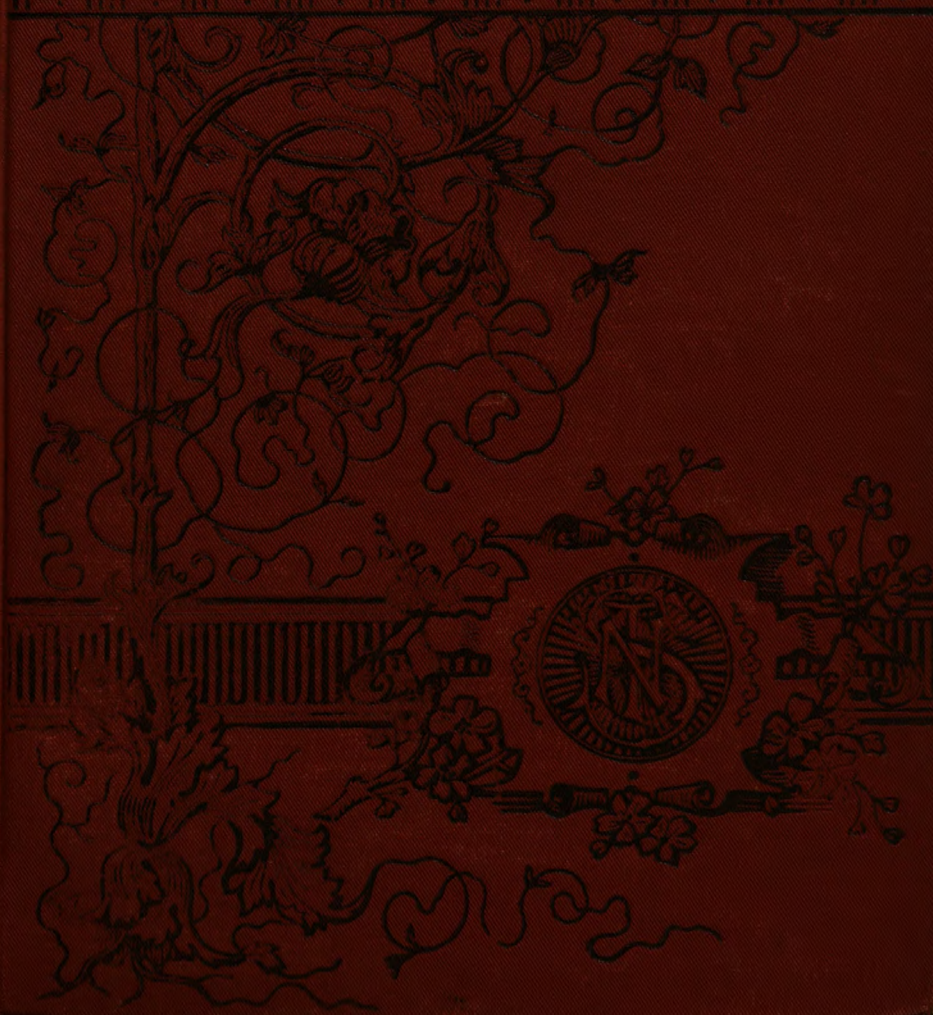


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HER READY-MADE FAMILY



Mr. C. H. Mead -

1897 -

HER READY-MADE FAMILY.

BY

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HER READY-MADE FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

NANCY KIMBALL, SPINSTER.

“ Every one that flatters thee
Is no friend in misery :
Words are easy, like the wind,
Faithful friends are hard to find.”

A WARM first of April day was closing. One by one the stalls of the great market were shut and the corridors were left to bareness, silence, and the night-watchman. A slender, youngish-looking man of thirty-eight or thereabout, came from a green-grocer's stall ; he put on his coat, dusted his shoes with a bunch of refuse leaves, put his hat jauntily on the side of his head, and proceeded to look for the names of streets branching from the market-place. Apparently he found the street that he wanted, and he walked along it, looking here and there, as one new to the locality. Certain girls who were

selling small wares on a corner, considered him "very nice looking"; he had closely-curved black hair, black eyes much too near together, a sharp nose and chin, thin lips, and a bright complexion, yellowish-brown and red like a pomegranate. The girls were not sufficiently observant to note that selfishness and treachery were plainly written on this physiognomy; they merely noted the bright color, the curls, and the jaunty air.

Noticing all signs and all window displays, our marketman was not likely to overlook a gay red and blue placard with the legend, "Nonpareil Beer. Every glass has the entire nutriment of a loaf of bread." This inscription was flanked by paintings of beer-schooners with high-piled overflowing foam.

"It would certainly be economy to try it; who knows when I shall get supper? A loaf of bread would be food enough; it would cost but a nickel, and could be swallowed in a minute. Nothing could be more reasonable."

He went into the beer-saloon and drank "a loaf of bread."

"Better have another to keep it company,"

laughed the bartender, and not reflecting that two loaves of bread at a meal is over-eating, even for a workingman with a prime appetite, a second schooner was emptied. As he had no more small change he returned to the street, which was becoming a rather steep ascent. Dawdling along, examining with great envy the chains and rings and pins in the small jeweler's windows; stopping with longing before the gay neckties and silk kerchiefs in the "Gentlemen's Furnishing stores"; delaying before the gun-shops, to crave boxing-gloves, revolvers, rifles, and cursing his fate that he "had not been born a city swell," to have all these things for the wishing, he suddenly realized that he was desperately thirsty, and looked about for a sign, "Ice-cold Beer." But he was now beyond the region where beer-shops were numerous. A drinking fountain at a corner offered itself as the only place of refreshment, and there he turned.

"Thirsty?" said a young man who had just helped himself, refilling the cup and offering it to the newcomer.

“Thirsty as a fish. Queer, too, for I’ve just had two glasses of beer.”

“That accounts for it. Those brewers and barmen are sharp fellows. They salt the beer plentifully, so as to make a fellow thirsty as soon as he drinks. Here’s stuff that satisfies. Try it.”

“Working in the city?” inquired the man from the market, as he emptied the cup given him.

“Wholesale china,” said the young fellow.

“Nice that. That would suit me ; I always did have a taste for handsome things. Live round here ?”

