are no discords in one's own heart!"

A day or two went by, and Phebe, though rapidly convalescing, was still a prisoner to her room.

"You're missing a lot of fun," said Bell Masters, sympathetically, as she bustled in to see her one morning, and sat down by the window, pushing

back the curtain so that she could look out into the street and nod to passers as she talked. "There's no end going on. Dear me, it's a shame to come to you empty-handed, Phebe. I had two or three rosebuds for you,--beauties they were too,--but the fact is I gave them away piecemeal as I came along, and I haven't one left. It seemed as if I met every man there was this morning. How soon do you think you'll be out again?"

"I don't know," answered Phebe, pushing a box of bonbons within reach of Bell's easy-going fingers. "I think I might go down-stairs now, but Dr. Dennis won't let me."

"Too bad. You'll miss Dick's coming of age, won't you? There are to be high doings. Mr. Hardcastle is too mysterious and pompous to live. One can't get any thing out of him but just 'My son Dick doesn't come of age but once' (as if we thought it was a yearly occurrence), 'and we don't celebrate it but once.' But I got hold of Dick privately and wheedled it out of him in less than no time with a piece of soft gingerbread. It's to be something _stunning_. His father wanted to do it up in English style, dinner to the tenantry, and all that sort of thing, only unluckily there wasn't any tenantry, and he had to abandon the benevolent role and take to a jollier one. He won't show off as well, but we'll have a deal more fun. It's to be a sort of royal picnic, but in the evening, mind,--wasn't that a brilliant idea for the old gentleman? We are all to go up in boats, and there are to be great rafts with blazing torches, and a supper in the woods grander than any of Mrs. Upjohn's, and bonfires, and the band from Galilee, and bouquets for the ladies, and I don't know what not, and best of all, unlimited opportunities for flirting. It's to be _the_ affair of this and every other season past or future. It's a crying shame you can't go."

"Oh! how I wish I could!" sighed poor Phebe.

"I made pa give me a new dress for it," continued Bell, leaning forward to pick off the biggest grapes from a bunch on the table. "I mean to look just too-too. Mr. De Forest is going to row me up. I don't know exactly how I made him ask me, but I did. It's such a triumph to get him away from Miss Vernor for once, though I suspect I'll have to pay for it by doing more than half the rowing myself. I don't suppose he would exert his precious self to pull an oar more than five minutes at a time. Amy tried her best to get Mr. Halloway, and so did the Dexters. The way those girls run after him is a caution even to me; but they didn't get him. He's monstrously clever in keeping out of people's clutches. I gave him up long ago as a bad job. Well, good-by, Phebe. Awfully sorry you can't go. Everybody'll be there, and it's to be the biggest lark out."

During the few days that intervened before Dick's birthday, little else was talked of anywhere than Mr. Hardcastle's party, which was never spoken of, by the way, as Mrs. Hardcastle's party, though upon that good lady devolved the onus of the weighty preparations. It seemed purely Mr. Hardcastle's affair, just as every thing did in which he was in any way concerned. Impromptu meetings were held at every house in turn to discuss the coming event, and the latest bits of information regarding it were retailed with embellishments proportionate to the imagination of the accidental narrator. Not a soul in Joppa but knew every proposed feature of the entertainment better than the hosts themselves. The old people said it would be damp and rheumatic and would certainly be the death of them. The young people said it would be divine, and quite worth dying for. The people who were neither old nor young said nobody could tell how it would be till after it was over, and they felt it their duty to go to

look after the others. The day came, brilliantly clear and soft and warm: such a day, in short, as Mr. Hardcastle had felt to be his due, and had expected of the elements all along as the one token of regard in their power to accord him, and he accepted his friends' congratulations upon it with a grave bow which seemed to say: "I ordered it so. Pray, did you suppose I had forgotten to attend to the weather?" The sun set in a cloudless heaven; the evening star hung quivering over the green-topped hills; the twilight dropped noiseless and fragrant over earth and water, and the long-dreamed-of moment had arrived at last.

"Just let me have one more look at you, Gerald, before you start," said Phebe, wistfully. "Oh, how beautiful you look! Nobody's dresses ever fit like yours, and that great dark-red hat and feather,--I thought I should not like it,--but it makes a perfect picture of you."

"For pity's sake do stop!" begged Gerald. "You know of all things I hate compliments. Where's that boy Olly?"

"He's coming to me later. I promised to make up to him for his not going to the party, poor little fellow."

"Phebe, dear," said Gerald, suddenly stooping to give her one of her rare kisses, "I cannot bear to leave you all alone so. That miserable Miss Lydia and Olly aren't any sort of company. Let me stay with you. I had a great deal rather."

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried Phebe, almost pushing her toward the door. "I don't mind a bit being left, and I wouldn't have you stay for anything. How lovely of you to propose it! You are an angel, Gerald, even though you don't like being told so, Good-by. And--Gerald,"--she had followed her friend out into the hall, and stood leaning against the banisters,--"Gerald, dear, will you tell Mr. Halloway I am going down-stairs to-morrow?"

Halloway was to be Gerald's escort that evening, and stood waiting for her now in the hall below, and looking up at sound of Phebe's voice, he gave an exclamation of surprise and pleasure, and immediately sprang up the stairs.

"Miss Phebe!" he said, taking both her hands in his. "How glad I am to see you once more!"

Phebe shrank back from him with a little cry of dismay. Ah! when does ever any thing happen exactly as we plan it shall? She had pictured this meeting to herself over and over again during the long days of her seclusion,--just what he would say and what she would say, and just how she would dress on that first day when she went down-stairs. She meant to look so particularly nice on that first day! And now to be caught in her plain little gray flannel wrapper with its simple red trimmings, her hair all loose and mussed, and even her very oldest slippers on,--and with Gerald standing beside her in her rich, dainty, becoming attire as if to make the contrast all the more painfully striking! Poor little Cinderella Phebe! She looked up at Denham almost ready to cry, and said never a word.

"It has been such a long, long time!" he said, still holding her hands. "I do not know how we have made out to spare you."

"We shall not have to spare her much longer," said Gerald. "She is coming

down-stairs to-morrow."

And then Halloway dropped Phebe's hands, and turning to Gerald, held out a hand to her.

"Forgive me for not even noticing you, Miss Vernor. At first I could only see Miss Phebe."

"Doesn't Gerald look nice?" asked Phebe, trying to choke back the uncomfortable lump rising so unreasonably in her throat. Halloway moved back a little and looked at Gerald, who stood fastening her long glove, utterly unconscious or unheeding of his scrutiny. The light in the niche at the head of the stairs threw its full glow over both her and Phebe.

"Yes," he answered, quietly, after an imperceptible pause, and, as he turned back to Phebe, it seemed to her that his eyes glanced over her with a suddenly awakened consciousness of the wrapper and the tumbled hair and even of the little worn-out slippers. "You look pale," he said, kindly. "I know I am wrong to keep you standing here just because it is so pleasant to see you again. And it is easier to say good-by, knowing I have only till to-morrow to wait now. _A demain_."

"Good-night," murmured Phebe, without looking up; "good-night, Gerald." And then she turned quickly into her room, and closed the door, and stood stock-still behind it, holding her breath and listening intently till she heard the front door close upon them and the last echo of their footsteps die away in the street outside. Then she flung herself face downward upon the bed and cried miserably to herself out of sheer disappointment. Why did it have to be all so very, very different from her dream?

CHAPTER XI.

"MY SON DICK."

Never had there been a more perfect night than that whereon Dick Hardcastle's coming of age was celebrated. Only enough wind stirred to toy softly with the gay little pennons streaming from the many boats winding their way to the rendezvous, and to throw dancing shadows of light upon the water from the torches at their prow. All along the banks of the lake, where high hills shut out the moonlight and bound the shore in an almost Egyptian darkness, rafts were stationed at intervals, blazing with colored lights. The sound of distant music floated far down upon the air, mingled with the swish of steady oars and laughter and happy voices as the occupants of the various boats called out merrily to each other across the water, or here and there broke into light-hearted song. Denham's boat glided stilly along through all this carnival-like revelry. Gerald was not in a mood for talking, and he felt little inclined to disturb her. It was companionship enough merely to glance at her ever and anon as she sat silently in the stern, the red ropes of the tiller drawn loosely around her slender waist like a silken girdle. He wondered idly what she was thinking of. Her broad hat threw too deep a shadow for him to see her face save when they neared one of the beacon rafts; then it was suddenly in brilliant illumination, and it was impossible not to watch for these moments of revelation, which lit her up

to such rare beauty. He fancied he could almost see her thoughts as there flashed across her face some new, swift expression more speaking than words,—now a noble thought, he was sure; now an odd fancy, now a serious meditative mood, that held her every sense and faculty in thrall at once. Through all her reverie she never forgot her duty with the rudder, though she quite forgot her oarsman. She made no effort whatever toward his entertainment, and he felt sure that he could do no more toward hers than simply not to obtrude himself upon her. Were there many, he wondered, even among her chosen friends (in whose ranks he could not count himself), who would have enjoyed this silent sail with her so much as he? They neared the destined spot all too soon for him, and Gerald at last roused herself.

"Are we there now? I had no idea it was so far."

"It is not far enough," answered Denham, resting a moment on his oars as he looked around. "Nothing surely can be devised, even in this pleasure-ingenious society, so enjoyable as I have found our evening sail."

"Why do you go to the party at all then?" asked Gerald, abruptly. "It isn't compulsory, is it? After you land me, are you not at liberty to row off if you prefer?"

"Ah, but I don't prefer," Halloway said gayly, resuming his oars. "I expect to be very greatly entertained there too. There is almost always something to be got out of every thing, and anyway I particularly like parties."

"I hate them."

"Yes, because you do not care for people. I like them just because I do care for people, and parties are but people collectively instead of individually, you know."

By this time Denham had shot the boat up to the landing, where the hosts of the evening stood ready to receive them. Dick was in a wild state of boyish hilarity, profiting by the novelty of his exalted position as hero of the evening, boldly to take a kiss from every pretty girl in succession as he swung her to the shore. "It's my right, to-night, you know, or if it isn't, I'm major now and can make laws for myself," he explained complacently to any expostulatory subject; and Mr. Hardcastle rubbed his soft, plump hands, and added: "Never you mind, never you mind, my dear; every dog must have his day, and this is Dick's day. And after all it's my son Dick, you know, and that makes it all right. He doesn't need any other guaranty than that he's my son, I'm sure, and seeing I'm Dick's papa, my dear, why I'll just make bold to follow suit."

But Dick would as soon have thought of offering to kiss the polar star as Gerald, and she was suffered to pass on unmolested to Mrs. Hardcastle, who stood just beyond, looking fagged and jaded, and as if she were heartily thankful that in all his life Dick could never come of age again. One of the next arrivals was Bell Masters, very fine in her new dress, but flushed and overheated to an unbecoming degree. She rowed up smartly, shipped her oars in true nautical fashion, sprang from the boat, and held out her hand to her companion with a hardly repressed sneer: "Pray allow me to assist you, Mr. De Forest."

That gentleman got up leisurely from his cushioned seat in the stern, and

came forward cool and comfortable to an enviable degree. "Thanks," he said, with even a little more drawl than usual as he took her proffered hand. "This boat _is_ a little teetery. You are uncommonly kind, and quite a champion oarswoman."

"You ought to be a judge of my powers by this time certainly," said Bell, snappishly. She had rowed the entire distance from Joppa unaided.

"Yes, I flatter myself that I am. People can always judge best of what they don't do themselves. And I will say that you do row well--uncommonly well--for a woman. I don't know a girl, except Miss Vernor, fit to pull stroke oar to you. Ah, Mr. Hardcastle, what an adorable evening you have provided for us! Mr. Dick Hardcastle, permit me to congratulate you upon attaining your majority, than which, believe me, there is but one greater blessing in the world--that of minority. I see you have not yet abandoned all the privileges of the latter, however," he added, as Dick caught Bell round the waist and gave her a sounding salute on the cheek. "That is an alleviation it seems unfair to monopolize."

Bell laughed and boxed Dick's ears, whereupon he speedily kissed her again, and Mr. Hardcastle chuckled and pulled one of the long, light braids hanging over her back. Bell's blonde hair, with her black eyes, was her strong point, and she invariably dressed it à la Kenwigs when she wore a hat. None of Miss Bell's lights ran any danger of ever being hidden under a bushel.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Hardcastle. "It's all right. It's only Dick, you know, my son Dick; and bless my heart, the boy's good taste too. He inherited it."

"Take my arm or let me take yours," muttered De Forest to Bell as Mr. Hardcastle turned away, "and do let's get through it with his good lady. Do you suppose she'll kiss me? Get her to make it easy for me, won't you?"

"Where now?" asked Bell, undecidedly, after the due politenesses with the hostess had been exchanged. The woods were fairly ablaze with bonfires and hanging lanterns, making a strangely brilliant and fantastic scene. Here and there rugs were spread out on the grass for the older people to congregate upon in gossiping groups, while the young ones had speedily converted a large, smooth spot of lawn into an impromptu dancing-ground, and were whirling merrily away to the music of the band, in the very face of the scandalized Mrs. Upjohn. This last field of action was the first to attract Bell's quick eye. "Oh, come," she said. "Of course you dance?"

De Forest gave a shudder. "My dear young lady! no sane man ever dances. But pray do not let me detain you. Where your heart is, there would your feet be also." He dropped her arm as he spoke. Bell shrugged her shoulders and put her arm back in his.

"'Tisn't fair to abandon you so soon after bringing you here. There's Janet Mudge" (hastily selected as the plainest girl present and the farthest from Gerald, toward whom De Forest's steps were manifestly directing themselves); "let's go and speak to her."