“C—— Street,” said the other, pointing to the nearest street that turned sharply up a hill.

“I’m looking for board and lodging ; something reasonable. Any places empty along there, think ?”

“I think there are some tickets out at the upper end. It’s a very quiet street, with quiet people.”

“That’s just what I want. I’m a very steady,

quiet person myself. Like to stay in and read in the evenings."

"You might inquire up there," said his interlocutor, turning away, with an incredulous glance at the close-set eyes and the sharp chin.

Slowly up the narrow steep street, lined with small brick houses of the poorer sort, went the marketman, until nearly at the top he saw in a window, "BOARD AND LODGING." Under this modest announcement sat a thin, grave-faced woman making button-holes in a vest. She was not one whom time had touched lightly; each passing year seemed to have left its record, even to wantonness, in the lavishing of little wrinkles and gray hairs. Nancy Kimball was forty odd, and looked fully ten years more than that; and life had to her been so hard and dull and workaday, that Nancy neither resented nor regretted her premature aging.

The marketman eyed her through the window: as a prospective landlady what was she like? He could not see the gray eyes bent on her work, but he saw the iron-gray hair parted

on her forehead, and done up in a little wisp behind, held by a little black comb. Her face was worn, sallow, with certain lines of despondency ; she looked a careful, meek person, also immaculately clean. Through the shining window her purple calico dress, and the bit of white lawn held at her neck by an old gold brooch, could be seen. There was a pot of blooming geranium by her window-sill, and she bent her face toward it as one bends toward a loved child, as she stopped to take another needleful of twist.

Then the marketman went up the three steps to the door, which stood ajar, and knocked.

“Come in !” said Nancy Kimball in a brisk, clear tone, and realized that this was a possible lodger. The visitor took off his felt hat and made a very impressive bow. He had lived long enough to know that such courtesies cost nothing, and go further than almost any other outlay in making friends for us.

“Madam, I see you have room for a boarder.”

Nancy had never before been called “Madam,” and she liked it well,

"Back room, up-stairs, ten by thirteen," she said tersely, working at a button-hole.

"A small room is all that I need, madam," with a bow.

"No dinners," quoth Nancy, button-holing vigorously.

"Exactly ; I don't want dinner. I am at the market."

"Then you'd want your breakfast too early."

"Most of us take breakfast at the market restaurant."

"Room, suppers, and three meals Sunday, three dollars a week," said Nancy.

"I have no doubt I should be suited, madam."

"Strictly in advance," said Nancy, finishing the button-hole.

The applicant's face fell, but he considered that the stipulation was usual, and that if he ingratiated himself sufficiently the first week, he might escape for a week or two after that, and then "fold his tent like an Arab and silently fade away." He had no intention of paying his board, but he said :

"Certainly."

"You can go up and see the room," said Nancy. "Straight up, and it's the only door unlocked."

She took her scissors to cut another button-hole ; as she did so she looked at her guest ; he made her another bow, quite as if she had been a grand lady, and Nancy remarked to herself as she threaded a needle, that he was "a very pretty man." Presently she heard steps descending the stairs.

"I'll take the room. My name is Arthur Wilson. I'll stay now, if you please. I'll bring my luggage to-morrow. I hope to be permanent. You like permanents?"

"I'm used to 'em," said Miss Kimball. "The man that had this room you've taken was here three years, and would be here now, only he's left town. I'm mighty sorry he's gone too."

"The front room was here when I rented the house, and he's stayed ever since ; an old man, a night-watchman at the Works. The middle room has been here two years, lodging and breakfasts. Yes, they all stay."

"Speaks well for them, and for you too,"

said Arthur Wilson politely. He took a chair and observed the interior which had suddenly become his home. The furnishing of the little room was more than meagre, but very carefully kept, expressing a poverty which had never abandoned itself to despair. Order, taste, and cleanliness gave this poor room a sort of elegance. Every object was in its place; the faded carpet was free from spot or dust; the coarse muslin curtains showed a fashion of embroidery in their numerous darns; the clock, a pair of china vases, and a big chair—in which Wilson had seated himself—looked like relics of a rural home. On a little side table a pile of vests, silk, velvet, fancy cloth, made in their elegance a marked contrast to the poverty and plainness about them. “She ought to get big money for vests like that,” commented Wilson to himself, “and she takes boarders and don’t fool her money on dress, sure.”

Miss Nancy finished the last button-hole on the vest in her hand, laid it on the pile, covered them with a towel, and remarked that she would get supper.

She lit a little oil stove in a corner, and while the kettle was boiling proceeded to set the table and prepare the meal in the room where they were, Wilson looking on. Nancy, angular in form and abrupt in motion, was quick, neat-handed, and accurate. The preparation of the simple meal was pleasant to watch.

"I don't get a dinner for myself at noon," said Nancy; "it is lonesome eating by yourself; I can't get used to it, though my mother has been dead eight years, and I've lived alone since. Seeing I get no dinner, why, there's always something warm for supper."

"That will be my gain," said the boarder, and as it was one of his principles—he had so few that he might well live up to what he had—always to ingratiate himself with people, if talk and bows would do it, he became communicative as he leaned back in the big chair. Nancy was informed that he was a bachelor, lately bereft of sister and mother, a great home lover; his newspaper and a cup of tea being "the limit of his desires."

Nancy, in a spirit of reciprocity, explained

that as a child she had lived in the country, and to the country she looked with longing, desirous to end her days amid green fields, flowers, brooks, trees, birds.

"Yes," Wilson said, "there was nothing like the country. Sheep and chickens, for instance, were like friends to a man in the country. What could equal milk, eggs, honey, and other country fare? If ever he got on his feet he should live on a little farm."

Eating heartily he complimented Miss Nancy's bread, butter, cold meat, cookies, and fried potatoes. "Real home cooking," he pronounced it, and added that its goodness made him hungry; he had already eaten two loaves of bread.

"Not in real loaves, though," he added, as Miss Nancy looked horrified at a boarder who could follow up two loaves by a hearty supper; "it was just what had the value of two loaves."

"Oh," said Miss Nancy innocently. "Well, I've heard of those quack medicines before, and I don't believe there's one bit of good in them; they just waste your money," in which

remark Miss Nancy came nearer the facts in the case than she knew.