"On the contrary, let us avoid her by every means in our power," said De Forest, imperturbably, walking Bell off in the opposite direction. "I never choose pearls when I may have diamonds. There's Miss Vernor. We'll go and speak with her."

"But I don't want to," objected Bell, crossly. "I am not at all as fond of Miss Vernor as you are."

"Naturally not," answered De Forest, pursuing his way undisturbed. "Men always like girls better than girls do. I appreciate your feelings. But she's got that good-looking young minister with her. You like him. All feminine souls incline to clergymen next to officers. Buttons first; then surplices."

"Thirdly, For(r)esters, I suppose," suggested Bell, saucily.

"Undoubtedly," assented her companion. "Miss Vernor, your humble servant." His glance, as it invariably did when they met, seemed to make swift, approbative note of every smallest particular of her appearance. "Mr. Holloway, here is a young lady who has just openly informed me that she prefers you to me, so I suppose I must resign her to you with what grace I can. Don't you think, Miss Vernor, you might try to divert my mind from dwelling too cruelly on Miss Masters' defalcation by showing me what Mr. Hardcastle's grand intellect has devised for my entertainment? That bonfire yonder has a sort of cannibalistic look about it suggestive of dancing negroes and unmentionable feasts behind the flames. Shall we inspect it nearer?" And he marched Gerald deliberately away, scarcely remembering to bow to Bell. Still, to be left with Mr. Holloway was by no means an unenviable fate, and Bell, like the wise girl she was, proceeded to make the most of it without delay, and paraded her prey wherever she chose, finding him much more tractable than her last companion, and not in the least dictatorial as to the direction he went in.

That out-door evening party was long remembered as one of the most novel and successful entertainments ever given in Joppa. Even Mrs. Upjohn admitted it to be very well, very well indeed, all but the dancing, for which, however, Mr. Hardcastle apologized to her handsomely as a quite unexpected ebullition of youthful spirits which in his soul he was far from countenancing, and upon which she resolutely turned her back all the evening, so at least not to be an eye-witness of the indecorum. Of course, therefore, she knew nothing whatever about it when Mr. Upjohn toward the end of the evening, actually allowed himself to be decoyed into the gay whirl by one of the youngest and most daring of the girls, and galloped clumsily around like a sportive and giddy elephant set free for the first time in its native jungle, and finding it very much to its liking. His daughter Maria, faithfully at her mother's side, sat with one ear grudgingly lent to the prosy heaviness of Mr. Webb's light talk, and her whole face turned longingly toward the spot where the happy sinners were gyrating, and, seeing her father there, her round eyes grew rounder than ever, as she watched in breathless alarm lest the earth should open under his feet in instant retribution. Gracious, if ma should turn her head! But there are some wrongs it is best to ignore altogether, where prevention is hopeless, and Mrs. Upjohn, like many another good woman, always knew when not to see. So she persistently did not see now, and Mr. Upjohn spun away to his heart's content (prudently keeping in the remotest corner of the sward, to be sure), winking at Maria every now and then in the highest glee, and once absolutely signing to her to sneak over to him and try a turn too.

And then came supper-time, and such a supper, setting all confectioners and doctors at defiance at once! Mr. Upjohn, red and perspiring, and remarking how curiously hot the bonfires made the woods at night, waited on his wife with gallant solicitude, lest she should leave a single dish

untasted. Mrs. Bruce had left town the day before, and in the absence of any new admiration he always fell back with perfect content upon his old allegiance. Mrs. Upjohn received his devotion as calmly as his intermittent neglects, and only raised her eyebrows when he stooped to whisper, "My love, you're the most handsomely dressed woman here!" which was strictly true as regarded the materials of her attire, and unblushingly false as regarded the blending of them. Dick had been in his element all the evening. He had had a serio-comic flirtation with every girl in turn. He had cut out Jake Dexter with Nellie Atterbury, and made it up to his friend by offering him a lock of Bell's hair, which he had surreptitiously cut from her hanging braids, and which Jake wore pinned in his button hole as a trophy for the rest of the evening, to the immense scandal of everybody. But with the supper-hour Dick's spirits ebbed. He knew, poor fellow, what Fate held in store. His father intended making a few remarks over him, as a sort of substitute for his defrauded speech to the non-existing tenantry.

"Stand by me, Jake, there's a man!" whispered Dick, forlornly, to his crony.

"I will, Dick, like a woman!" Jake responded, tenderly, and the two stood together just at Mr. Hardcastle's elbow, as that worthy advanced to a central spot between the bonfires, cleared his throat ominously, and pirouetted solemnly around, holding up his hand to attract general attention.

"My friends," began Mr. Hardcastle, swelling with the importance of the moment to even more than his usual rotundity, "this has been a day of days to me. All of you who are parents will appreciate my feelings of mingled pride and humility,--of pride and humility," repeated Mr. Hardcastle, pleased with the antithesis, and swaying gently back and forth, "as I stand here before you with my son, the boy whom I have watched over from his cradle up with an unsleeping eye, and whose tender feet"--Dick here stooped over to inspect those honest, able members. Jake did the same with evident disapproval of them. Mr. Hardcastle raised his voice--"whose tender feet I have endeavored from his youth up, so far as lay in my limited power, to guide in the way that I hope he may never depart from. This boy I now present to you, friends, a man,--this boy who has grown up among you, whom you all know, and whom I hope you all harbor some kindly feeling for,--this boy,"--he put out his hand to draw him forward, Dick gave Jake a gentle push toward the hand and vanished, and Mr. Hardcastle, quite unconscious of the manoeuvre, drew the grinning Jake solemnly up to him, and casting around a look of triumph which seemed to say: Do better than this, friends, if you can, placed his hand on Jake's shoulder with his grandest air, and continued, sonorously,--"my son, ladies and gentlemen,--my son Dick."

There was a moment's pause of consternation among the guests and a suppressed scream from the defrauded Mother Dexter. Mr. Hardcastle slowly turned his radiant face toward his supposed son, and immediately dropped his hand and exclaimed, in entirely altered and most natural tones of amazement: "Well, I never! How in the world did _you_ get here, Jake Dexter?"

A shout instantly went up all round; even Mr. Hardcastle himself was overcome with the ludicrousness of the mistake, and further solemnity being impossible, a signal was given, and from a barge far out on the water a score of rockets shot hissing into the air, announcing the beginning of fireworks. A brilliant display of these followed, closing

the evening's entertainment, and immediately afterward a large raft was towed up to the landing, and the whole merry party embarked and returned to Joppa together, the band following on another boat and treating them to music all the way. Halloway stood near Gerald in the crowd, but he did not attempt to join her until the raft reached the pier and was made fast. Then he quietly went to her and offered his arm. De Forest stepped up at the same moment. "Miss Vernor, will you condescend to accept of my valuable escort home?"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Denham, "I am Miss Vernor's escort to-night."

De Forest stood still. "I did not know it was a return-ticket arrangement."

"It was," answered Denham, decidedly. "You can hardly expect me to relinquish my rights."

"I should say your rights depended wholly on Miss Vernor's choice. Fair lady, two hearts and four arms are at your immediate disposal. If you could make up your volatile mind to determine between them--"

"There can be no question of choice," said Gerald, quietly. "I accepted Mr. Halloway's escort yesterday; so good-night."

"You leave me a blighted being," said De Forest. "For the peace of my soul, let me ascribe your decision to a love of justice rather than of individual. _Au revoir_."

Halloway drew Gerald's hand through his arm with a very comfortable feeling of possession, and they walked on some time in silence. "Are you tired?" he asked at last.

"No--yes. Parties always tire me, and life in Joppa consists of parties. Do you always go?"

"Oh, always!"

"Your mental constitution must be robust to stand such a steady strain upon it."

"The shepherd must keep by his sheep, you know," laughed Denham.

"I thought the shepherd was to lead the sheep, not to be led by them. Don't you hope to inspire them with a love for better things? I fancied the province of a clergyman was to improve people--not just to preach to them."

A shadow crossed Denham's face. "There are many of them more fitted to improve me than I them," he said, humbly. "How would you have me begin?"

"With making Mr. Hardcastle less offensively pompous, and Mrs. Hardcastle less tedious, and Mrs. Upjohn less dogmatic, and Mrs. Anthony more sincere, and Miss Delano less namby-pamby,--in short, by taking a little of the superficiality and narrow-mindedness and provinciality out of the place if possible."

Denham tossed back his head with a light laugh. "Ah, how you relieve my mind! Most of those whom you have so scathingly described belong to other

congregations, and are therefore beyond my jurisdiction."

"Do you really feel so? Are you so like a physician?" asked Gerald, quickly. "Do you seek to do good only to those who pay for the care you give them? Is not your mission with all with whom you are thrown?"

"The days of single-handed combat against the world are over," answered Denham. "You cripple a man by giving him too wide a field of action."

"I would not take less than the widest were I a man!" exclaimed Gerald, proudly.

"Would you be a clergyman?"

"No. I have no talent for writing. I could not preach."

"Nay, I think you an admirable preacher," said Denham, gently, without the faintest tinge of sarcasm in either tone or look. Gerald glanced at him quickly and flushed slightly.

"I am too dogmatic myself," she said, biting her lip and turning away her head. "I should not be so hard on Mrs. Upjohn."

"You do not intend to be hard on any one."

"But to be just is to seem hard," said Gerald.

"It is a divine prerogative to know just how far to temper justice with mercy," Denham answered. "I suppose none of us can hope to attain to perfect knowledge; but if there must be error, I would for myself rather err in excess of mercy than of justice."

"In other words, between two evils you would choose the least," Gerald replied. "That is the common way of getting out of the difficulty. But it seems to me like compromising with evil. There ought to be always some third, wholly right, way out of every dilemma, if only one sought earnestly enough." She spoke more as if to herself than to him.

"Then perhaps," said Denham, pleasantly, "we may hope that you will in time light upon the very kindest and rightest way combined of judging not only abstract subjects, but also the not altogether unworthy inhabitants of even this little place of Joppa."

"Oh, Joppa!" cried Gerald, all the impatience instantly coming back to her face and voice. As instantly too she frowned in self-conviction, and turned almost contritely to Denham. "You see, Mr. Halloway, I shall have to bring my own character first to that future Day of Judgment, and to be very careful that I do _not_ err on your side,--in being too merciful."

CHAPTER XII.

WHY DO SUMMER ROSES FADE?

A few more days slipped by, easily and swiftly, as all days did in Joppa. The famous party was discussed and re-discussed down to its

minutest details. Mrs. Hardcastle recovered from her subsequent attack of neuralgia. Mr. Hardcastle, who went from house to house, gathering compliments as an assessor levies taxes, completed the round of the village and began again. Mrs. Upjohn asked for and obtained the recipe of a certain dish, the like of which had never before been seen in Joppa, and the Joppites commended her boldness in asking and condemned Mrs. Hardcastle's weakness in giving. The report that Mr. Upjohn had apostatized from the Presbyterian Church, disapproving of its tenets as regarded waltzing, was duly started, denied, violently adopted, and as violently exploded. The statements that Jake Dexter was engaged to Nellie Atterbury, that Bell Masters had offered herself to Mr. Holloway and been declined with thanks, and that Gerald's hat had been imported from Paris two days before, were also duly aired and evaporated. It had, moreover, by this time become a town fact, that it was Bell Masters and _not_ Janet Mudge whom Holloway had rowed to the party, and that he had walked home with Mrs. Lane. Miss Brooks overheard him taking leave of her at her door, and fancied--but was not sure--that she told him to change his boots lest his feet should be damp. Everybody had also found out beyond discussion or doubt that De Forest was Gerald's escort home on that occasion, but that the engagement between them was broken off. It was definitely known that he had said he was a blighted being, and should shortly take a return ticket to New York. Everybody said it was a shame, when they were so manifestly cut out for each other. In fact, every thing had been found out about every thing. The evening had been talked threadbare, and, alas, there was nothing else to talk about. Phebe's reappearance downstairs, unscarred and bonnie as ever, was become an old story long since, and Dr. Dennis' treatment of the case was now admitted to have been the very best possible next to what Dr. Harrison's treatment would have been, though by all means, it was decided, Dr. Dennis and _not_ Dr. Harrison should have been called in when Mr. Brown, the grocer, fell ill of a fever. Poor Joppa was indeed fairly talked out. It had to settle down upon the fever and Mr. Brown for lack of any thing else. It was really almost a godsend when Mrs. Brown took the fever too, for it gave Joppa just twice as much to talk about, and everybody said it was somebody's duty to see that the poor souls had right advice in the matter. Jabez Brown, Jr., carried on the business in his father's stead, and measured out his sugars and teas at so much advice the pound, and did a thriving business, but the poor old father died all the same. He was a respectable, honest man, and all his customers attended his funeral in the most neighborly way in the world, with a grim look upon their sympathetic countenances of "I told you so. It should have been Dr. Dennis."

Yes, to all but Phebe, her illness and long imprisonment and her return to matter-of-fact life downstairs, was a tame-enough story now. But to her it was as the opening chapter of a new history. Life seemed changed and strange to her when she stepped back into it, and took up again the duties and labors that she had laid by only so lately. Had she dreamed herself into another world, or why was it so hard to put herself back into the place she had stepped out of? Everybody about her was the same; nothing had really changed in any way, and certainly she had not. Neither had Gerald. Neither had Mr. Holloway. What had she expected? What was it she had vaguely looked forward to? What was it that was so different?

"Pray, what are you thinking of?" Denham asked suddenly one day, turning to her with his bright, sweet smile. "You have been quiet for very long."