After supper Miss Nancy bought a paper and Wilson read it to her. At nine he took his candle and said "Good-night," leaving on the mind of his hostess an impression that he was "a real gentleman." She hoped he would be suited, that his bed was well aired, and that he would not recklessly sleep in a draught.

Pursuant of his intention to produce such friendly and truthful opinions in the mind of his landlady that he should not be pressed for further board money for two or three weeks, Wilson next evening offered to accompany her to the shop for which she worked, and carry for her the vests.

Miss Nancy had never appeared on the streets with a man in dutiful attendance; she was "weel pleased to be respectit like the lave," and set off fairly beaming.

"Do you go to Pressley's?" asked Wilson.

"Pressley's? No! Why, that's 'ready-made clothing,'" said Miss Nancy with scorn. "I don't work for 'ready-made'; I work for

Jordan. They are only order men. 'Ready-made' don't show such goods as this."

Wilson saw that he had erred.

"Your work is really magnificent; but you see I'm a poor man, and don't know about such swell shops."

The next evening Wilson offered to run round to the little dairy and get the butter, milk, and eggs, which Miss Nancy wanted for tea. He had brought from his market-stall a bunch of radishes and a head of lettuce, and the table looked sumptuous.

"For Miss Nancy Kimball," said Wilson to the fat dairy-woman, "and here's the money. I suppose you don't trust, eh?"

"I'd trust Miss Kimball, she's good for it."

"So? Folks keeping poor men like me for boarders, usually break up, and are sold out."

"Miss Nancy won't. She's shrewd and saving, and has a trade. Why, she lays up a heap of money. She has money in the bank, hain't she, Jo?"

"Jo," her husband, who was slicing bacon, responded, "Wisht I had as much."

“They do say it’s near a thousand—anyway it is mor’n six hundred,” said the dairy-woman, “and she without chick or child or relation in all the wide world. I wonder she don’t adopt a child for her old days, don’t you, Jo?”

“She ought to adopt some tidy fellow like me,” said Wilson, winking at Jo, as he took up his purchases and the change.

“Not much danger,” laughed Jo, “Nancy hates men.”

Back went Wilson, but the current of his ideas was already changed. This woman was homely, meek, industrious, credulous, a good housewife, and had possibly a thousand dollars! He fancied that if he was flattering enough he could enlist Miss Nancy’s affections, and if he married her he could have all her money to the last penny. Contemplating Miss Nancy as she finished getting supper, he concluded that “the melancholy dodge” would suit her best. Therefore he sighed, and everything on the table reminded him of the country, of his early home, his dead friends, his lonely condition. Miss Nancy was honestly and frankly sympathetic.

Sunday afternoon Wilson asked leave to read to Miss Nancy. She gave him the *Missionary Magazine* and her church paper, stating that "she didn't take in Sunday papers."

Wilson vowed that she was quite right; folks ought to be particular, and as he saw that Miss Nancy was religious, he took very pious views, pitied the case of the heathen, wished he had been a missionary to do some good in the world, and begged that as he was a stranger, Miss Nancy would take him to church in the evening.

Miss Nancy was abundantly willing. She had never had "company" to church in her life.

A paragraph in the church paper elicited from Miss Nancy the information that she hated nothing so much as intemperance; that for her part "she was a total abstainer and a prohibitionist."

"That's all very well," said Wilson, "but total abstinence and prohibition don't go deep enough."

Miss Nancy averred that she'd be glad to know what went any deeper.

Wilson waxed eloquent. "What you want, Miss Nancy, is to stop drunkenness, isn't it?"

"Yes," Miss Nancy said, she did want that decidedly.

"Well, your total abstaining or mine, isn't going to make the drunken man round the corner keep sober. Prohibition of making or of selling don't really stop the making or selling. I can tell you a better way. Getting drunk ought to be a crime against the law, just as stealing or killing is. Not what a man does when he is drunk, but just the being drunk ought to be criminal, and punished with jail every time. No fines taken. Fines give the rich man advantage over the poor man. If drunkenness was made by law a crime, then people would soon be as scared of being drunk as of killing or stealing; and drunkards would be as scarce as thieves."

"Thieves are too plenty," said Miss Nancy.

"That's so, but they are not showing up by the dozen on every street; and they are getting scarcer. Besides, stealing can be more secret

than drunkenness. When a man's drunk he shows it. Clap him in jail, I say !”

In the course of a week Wilson made great progress in securing Miss Nancy's good opinion. He brought home some little tribute from his stall each evening, he paid his board in advance unasked, and, oh, how he talked about the country ! Miss Nancy, exiled for thirty years from the country, had never gotten over her *heimweh* for green fields, wild flowers, and country quiet. Wilson devoted himself to feeding this longing for rural ways. He, himself, he said, had a lovely little farm and house, which, owing to his duteous care of his now dead parents, had a mortgage lying upon it. When, by renting and city work, he had lifted that mortgage, back he should go to the sweet society of his bees, pigs, calves, and guinea-hens. At the end of two weeks he grew so jubilant over his progress in Miss Nancy's esteem that, returning from the market one evening, he further exhilarated himself with three drinks of that Nonpareil beer, each glass equal to a loaf of bread. This refreshing liquor caused him to

forget Miss Nancy's temperance principles to such an extent that he ordered, at the nearest beer-shop, that a pitcher of best ale should be sent round to Miss Kimball's, "at six o'clock sharp."

Miss Nancy, quiet and melancholy, thoroughly enjoyed her lodger's livelier character. His rattling, self-satisfied talk, his jokes, his brisk ways, cheered and amused her. There is always something of the maternal and indulgent in the affection of women past forty, and this element secured for Wilson that loving toleration accorded by mothers to the pranks of children. On this particular evening Miss Nancy and her boarder were in high good humor when they sat down to the tea-table.

"I didn't bring anything, but I ordered something," said Wilson as they took their places, his nearest the door, with his back to the street and the open window.

A wild dream of ice-cream or early strawberries swept over Miss Nancy's mind. Could he have been so extravagant?

A tap at the door—"I'll go!" cried Wilson,

jumping up—and returned with a foaming jug of ale.