"So have you been quiet," returned Phebe. "I do not think I have been any less talkative than you."

"Perhaps not," said Denham. "We are leaving Soeur Angelique and Miss Vernor to have a regular tete-a-tete of it, are we not? But you evade my question in a very unbecoming way, Miss Phebe. Tell me, what were you thinking of?"

"I don't quite know," answered Phebe, slowly. "But I think I was wishing for impossibilities,--for things that can't possibly happen, just because it would be so nice if they could."

"Ah," said Holloway, dreamily. "That is a very bad habit, a frightfully unsatisfactory, delusive, and, indeed, an altogether pernicious habit, Miss Phebe. It takes the taste out of every thing solid, and leaves one an appetite only for indigestible sweets. I must correct you of it. I will, just as soon, that is, as I have broken myself of it. Will you wait till I have taken myself in hand?"

They were together sitting in a little recess of the rectory parlor, while Mrs. Whittridge and Gerald were talking at the farther end of the room. Soeur Angelique had invited the two girls to tea, and Holloway, when he came in from his study, seated himself at once by Phebe, though after his warm greeting and self-congratulations upon having her back in her old haunts, he had fallen into quite an unusual silence. Phebe was looking very sweet and fresh that afternoon. All the care that she had meant to devote to her toilet upon the occasion of her first meeting with Holloway, she had expended in dressing herself for this visit to the rectory. Never had her shining hair been braided so glossily, or coaxed into waving more prettily about her forehead; never had the simple etceteras of her dress been more studiously selected and more carefully put together. Looking in the glass when all was done, she had been fain to confess that she really did look nice for once, though she reproached herself immediately afterward in severest terms for the unpardonable vanity of the thought, and made a little grimace at her own image to effectually dispel the illusion. What could it ever matter how she looked? And particularly how could it matter when Gerald was by,--Gerald, who possessed that rare and enviable gift of always looking her best? So Phebe put the subject of her looks entirely away from her mind, and leaned back on the sofa, her hands folded idly in her lap, feeling perfectly content with the passing moment, and asking nothing from the future but that it might be always "now." What more could she want? The room held her three dearest friends in the world,--Gerald, Soeur Angelique, and Mr. Holloway;--of course one should always put ladies before gentlemen even only in thought. How handsome Gerald looked as she stood with her head slightly bent forward, listening to Mrs. Whittridge. If Gerald did not choose to listen, no one could ever force her to lend an ear. But when she did so choose, she listened with her whole mind, and was lost to all else. Phebe smiled with quiet amusement at her friend's intensity in every thing, and turned with the smile on her face to Holloway. He was not smiling at all, but he too was looking fixedly at Gerald.

"It has been lovely having her here, but how we shall miss her, shall we not, when she goes?" said Phebe, softly.

"Goes?" repeated Holloway, blankly. "It is scarcely September yet."

"What, have you not heard?" exclaimed Phebe. "Do you not know? Gerald has been sent for. She and Olly go back next Thursday."

"Thursday?" echoed Halloway, in a sort of stunned way. "So soon? Going for good? Thursday?"

What closely guarded secret did the loving gray eyes, fastened upon him, read in the swift, uncontrollable look that flashed suddenly across his face, like the lightning that leaps out of the dark by night, laying all earth bare in one brief, vivid glimpse? He was so taken by surprise as to be completely off guard. It was but an instant, and with a start he recovered himself.

"I had not heard your news," he said, with perfect quiet, reaching out to the table for an uncut magazine, and proceeding leisurely to open its pages. "I suppose it is a sign that summer is over when the birds begin to fly home."

Phebe did not answer immediately. In that one short moment, all her face had changed also. As by the stroke of a wand, its brightness and sweet content had given place to an expression of unutterable weariness. She got up and went to the window, standing with her back to Halloway.

"We had our first cold night that evening of my accident," she said, with an effort to speak very calmly. "I think the summer really ended then."

CHAPTER XIII.

JOPPA'S TRIAL.

It was the night before Gerald's departure, and a number of people strayed into Mrs. Lane's parlor to bid the fair traveller god-speed. She had not been at all a popular guest, but that was no reason why Joppa should lack in any possible courtesy toward her, little as she appreciated the magnanimity of its conduct.

"Very sorry to lose you, very," said Mr. Hardcastle, taking her hand in the soft, warm grasp that Gerald so particularly detested. "But maybe it's as well you are going. Joppa isn't the place it used to be. Here's Mr. Anthony's got the fever to-night, and there's a poor family down in the village as have all got it, Dennis says; and I noticed that little Nellie Atterbury had monstrous red cheeks when Dick and I passed her to-night, and indeed I crossed the street to avoid her in case she might be going to have the fever too. Where one has a family one has duties one would never feel for one's self. So I say, my dear, it's as well you're going, if only on account of that boy of yours. We must all learn early to sacrifice ourselves for our children."

"Olly isn't my child," said Gerald, twisting her handkerchief around her hand to efface the remembrance of Mr. Hardcastle's touch.

"Hey? Ah, yes, to be sure, he's your brother; but it's all one. You stand in the light of a parent to him just now, my dear." He was actually going to pat Gerald paternally on the shoulder, but she moved abruptly aside, and he pulled Olly's ear instead. It was necessary to do something with his outstretched hand before drawing it back. Olly was playing cat's-cradle with the good-natured Mr. Upjohn, and merely kicked out at

his caresser, as a warning that he was not to be interrupted.

"Fine spirited boy," muttered Mr. Upjohn under his breath. "Very fine. Will make a man some day."

"Not so big as you, though, I won't be when I'm a man," declared Olly. "You're too fat."

"Now just hear him!" exclaimed Mr. Upjohn, shaking all over with corpulent mirth. "Maybe you would rather be like Mr. Webb then?"

"No, I wouldn't neither," retorted Olly, nothing deterred by that gentleman's presence from a frank exposure of his sentiments. "He's too lean. He's leaner than any thing. He's just like the blade of my pocket-knife with clothes on. Oh, crickey!"

It was conveniently discovered at this crisis that it was Olly's bedtime, and he was with some difficulty conveyed from the parlor, followed by an angry glare from Gerald and a severely truthful comment from Mrs. Upjohn. De Forest outstayed the rest of the leave-takers. Phebe thought it hard, when she so wanted to have Gerald all to herself on this last evening; and she wondered too that Halloway had not come to say good-by. He came in, however, at last, flushed and tired, apologizing for the lateness of his call, saying he had been sent for by two of his parishioners who were also down with the fever.

"It looks something like an epidemic," remarked Gerald. "I am really rather glad we are going."

"You have no ambition to remain and turn Florence Nightingale then?" asked De Forest.

"Not in the slightest. It is a role I am eminently unfitted for. I detest sick people."

"Not always, I think, Gerald," said Phebe, with a grateful glance, which Gerald returned with one of real though undemonstrative tenderness.

"Your case was very different, Phebe."