Miss Nancy was scandalized. “Ale! Ale on my table!” she cried. “Mr. Wilson! Do you drink ale? I thought you were a good man—I thought you were temperance! Oh! oh!”

Wilson realized that he had sinned desperately and that his chances of sharing Miss Nancy’s money were vanishing. He sobered at once. “Nancy!” he cried. “My dear Nancy, do not be angry. I thought it was drunkenness you hated, not mere ale. But I don’t care for ale. I vow I don’t. A doctor to-day said I must surely take it at tea, to strengthen me, as I’m overworking. But hang the doctor! If you don’t want me to drink it I swear I won’t. I’ll fling it out,” and in his zeal he caught up the pewter pitcher and wildly, without looking first, flung the beer into the street.

The next instant the door burst open, and a huge, ruddy man, in a straw hat and a white linen carter’s-frock, burst, whip in hand, into the

presence of Nancy and Wilson. The man's red face and tawny beard were dripping with ale, and a broad brown stream was meandering over the immaculate whiteness of his frock front. Unluckily he was roaring with rage.

CHAPTER II.

COUSIN JABEZ.

“But still with a patience that is not hope,
For vain and empty it long hath been :
I sit on the rough shore’s rocky slope,
And watch to see if my ship comes in.”

“OH, sir! Oh, dear me, what a dreadful accident!” shrieked Miss Nancy, springing up. “We were not looking into the street, and never thought. Oh, here, do take this towel and wipe your face—and let me rub that stain off your frock.” She hastened to hand him a clean towel, and then pouring hot water into a basin, came with another clean towel to wipe the beer from the linen. “Indeed, it was all my fault. Mr. Wilson”—she looked about, Mr. Wilson had disappeared.

“It was all my fault, really,” said Miss Nancy, still rubbing at the beer stain. “Mr. Wilson is my boarder, and when I said I didn’t

want beer on my table, to please me he tossed it out into the street, never thinking any one might be passing ; he is a countryman."

"Humph," said the big man, putting a big hand on each of Miss Kimball's shoulders, and pushing her a little further back, so that he could look into her face, "Nancy, don't you know me?"

Miss Nancy from crimson became pale, and then putting up both her work-worn hands to clasp the palms on her shoulders, cried joyfully, "Cousin Jabez! Why, it is Cousin Jabez. Dear me, how glad I am! I didn't know what had become of you. I haven't seen you since——"

"No, Nancy, not since your mother's funeral. After that I was off on a trip three months, buying beef cattle, and wife couldn't leave little Tomsey, and when I came back to look you up you had moved and I couldn't find you. I looked a good bit for you at first, and then it kind of passed out of my mind ; but I sha'n't let you get out of sight again, Nancy ; I haven't so many relations I can afford to lose

you, my girl. Bless my heart, I'm glad of anything, even of a quart of beer flung in my face, that brought me in here."

"You're not gladder than I am," said Miss Nancy, "and now if you'll sit right down I'll draw some more tea and cut more bread, and there's a nice pie I made this morning, and we'll take tea together. Well, Mr. Wilson will be sorry about the beer."

"He's skipped out," laughed Cousin Jabez, "afraid."

Now a woman highly resents this imputation of cowardice in a man for whom she is interested, so Miss Nancy, while putting more tea in the pot, protested earnestly. "No, indeed, he's not afraid, he is a very nice man."

"Must be; guzzling beer for his supper," said Jabez.

"It was the first time, and at his doctor's orders," asserted Miss Nancy. "Mr. Wilson is strong temperance."

"Wilson, is he? Well, I couldn't see very plainly, my eyes were so full of beer, but I thought he was a lazy, lying, no account, beer-

soaking fellow, from up Tiptown way, named Eugene Loring."

"Oh, you are all wrong, Cousin Jabez. Mr. Wilson is a very hard working, honest man, here in the city; he's boarded with me some time," said Miss Nancy, computing time rather by the change in her own feelings toward her lodger than by lapse of days. However, as Mr. Wilson did not reappear, she and Cousin Jabez took tea together, and sat until nearly dark rehearsing personal and family history.

Meantime Mr. Wilson had slipped out of the house with exceeding promptitude, and betook himself to the City Park, where, seated on a bench, he began to consider his relations to his landlady. When that beer question came up, he had seen a sudden flash of determination in Miss Nancy's gray eyes, a something in her whole manner which suggested that, in certain respects, she might not be as pliable as he had supposed. "I may find," said he to himself, "that she isn't to be twisted round a body's finger, like a piece of string. I'm in for nearly three weeks' board, now. I might take my

traps and flit out to-night, and be done with it. But then, if she has money, why, I might as well have my share of it. I'll find out from her. She is sure to tell the truth to a penny." Having made this decision, he gripped his curls in both hands, and bowed his head nearly to his knees in an agony of invention arranging a suitable tale for Miss Nancy.

At nine o'clock he returned to his quarters and found his landlady sitting on the doorstep, evidently waiting for him.

"Why, wherever have you been, without any supper?"

"I should say so," replied Wilson as they went into the house, and Miss Nancy lit a lamp. "When that man burst in in such a fury I didn't want a fight, right in your house, perhaps getting in the police and neighbors, that would have hurt you. Besides, I felt terribly cut up over it, and I saw I had spoiled his hat and necktie, and I raced down the street to buy him some, to make my peace with, while he was getting cleaned up. I owed him that much, sure. As I went I saw a boy run over by

a cart. I was the one to pick him up and call for an ambulance. His leg was broken, poor fellow. By the time I had carried him into a drug-store, and got him off to the hospital, and gone to tell his mother for him, and then gone to the hospital to inquire for her if the hurt was serious, why, you see, I forgot all about tie, hat, or supper."

"I should say so!" cried Miss Nancy, much interested; "how kind you are, and how handy; and you always want to help folks, Mr. Wilson! Was the hurt very bad, poor boy?"

"Oh, no, simple fracture. I think I'll take my candle and go up-stairs. I'm tired."

"Won't you have some supper? No? You can't think who that man was! My cousin, Jabez Long! We had lost sight of each other, and he was so glad to find me. He stayed to tea. He lives out beyond Tiptown"—Mr. Wilson was looking earnestly into the street—"but you'll meet him some time. What do you think? he thought you were some man, I didn't pay attention to the name, from up his way, but I told him he was mistaken."