"I should think it would be extremely difficult to detest Miss Phebe under even the most aggravating circumstances," said Halloway, smiling frankly at her. "Hallo, who is this?"

It was Olly, bootless and coatless, whom the sound of Halloway's voice had brought down from the midst of his slow preparations for bed, to bid his friend good-by, and who sprang upon him with a rush of suffocating affection.

"What would Mrs. Upjohn say!" drawled De Forest.

Gerald rose at once to send off the child with a reprimand, and remained standing after he had gone. De Forest rose too and slowly came toward her.

"I suppose I had better leave you to follow Olly up-stairs. I wish you to be fresh to entertain me during to-morrow's tedious journey."

"What, do you go back to-morrow too?" asked Gerald, in surprise. "I

thought you were to stay till next week."

"I am afraid of the fever," pronounced De Forest with great gravity, his handsome eyes fastened on her face. "I am running away from it. I don't think it safe to stay another day in the place."

Gerald colored a little,--not at his words, but his look. "Then I suppose I need not bid you good-by," she said, turning away. She seemed almost embarrassed. "Good-night."

"Oh, but Gerald,--Mr. Holloway, you must say good-by to him you know," said Phebe, distressed.

"Surely. I forgot," replied Gerald, with uncomplimentary sincerity. She turned back, the faint shade of confusion quite disappearing. "Good-by, Mr. Holloway. I wish you success in finding all the Nightingales that you may require."

"Thank you," answered Denham, shortly. "Good-by."

Phebe glanced up at him quickly. She noticed a shade of bitterness in his voice for the first time. He said nothing more, and dropped Gerald's hand almost immediately. De Forest bent forward and raised it. "Am I to be defrauded of a good-night, Miss Vernor, simply because it is not my good-by? _Au revoir_."

It seemed to Phebe that he held Gerald's hand an instant longer when she would have withdrawn it, and that she permitted or at least did not resent it, and before releasing it he stooped and touched her fingers lightly with his lips. "_Au revoir_," he said again.

Holloway turned abruptly to Phebe. "Good-night." He spoke almost brusquely, and went directly away, without offering his hand or looking at any of them again.

Phebe followed Gerald into her room when the two girls went up-stairs, and sat watching her friend's quick movements as she completed some last arrangements for the journey. It was strangely unlike Phebe not to offer to help her, but somehow Gerald looked so strong and able and self-sufficient, and she herself felt so tired and weak to-night.

"How quiet you are!" said Gerald, folding a soft shawl smoothly over the top of a tray. "Haven't you any last message to give me? Isn't there any thing you would like me to do for you in New York?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"You are sure? Well, now I am through and mustn't keep you up longer. You have all been exceedingly kind, Phebe, both to myself and that troublesome Olly. I appreciate it, even though I don't say as much about it as perhaps some would."

"Have you really enjoyed it here, Gerald? Have you been happy? Will you miss us a little--just a little--when you are gone?"

"I shall miss _you_, child, of course. You constitute Joppa to me, you know. And indeed I have enjoyed it here very much, and it has done Olly a world of good. Good-night, dear."

Phebe had her arms about her friend at once, clasping her close. "O Gerald, Gerald, I think it is almost better to have no friends at all, it is so hard--so cruelly hard--to part with them, and--and to lose them! O Gerald!"

"Parting with them isn't losing them, you foolish sentimentalist," returned Gerald, gently unclasping Phebe's arms. "Now go to bed. You look worn out."

"Just tell me once first, Gerald, that you love me. I haven't many to love me. I need all your love."

"Of course I love you," said Gerald. "You know it without my saying so. And don't talk so foolishly. I never knew a girl with more friends. Now good-night."

Phebe kissed her very quietly, and then crept into Olly's room, and sat down on his bed. "Olly, dear," she murmured, "are you asleep?"

The little fellow sprang up and flung his arms closely around her neck, embracing collar, ruffles, and ribbon in one all-comprehensive destruction.

"Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?" whispered Phebe, half laughing and half crying, as she strained him to her heart. "Oh, Olly dear, I do want some one just to say so!"

"I do, I do, I do, and I do!" said Olly, with a bear's hug at each assertion. "Blest if I don't. That's what Mr. Upjohn said when I asked him if he didn't want some taffy. 'Blest if I don't.' I guess it's a swear, 'cause he said I mustn't tell Mrs. Upjohn he said so, not to the longest day I lived. The longest day won't come now till next year, the twenty-first of June. That's the longest day, ain't it? Mr. Holloway taught me that. My, don't he know a lot! I'm going to be like him when I'm a man. That's who I'm going to be like. And I'm going to love you always. He loves you too, doesn't he, Pheeb?"

"No, dear," answered Phebe, still laughing and crying together, and rocking gently back and forth with the boy in her arms; "he doesn't at all. There doesn't any body really love me, I think, but just you. But you do, don't you, dear?"

"Bet on it!" said Olly, with forcible vulgarity.

"God bless you," said Phebe, very softly, as she put the boy back in the bed, and laid her wet cheek on his. "God bless you now and always."

"Forever and ever, amen," whispered Olly back, with an impression that Phebe was saying her prayers over him. "And oh, I say, Pheeb, can't you let us have some of that jelly cake with raisins in it, to take with us for luncheon to-morrow?"

And Phebe promised she would, and laughed and went away feeling, somehow, a little comforted.

And so Gerald and Olly and De Forest all disappeared from the scene together, and shortly after the Dexters went to Morocco on a visit, and the Masters adjourned to Bethany to do their fall shopping; and there were whisperings around that something was wrong; there was more and more

talk of the fever; of how it ought to be checked, and why it had not been checked, and what would be the dire consequences if it were not checked. The summer guests all slipped quietly away, leaving Joppa alone to its growing trouble. Every day brought some new case, sometimes a death, and people began to look suspiciously at each other in the streets and to avoid each other on the flimsiest pretexts. Miss Lydia cried helplessly in her room and said she was sure she should take it and die of it. Mr. Hardcastle found he was too busy at home to have time for neighborly visits, and went around the block rather than pass a door where he saw the doctor's gig. When one has a family, one owes it duties that should not be neglected. Mrs. Upjohn declared the panic to be ridiculous. "She_ shouldn't be scared away by a red flag, like a crow from a cornfield." There had never been a case of typhoid known in Joppa, and places were like people, they never broke out with diseases that were not already in their constitutions. It was all arrant nonsense. However, she was perfectly willing that Maria should make that proposed visit to her aunt in Boston if she liked, and it was quite proper that Mr. Upjohn, in the character of gallant father, should escort her there; the girl couldn't go alone. So every day saw some new flight from the village. The doctors began to look overworked and very grave, and Mr. Hardcastle appeared less and less outside his gates, and took to walking always in the middle of the streets, whence he could wave a salutation to his passing friends without stopping to speak to them. Dick said he'd like to see the fever catch _him_, and pursued the rough tenor of his ways fearlessly as of old, though he assured his anxious father that it was wholly because Nellie Atterbury lived in the healthiest quarter of the town, that he spent so much of his time at her house. There was no use denying or qualifying it. An epidemic of typhoid fever had stolen upon Joppa as a thief in the night, and there was no knowing what house it would not enter next, to rob it of its dearest and best.

Through all this slowly increasing alarm, Phebe Lane had been living as in a dream. It was as if she found herself back in that old life before she knew Holloway, when people bored her, and when there seemed nothing worth doing or worth looking forward to, though the days were so full of duties. She had been at the rectory but once since Gerald left, and that was to the Bible-class, and when Mrs. Whittridge had tried to detain her afterward, she had pleaded some pressing business at home, though chancing to look out of her window a little later, Soeur Angelique was almost sure that through the closed shutters in Phebe's room, she saw a dim shadow of the girl's head laid down listlessly on her folded arms on the sill. But when the epidemic reached its height, Phebe seemed suddenly to awaken from her languor and rouse herself to action. Here was something worth doing at last. Once more her soft, sweet whistling sounded bird-like through the house. The spring came back to her step, the brightness to her eyes, and more than the old tenderness to her voice, as she went from one shunned sick-room to another like a living sunbeam, bringing the freshness of a May morning with her, and seeming always to come solely for her own pure pleasure. And when poor motherless Janet Mudge was struck down too with the dreaded disease, and had no one but servants to care for her, her own aunt, who lived in Joppa, being afraid to so much as go to the house to ask after her, it seemed perfectly natural to everybody that Phebe Lane, who had no cares at home and no one really dependent upon her, should quietly install herself as Janet's nurse. It was a very proper and natural thing for Phebe to do, everybody said, and thought no more about it. It was so manifestly a duty sent direct from Heaven, labelled "For Phebe Lane."

"I met Dr. Dennis to-day," said Holloway one afternoon, coming into his

sister's room and throwing himself wearily down on the sofa. "He says Janet Mudge is better,--is really going to get well."

Soeur Angelique put aside her work and came to sit by the sofa and stroke her boy's head. If the doctors were overworked and spent, so too was he. The hour of trial had not found him wanting. His unambitious, simple spirit, that sought no wider duty than merely to fulfil the moment's call as he best could, met and conquered a stress of work that would have disheartened many a bolder hero. He never thought of it in the light of duty at all. There was nothing heroic or high-minded about it. It was simply what in the nature of things he was bound to do. Wherever he was wanted he went, and because where he went he brought such sunny cheer, and such sympathetic help, and such bright, kindly ways, he was wanted everywhere; not only those of his own parish, but those of the other churches too came to look to Mr. Holloway as the one whose visit helped them the most in any season of trial. Among the poor he was held a ministering angel, and supplemented by Soeur Angelique as an unseen force, often proved one in truth, while his bright face did them more good, they said, than a power of sermons; and no one ever thought the less of him because he seemed so much more the friend than the pastor, and did no preaching at all.

"So Janet is better," said Soeur Angelique, toying caressingly with the wavy brown hair tossed over his forehead. "Now I hope we shall see more of our Phebe again. What a little heroine she is!"

"A perfectly unconscious one," answered Holloway, lazily submitting himself to the fondling hand. "She thinks it the most matter-of-fact thing in the world that she should play Sister of Charity to other people's sick, and never expect so much as a thank-you from them."

"She is a lovely character," said Mrs. Whittridge, warmly.

"She is indeed," assented her brother. "A rare character. She is one in a thousand."

"I cannot but compare her sometimes with her friend, Gerald Vernor," continued Mrs. Whittridge. "And despite Miss Vernor's beauty and her power, which makes itself felt even by me, still it is always to Phebe's advantage."

Holloway got up and began slowly pacing the room, with an odd smile upon his lips. "Always to Phebe's advantage," he repeated. "Yes, she is by far the more amiable, the more unselfish, the more lovable, the better worth loving of the two. She is all heart. She is brimming over with affection, and must speak it or die, while Gerald is colder than stone,--than ice. She is so cold she burns. She reminds one of stars in mid-winter, of icicles in the moonlight, of any thing eminently frigid and brilliant and remote. I daresay, despite all her beauty and her talent and even with her wealth thrown in, she will have comparatively few lovers, yet those few will be truer to her through all her coldness and her disfavor than the lovers of many a sweeter girl. Did I say Phebe was one in a thousand? Well Miss Vernor is one in nine hundred and ninety-nine,--or one in ten thousand,--I don't know which."

"You said Phebe was the better worth loving of the two," said Mrs. Whittridge, coming to walk up and down the room with him and clasping her hands over his arm. "I used to think,--I fancied you cared for the child,--that you would care for her."

Denham stood still and faced his sister very gravely, "I was growing to care for her, Soeur Angelique," he said. "I believe I would have loved her if,--if Gerald Vernor had not come here when she did."

"Oh, Denham!"

"Yes, Soeur Angelique. It is a humiliating confession, is it not, that one has wilfully thrown away something that perhaps one might have had, for something that one knows one can never have? It is sheerest folly. And to do it with one's eyes open is the maddest folly of all. Gerald Vernor is as indifferent to me as it is possible for one human creature to be to another. I hold no more place in her thoughts than had I never existed. And yet, Soeur Angelique, I am fool enough,--or helpless enough,--whichever you please, to love her. I love her not for what she is to me, but for what she is in herself, for what she really is, rather than for what she seems,--for the strength and the heroism of her heart, which I see through all the glaring, commonplace faults, which she is at no pains to hide. Or perhaps I only love her because it was meant that I should. Be it as it may, I do love her, and as passionately, as entirely, and as hopelessly as it is possible for man to love."

"O Denham, Denham, my boy!"

Denham laid his hand lightly on his sister's lips. "Now we have had a sufficiency of heroics for once, indeed for always," he said, with a wholly altered voice. "Life has enough of solemnity in it and in spare, without our adding aught to it. We will not speak of this again, if you please. Folly is always best forgotten. But Soeur Angelique, if you imagine me to be a blighted being, if you think I walk the floor in the dead of night, tearing my hair and calling on all the stars to witness the unearthly gloom in my racked bosom, you are utterly mistaken. I do nothing of the kind. I am not blighted at all. My damask cheek is not going to be preyed upon, nor shall I take to an excess of tobacco and poetry. I have made a mistake, but I mean to sing over it,--not weep over it,--and to become a stronger and better man, if possible, for having been so weak a one."

"And Phebe?" said Soeur Angelique. Great tears stood in her eyes. "I hoped--"

Denham placed both hands on his sister's shoulders. "Soeur Angelique, you must bury those hopes in the grave. Loving Gerald Vernor, never, now, or in the future, shall I have one word of love for any other woman. But for her, I should have come perhaps to love Phebe with this same love; perhaps,--who knows?--Phebe might so have loved me. As it is--Soeur Angelique you know what I am. You know if I am likely to deceive myself. Gerald Vernor has changed my life for always. What might have been, now can never be."