"I should say so," said Mr. Wilson gruffly, taking his candle and going up-stairs.

The next evening he came home very cheery. "No more beer," he cried, "and here's a little basket of strawberries to make friends with. No more beer, if it did find you a cousin."

"I'll be so glad to have you meet him," cried Miss Nancy, all in a flutter of pleasure. "He is coming to tea, and he is to be sure and send me word, so I can have something real nice."

"So we will have something nice," said Wilson. "I'll send you up as fine a fowl for stewing, and as handsome a cauliflower, as ever you saw in your life."

"That will be a feast," declared Miss Nancy.

"To us, not to him, the big countryman! Country folk feast on the fat of the land. It beats all how poor we are here in the city, and how hard we work without getting any ahead. Now you, Miss Nancy, grind at button-holes, vests, boarders, never spare yourself, never pamper yourself, and I'll wager you scarcely can make two ends meet."

"Yes, I can," said Miss Nancy, "I've got money laid up."

"Hoh! Forty dollars, may be!" laughed Wilson.

"Forty dollars! More than that; why, I've been hard at work fifteen years," protested Miss Nancy.

"So you have, and what does it all come to? Honest, now. If you've laid up a hundred and fifty, you've done well. Yes, wonders. For, you see, women can't lay up the way men can; their work is not so well paid; they have more expenses, can't save so close, and are more cheated. Why, a working woman, who in twenty years saves a couple of hundred, would be a wonder."

Now, Miss Nancy was stimulated by these remarks, first to disprove that statement that a woman cannot save as well as a man; and second, to prove that she was a wonder. Praise is sweet. She smiled.

"I'll tell you the fact, Mr. Wilson, I've laid up six hundred and fifty dollars! What do you say to that?"

"I say you're a miracle, a real miracle! I hope it is where it is safe," said Wilson eagerly.

"Indeed it is; it is in the bank, and I'm so careful I don't even keep the book here."

"That's right, very right. Whatever you do, be prudent, and don't let any one chouse you out of that money. The great danger when women do save up anything, is, that some rascal comes along and cheats them out of it. You hold fast to your savings, Nancy."

Wilson looked very virtuous as he liberally sugared Miss Nancy's little dish of berries. "I'm glad you told me that," he said in a grateful tone, "it gives me courage to work hard, and hope that I, too, can lay up enough in time to pay off that mortgage on my little place. Three hundred dollars it is, but I'll get it if I stick at it, and then off I go to live in the country. I'll send you honey from my hives, and a Christmas turkey of my own raising, when I get home. Home! What a word that is to me!"

The next evening Wilson asked Miss Nancy to walk out in the park with him. There the

grass and trees reminded him of his place in the country, and he expatiated: "There's a well, with a big sweep, an 'old oaken bucket,' and all that. A row of bee-hives along the garden fence; an arbor over the porch, all hung with honeysuckles. A big hop vine, make you sleepy to look at it! Such a nice garden, with mint and parsley, and big hollyhocks; such nice grass for bleaching; a spring house, and a but-tery. Shall I ever live there again? At least I hope to die there."

Then, while affairs were going so nicely, on Friday night Miss Nancy announced that Cousin Jabez Long would take tea with them Saturday. Wilson was charmed to hear it; he and Miss Nancy planned the supper, and early next day a messenger boy brought the fowl and cauliflower.

Cousin Jabez was already on hand, and supper about to be served, when the same messenger boy came to say that Mr. Wilson's helper was sick, and Mr. Wilson couldn't be home before eleven, "he was awful sorry."

Naturally on Sunday afternoon Miss Nancy

had to tell Mr. Wilson all the family news brought by Cousin Jabez, and from that passing to reminiscences they became very confidential. Finally, after a long silence, Mr. Wilson said: "Nancy—I'm afraid it is selfish to ask it, but will you promise me, that when I get that three hundred, and pay off the mortgage, so I can go back to my place, you'll marry me and go with me? It will give me courage to think that you'll do that. I'll have more to work and hope for. I'll find evening work, I'll work double as hard, and I reckon, in a year, I can do it, if my health holds out. With that dear little home and such a housekeeper as you, dear Nancy, what a happy man I should be!"

Miss Nancy seemed in a dream of bliss; her face took a glow and joy which made it almost young again as she promised.

"And as there's a whole year to wait, I suppose you won't mention it just yet; folks would think I was very shiftless not to be ready at once. But you understand, Nancy, all the trouble I've had with my old folks' sickness and death."

Miss Nancy had two or three happy days after that. It was so delightful to think that she had some one to love her, that she was going to the country, to a beautiful little home, which she could improve and decorate as her own. No more lonely years; no more days spent by the window stitching vests!

Upon these joyful musings broke the burly form of Cousin Jabez Long. He brought a little basket of butter, cookies, and cream from his wife; also a warm invitation for a visit that summer.

"Yes," said Miss Nancy, "I do lay out to visit you soon."

"We sha'n't lose sight of you again, Nancy, and just make yourself easy. Thank the Lord, we're comfortable, and if you get into any trouble, or get sick, just come to us. Blood's thicker than water; we'll do for you. The way you've kept yourself up is just amazing, but a lone woman can't lay up money out of lodgers and vests. Don't worry yourself, don't overwork or pinch yourself, and if you come to a hard place, my name is Cousin Jabez."

"You're dreadful good," said Miss Nancy ; "but I've done better than you think. I've laid up over six hundred in bank, Cousin Jabez."

"Well, if that don't beat all ! What a powerful business woman you must be, Nancy ! I'm proud of you ; and I hope you'll show the same sense keeping as you have getting. Don't let some sharper hocus it away from you. There's the danger."

"I'll see to that," said Nancy, and was just about to confide to Cousin Jabez the affair of Mr. Wilson, when he rushed on with his monitions.

"And whatever you do, Nancy, don't be bamboozled into getting married."

"Why not ?" demanded Miss Nancy.

"Oh, some smooth-tongued, slick-looking chap will come along and want to share what you've got, and of course you'd end in being miserable."

"Why would I ?" asked Miss Nancy, endeavoring to laugh and be sprightly.

"Why, Nancy, when a woman or a man,

either, stays unmarried till your years, they get set in their ways, and it's hard to change ; other folks have different ways, and they don't gee. Young people's opinions are more limber-like, and they grow together, and fit each other's notions better. So, Nancy, as you've been an independent woman so long, stick it out on that line. Well, good-day !”

So Cousin Jabez was off, and Nancy's story was untold.

It was that very day that Wilson began to look sad, and after a day or two Nancy pressed him to tell her why, as she had every right to do.

“I haven't been well for some time,” sighed Wilson ; “and to-day the doctor told me if I didn't leave the city and go back to the country I'd not live six months. I came here to lift that mortgage. I felt sure I could do it by a year from now ; but at what I could make in the country, it will take two or three years. I'll feel so lonesome to leave you, Nancy, and so discouraged ; and I won't be able to get in to see you oftener than once in a month or two,

And then I know that no other person's cooking will build me up as yours does." By this time he and Miss Nancy were very lugubrious. Wilson added: "The doctor told me to use plenty of beer and porter, but I won't. I'll not go against your opinions, Nancy, or waste the money that might help on the mortgage."

This chivalric self-devotion quite broke Miss Nancy's heart. As she lay awake that night she thought of a way to emulate it. It was such a grand way that next day she sang little bits of "When I can read my title clear," and "From Greenland's icy mountains," and so on. Some women enjoy immolating themselves.

That evening at supper Miss Nancy developed her plan.

"I've thought of a way for us," she said. "Why can't I clear off that mortgage? I have the money."

"Oh, that would be too much! I could not allow it!"

"I could, just as well, and I should have over three hundred left. When is it due? Is it owed here in town?"

“Yes, Buller, on Fifth Street, has it, and it will be due June 1st. Of course, he'd extend if I asked. The family that rent my place want to leave by June, and, as you say, Nancy, the place would be yours anyhow, 'all that's mine is thine,' and welcome. It would be paying the money on your own home, anyway, and I hope you'll be very happy in it years after I'm dead.”

“Oh, don't talk that way!” said Miss Nancy, wiping her eyes.

“If you insist on saving my life that way, Nancy,” said Wilson, “you must promise to marry me June 1st, and I'll have my tenants out and take you right to your own home.”

“Very well,” said Nancy; “we can be married early in the morning by my minister, and then we'll go to Mr. Buller and pay off the mortgage.”

Nancy was pouring tea, and Wilson looked closely at her. Was this uncommon shrewdness? Would she not be easy to manage after all? He concluded that while her heart had laid the plan to help him, her head, long accustomed to looking out for her own interests, had

made it plain that she should marry first and then go and do the money-paying herself.

"You're the best woman in the world," he said, as Miss Nancy looked up from the tea-pot, expecting him to say something. She was too happy to notice his embarrassment.

"You know," she said, "that Mr. Buller ought to know that the money will be paid, and just when, and be ready to give you release of mortgage. Can't you come up here to-morrow, about eleven, and I'll go to see him with you, and then I'll call at Jordan's and tell them I cannot take any more vests. I shall be busy enough. I must find some one to take my lease here and my lodgers, and I must make up some things and pack my goods. Can't they all be sent out on a freight wagon to furnish your house?"

"*Our* house, Nancy," said Wilson, coming to time like a man, "or, rather, *your* house. Yes, we'll go and see Buller to-morrow. You are such a good girl!"

But all the evening, as he and Nancy planned affairs, he thought that this "good girl" had

just a little too much business sense. Still, no doubt, if he showed "true cause" he might be able to get the remaining three hundred from her after they were married ; there was no sense in a woman's keeping money like that ; what good did it do her, anyway ? It did not need the spirit of prophecy to reply, "Precious little good when such a man as you shares her fortunes."

When they arrived at Mr. Buller's office the next day Wilson left Nancy seated near the door as he entered, and going to the broker's desk, said :

"Mr. Buller, I'll pay up all the mortgage on my place June 1st at nine o'clock. Will you be here to finish up the business then ? I'm going right out of town."

"All right," said Mr. Buller.

Then Wilson held open the door for Nancy and hurried her out. She had not been conscious of any suspicions, but she felt particularly happy as they walked along the street, and she looked in all the shop windows to choose a gown and a bonnet for her wedding outfit.

CHAPTER III.

THE READY-MADE FAMILY.

“Behold we live through all things, famine, thirst,
Bereavement, pain ! All grief and misery,
All woe and sorrow ; life inflicts the worst
On soul and body, but we cannot die.
Though we be sick and tired, and faint and worn,
Lo, all things can be borne.”

OH, happy days for Nancy Kimball, happy in a brief illusion, but truly happy for all that. Never had she gone out of doors so much ; never had she done so much shopping ; never had she so consulted her own comfort. The day after that call on Mr. Buller, Nancy drew from the bank fifty dollars. She told herself that it was only right to go to the new home and among Mr. Wilson's friends in a creditable style. “For once she would have things like other folks.” She bought a white counterpane, a pair of pillow-shams, and six towels with borders “to set off her room in her new home.”

Then she bought for her wedding dress, a gray alpaca, trimmed with green velvet ; a gray hat, with a bunch of grass and leaves for trimming ; a pair of gray kid gloves, and a pair of new kid boots. In all her life Nancy had never before had a full new suit. When she had bought a dress, she had not dared to invest in a shawl or a hat ; when the hat must be had, gloves and boots were recklessly sacrificed to the manes of the outworn headgear ; but now all was new, including the gray shawl bought the previous autumn. When Miss Nancy had put her best stitches into the making of this dress, and of a new gingham for afternoons, had made over her ten-years-old black silk, and generally furbished up the remainder of her meagre wardrobe, she felt that all was in order for her marriage. She found a suitable person to take her lease, sold to this successor certain bedsteads and tables, which Wilson said would not be needed, and then packed her other goods for departure.

Wilson's behavior was, in Miss Nancy's view, admirable in the extreme ; he went to church

with her, took her to walk in the park in the evenings, and treated her to soda-water and peppermints.