He stood still a moment, looking full at her. It was wonderful how resolute and firm and yet brave and gentle too those merry brown eyes of his could become. Soeur Angelique sighed and shook her head softly. He stooped and kissed her, then turned away saying: "Now that chapter has been read through to the end. Woe be to him who turns back the page! And it is time I went to call on poor Widow Brown."

Soeur Angelique stood in the window as a moment later he passed by. He kissed his hand to her with a gay smile and went on. But she still stood

there with the tears welling and welling in her eyes till they fell gently over upon her cheeks. She did not heed them, she was so busy with her thoughts. "Poor Phebe," she said softly to herself. "My poor little Phebe! But perhaps,--with time--"

CHAPTER XIV.

PHEBE'S GOOD-BY.

When was it Phebe first fell ill? No one knew. Mr. Hardcastle had kept cautiously out of her way this long time past, but nobody else suspected that the brilliant cheeks and eyes which shone like stars were telltales of a hidden fire burning her life away. The fever was abating in the village. The doctors declared the epidemic virtually over, and mutually congratulated each other upon the success of their measures. Mr. Hardcastle returned to the sidewalks; Mr. Upjohn brought back Maria; Miss Lydia said death had spared her this once, but next time it would be her turn to go; Mrs. Lane said she needn't make her will yet for all that; and everybody said how very much worse the fever would have been in any less peculiarly healthy spot than Joppa. How was it that at the very last, when there was no reason at all, when she had been apparently so perfectly well all along, Phebe Lane should suddenly take to her bed? Not only one doctor was called in, but both, and when they saw her they said the fever had been running a long time already, and then they looked very grave and shook their heads. She did not seem so ill. Most of their patients had had far more aggravated symptoms yet still they shook their heads as they looked at her, and murmured something about lack of vitality, a general giving way, a complete want of will power, etc. People looked at each other aghast. Was it possible that little Phebe Lane was really going to die? Nobody really believed it could be, excepting only Soeur Angelique. "Oh, my darling, my darling!" she cried out when she first heard of it, and then she instantly went over and installed herself in Phebe's room. And there she sat the slow days through, waiting and waiting with a breaking heart. Phebe suffered very little. She lay generally perfectly still, too weak to move, too weak to care to speak. People came and went noiselessly below, but no one was admitted to her room save her step-mother and Mrs. Whittridge. Mrs. Lane watched her with growing anxiety. The fever was so slight, why did she not rally from it? How was it credible she could fail so rapidly and so causelessly? And Mrs. Whittridge sat by with despair in her heart.

One day, late in the afternoon, as she sat so watching, Phebe suddenly opened her eyes. "Will you call him, please? I hear him."

"Who? Denham?" asked Soeur Angelique, with quick intuition. A finer ear than hers had caught the light step and low voice in the narrow hall below.

"Yes, Denham," said Phebe, softly. "Denham. I want to see him."

It pleased her to say his name so. She said it to herself over and over beneath her breath, while waiting for him to come. It was but a moment, and he was kneeling by the bedside, holding both her hands in his. She looked up in his face and smiled, and said his name again, lower still.

"Denham."

"Yes, Phebe--yes, dear," he answered, too moved to say more.

"I only wanted to say good-by," she continued, her eyes full of a love unutterable that not even the shadow of coming death could wholly darken. "Will you kiss me good-by please, this once, good-by--for always?"

A faint, soft flush crept up over her white face, and he bent down and kissed her gently, as one would kiss the Madonna of a shrine.

"Phebe," he whispered, "not for always only for a time, dear--good-by."

"Yes," she said, with a glad smile lighting up all her sweet, pure face. "Only for a time."

And then, still holding her hands tightly clasped in his, Denham bent down his head upon them and prayed.

The sunset came and faded, and the twilight came and went, giving place to the solemn stillness of the enduring night. The stars shone clear and still. Not a breath stirred. In his study Denham knelt alone, praying for a dear and lovely life, praying against hope, against belief--against all but faith. He did not know what time it was--it seemed as if it might be morning---when at last the door opened and Soeur Angelique came in. He got up and stood waiting, too agitated to speak. What news could she bring him but the one? She came slowly up to him, then gave a little gasp, and flinging her arms around his neck, burst into tears.

"O Denham, Denham, all is over! Phebe is dead!"

CHAPTER XV.

ONLY AN INCIDENT.

The morning sun was streaming brilliantly in through the richly curtained windows of a handsome New York dwelling. Mr. and Mrs. De Forest were about sitting down to breakfast, which waited for them ready served, and which indeed had been so waiting for some minutes. The butler coughed behind his hand as a discreet reminder of his presence, and so indirectly of the cooling dishes. The gentleman looked up from his easy-chair by the fire and yawned.

"My dear, I've been up so long I think it's getting bedtime again."

"Just one moment, Ogden," answered the lady, from her desk. "I must send off this note by the first mail."

"Any thing important?"

"Yes. I will not be put on that new committee. They _must_ find some one else. My time is too full."

De Forest rose and stood with his back to the fire, looking complacently at his wife. "What an odd sensation it must be--having one's time too

full! It's an experience I'm willing always to delegate to some one else. Doesn't it feel rather like too tight shoes?"

Gerald laughed as she passed her husband to her seat at the table, and he stood still watching her as she began pouring coffee. It was always a pleasure to watch her. The butler drew out the gentleman's chair firmly. It was time his master took his seat with his lady. There was too much of this dilly-dallying. De Forest came lazily forward and seated himself.

"Any news?" asked Gerald.

"None whatever. It's a swindle to pay three cents for the _Herald_ in such monotonous times. I was reduced to searching in your church paper to see if by any chance something new had gotten lost in there."

"I hope you found it."

"I didn't. Not so much even as the death of someone I knew to cheer me. There would have been variety at least in that. By the way, though, I did see a familiar name among the personals,—just a notice that the Rev. Denham Holloway had accepted a call to some church or other in some place or other. He was quite a friend of yours, wasn't he, that summer before we were married, when we were all in that odious little Joppa together? How bored I was there!"

"Denham Holloway," repeated Gerald, musingly. "Denham Holloway. Why, I don't believe I have thought of him since. But he was never any especial friend of mine, you know."

"Ah, there was somebody else who managed to engross a great deal of your time and most of your thoughts that summer, was there not, my dear, while nobody but myself was bold enough to suppose that any impression had been made on that frigid heart of yours? Well, I was perfectly fair. I left your friend, Phebe, for Holloway."

"Poor little Phebe!" said Gerald, with softened eyes. "How long ago it all seems. Poor dear little Phebe! I have never wanted to hear of Joppa since her death. I feel as if she had given her life for it. Yes; I don't suppose I have thought twice of Denham Holloway since."

Ah, so it was! That brief summer meeting, which had had so potent an influence on the lives of those other two, had in her life been only an incident.

THE END.

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