Indeed, Wilson's regard for Miss Nancy had received a new stimulus. Only a day after that call at Mr. Buller's, a young man delivering to Wilson a load of early vegetables, delivered also a message :

“ I say, Mr. Stitt's leg is about well, and he says you won't be wanted to run this stall after the 28th.”

“ All right,” said Wilson, “ I reckoned he'd be mended by this time. Any other news ?”

“ Well, yes ; Peter Gregg has had a 'pleptic fit, and they don't reckon he'll live much longer.”

“ So ! Why, he looked stout as a prize ox !”

“ Yes, too much of the prize ox about him. Doctor says it is his everlasting beer guzzling that did it. I don't reckon he knew how many beers he did take in a day ; at every turn he must have his mug full. They say he ain't going to leave much of anything, an' the widder, when she is a widder, will have to sell

the team and big wagon, the pigs, the cow, and the hay, and go live with her sister Thomas."

"So! Why, I thought Gregg was well off; he had a good route of huckstering."

"Yes, so he did; but the beer spoiled that, too. You see, he spent so much time stopping for beers, and spent quite a pile of money in a month on the stuff, too, and then he was so full all the time, he was sort of forgetful—forgot his orders; forgot to take up eggs and fowls, and vegetables he had engaged; forgot to get his money, let himself get cheated when he couldn't count straight. Land, all's up with him."

"So! How much do you reckon that outfit will sell for, horses and wagon?"

"Dun'no. It will go cheap, for less than it's wuth. Three year ago that wagon cost a hundred and fifty dollars; and four year ago them horses was bought for two hundred. They're strong, and only seven year old, though not partic'lar handsome."

"Nancy's got to buy me that rig," said Wilson to himself, as he helped his clerk-cashier, young Stitt, to store away the vegetables.

And that evening Wilson went home with an offering of asparagus, and began that judicious course of walks, soda-water, and mint-drops, that has been noticed above.

Finally the wedding day came. At six o'clock Nancy's goods were delivered to the freight wagon, and Wilson superintended the loading and gave the driver a card telling where to carry the things.

"Why, that's the wagon that runs west!" cried Miss Nancy. "I thought, Hobart, your place was east."

"This is all right, Nancy," said Wilson hurriedly. "Bless me, how fine you look in that suit!"

"Indeed she do," said the new landlady.

Off now to the minister's house, at half-past seven, and Miss Nancy was a little startled when the minister said, "Eugene, wilt thou take," etc., instead of "Arthur, wilt thou take"—but she was so flurried with her own share in this momentous ceremony, that she passed over that trifle, and scarcely caught the name that followed the Mrs. when the minister shook

hands with her ; it was so queer to be called Mrs. ! Then quietly walking along the streets, not yet very full, to a restaurant for a nice breakfast, and Nancy had never before eaten at a restaurant, and had a black waiter in a big white apron to stand behind her chair.

Finally to Mr. Buller's office, and there Nancy, at the door, handed her husband three one-hundred-dollar bills, and after he had finished his business at the desk, he brought her a paper, the release of mortgage, which she put in her little hand-bag.

To the station next, but they were only on the car about half an hour when the bridegroom said, " Here's our station, Nancy ! "

Nancy looked out. " Why ! This is—
Tiptown."

Her husband smiled mysteriously, and went toward a boy who was in charge of a shabby buggy and a rough sorrel horse. The boy having abandoned this turn-out, Nancy was beckoned and was soon riding along a lovely country road. Was this excellent man about to surprise her with a visit to Cousin Jabez?

A surprise was in store, but not of that fashion.

“Here’s our place,” said her husband; “get out, Nancy; come in.”

He led her through an open door into a room in one corner of which was a bed, wherein an old, very old woman, was propped up against pillows. She regarded Nancy with a malign look, and shrieked, “Who are you?”

Nancy had once seen a turkey-buzzard at work in a field, and this woman, with the bald head, lean, yellow, skinny, bony face; big, hooked nose, filmy eyes, and crooked, horny hands spread out on the quilt, reminded her at once of that ill-favored bird; but Aunt Peggy Loring was by no means as useful, amiable, and well-intentioned an animal, as the much vituperated buzzard.

Not far from the bed was a very large wooden cradle, in which lay two children, one at each end. A girl of seven, dark and tousled, was sitting on the side of Aunt Peggy’s bed, and when she divined that the crone eyed the stranger in gray with disfavor, she rolled her

black eyes wildly at Nancy, and further favored her by running out and wagging a long red tongue. Near the open back door, looking into this room, a washing-tub was placed on a bench, and bending over it, making the white suds fly as she industriously rubbed garments, was a tall, vigorous girl of seventeen. Her light brown, shining hair was piled on the top of her head, while here and there a little puff or ring caught a glint of sunshine through the vines above her, and became golden; the face above the tub of clothes was warmly flushed with the pink of the trailing arbutus, and the white, full throat, rising out of the blue calico dress, looked like that lingering rift of snow against which sometimes the first arbutus blooms. The big brown eyes, turned from the work in hand toward Nancy, were full of surprise and half scorn, while the whole beautiful face, firm lips, full chin, hardened and set, into what seemed a white heat of anger.

A boy hoeing in the garden, ran to the window and looked in, resting his elbows on the sill, and his chin on the palms of his hands.

A larger boy of fourteen, bearing a singular likeness to "Arthur Wilson," followed the newly-arrived to the front door, where he disposed himself with his legs crossed, and his hands in his pockets, bracing up the doorway after the fashion of a caryatid.

This grouping of many was accomplished in a moment, and as Nancy gazed about bewildered, her husband hanging his head, and avoiding meeting her eyes, gave a chuckle, remarking :

"Make yourself at home, Nancy ; here's your home, and here's your family, ready-made, you see ; hope you'll like 'em."

"Have you married her?" screamed the old woman. "Do you mean to say, Eugene Loring, that you've gone and got another wife? Well, she sha'n't stay. I'll turn her out. This place is mine, mind you, and I've got papers to show it!"

A terrible sickness and dizziness seized Nancy ; she sat down, because she trembled so that she could not stand. Her voice faltered piteously, as she demanded :

“Isn't your name Arthur Wilson? Have you been married before? Are these your children? Have you deceived me? Why did you deceive me?”

“I was afraid you wouldn't take me, if I said I had seven children and a bed-ridden aunt to see to, my dear,” and he laughed, that low, mocking giggle again.

“A false name!” screamed Aunt Peggy, “then 'tain't a real marriage, and she ain't no real wife, so she can start. Git out, I say, you homely, yellow thing, git out or I'll throw a pillar at you!”

The young laundress now stepped to the front. Erect, stately, her sleeves rolled to the shoulder from her round, smooth, firm arms, the big ticking apron tied closely over her blue frock revealing the strong, supple lines of her vigorous figure, she looked not an unworthy antagonist for any one, and the “head of the family” seemed to cower and shrink, and look meaner as her fearless, frank youth contrasted him.

“Eugene Loring, what did you marry for,

when my mother has not been six months in her grave?" Thus the Juno of the tubs.

"Eugene Loring!" whined the man, "there it is again. Can't you say father, as you used to?"

"No, I can't. I said it, as a child, from imitation and then to please my poor mother. You know I never said it since she died! Why have you married so soon, I say?"

"If I have, Miss, your mother showed me how. Didn't she marry me before your father had been dead eight months? How much older are you than Liane?" Thus Loring, picking up courage.

The girl flushed crimson, her weapons being thus turned against herself.

"Well, she repented it every day she lived—and this woman will. And he never told you about these, did he?" and thus interrogating Nancy, the young Juno waved her arm with grace toward the family group.

Nancy shook her head. All the wrath of which her meek soul was capable was seething within. Honest as Nancy was, lying she de-

spised, and she looked at her deceiver with a rising of loathing. A swift programme of action rose before her. She could have the wagon load of goods sent back to the city ; she could go back herself on the evening train ; she could recommence her life of vest-making, and in some part of the city where she was unknown she could open a little boarding-house as before. She had still three hundred dollars. But as she thought of this escape, she remembered that but a few hours before she had taken solemn vows, "For better or worse." This was worse with a vengeance, but would it dispense her from her vows? "Until death do you part," she had pledged herself to that. If she abandoned her new position as wife, could she feel that the act was smiled on by her God? Would the blessing of God follow her? Nancy was a thoroughly religious woman ; she believed that the hand of God led His people in all the devious ways of this earthly life ; she had asked His blessing on her marriage, not realizing that in its inconsiderate haste it had placed her rather in the line of correction than in that of

benediction. Possibly this strange disappointment was part of God's plan for her, and would bring her blessing, she said to herself.

And here Nancy was right, for trials bravely borne always tend to our benefit, and by our errors we may rise to higher things. A little pride entered into Nancy's hasty considerations. Could she bear her few friends to know that she had left her husband on her wedding day? Her minister had put it in the paper that she was married, and what would he or others say, if she were found living alone, stitching at vests? True, this was hard to be borne, this deception, this big, ready-made family! But still there was a certain dignity and honor in being a stepmother, and perhaps some of this numerous family, eyeing her now with evident hostility, could be won to like her. In her lonely, heart-empty life, Nancy had so longed for some one to cherish, and her tender heart had turned very warmly to this deceiver. How far had he deceived her finally? Here was the house; she saw the bee-hives by the wall, the garden, the well, the vine-hung little trellis

porch. How far had he gone in his deception? She looked at him, "Did you marry me under a false name?"

"No, I didn't, Nancy. I gave my true name—Eugene Loring. Didn't you hear the parson call me Eugene? And that's the name that will be in your certificate and in the marriage notice."

So far so good, but unluckily Nancy pursued her interrogations.

"You said—you loved me. Did you marry me just for my money?"

Loring, like other weak people, was irritable; he snapped out: "Suppose I did? You don't think I married you for your good looks, do you?"

Nancy turned white as the foam on the wash-tub, and the young Juno, suddenly laying her pink, water-wrinkled hand on Loring's shoulder, said fiercely:

"See here, Eugene Loring; no one expects you to behave like a gentleman, but, all the same, you need not be a brute."

"Money! money! Has she money?" scream-

ed the old woman in the bed. "Is she rich, Eugene?"

"No, but she has paid the mortgage on the house."

"Paid the mortgage and got a release? Where is the paper? Give it to me; this is my house."

"Hush up! It is not your house, it is mine; and all the right you have is to stay here till you die, and you're taking your time about that," retorted Eugene, and went out at the back door with an angry fling.

"Violante!" shrieked the old woman; "bite her, kick her, do you hear me!" It was as if she was setting a dog on an intruder. Violante bounced from the bed.

"Violante," said the tall girl, "if you do one thing that your Aunt Peggy tells you to, I'll switch you well."

Violante climbed back upon the bed and treated her new stepmother to further wagging of her tongue.

But now a pair of plump, rosy hands grasped the sides of the cradle, and the awakened baby

made vigorous efforts to pull itself up. Nancy saw the little head rising above the pillow—a round, dimpled, pink, blue-eyed, baby face; a bald head; a pretty, smiling, toothless mouth; a real, typical, dainty, darling, baby face—looking straight at poor Nancy and remarking, “Mam, mam, mam’a.”

Of all things in the world Nancy adored babies; even dirty and homely babies were enticing, and this one was clean, and fresh, and beautiful as a June rose! She was its step-mother in spite of them! She had a right to this baby! She put her hat and gloves on the table, went to the cradle, and bent to take up the child, saying, “Oh, you lovely darling!”

When she came near the cradle she saw that the other child, a pathetic, weakly creature of three, was much deformed; her thin, twisted legs were paralyzed, and her back was crooked. She, too, was very clean, and pretty but for her deformity and emaciation—a wan, patient thing that melted all the ice which her below-zero reception had begun to freeze about Nancy’s

heart. She smiled at this child. Nancy had a benevolent, honest smile.

"Oh, I want some one to hold me like my mamma did," plained the little unfortunate.

"Be patient, Seraph!" cried Juno, hurrying to her tub; "sister will hold you by and by. Violante! come here and lay these rinsed clothes on the grass; quick, now!"

Nancy revised her intentions, bolstered up the baby, and took into her arms the older child, placing her comfortably, and slowly rocking to and fro.

"I likes this," sighed the child contentedly; "and I likes to be outdoors, under the sky and trees."

"Long, long ago I knew a little girl like you, and she had a little hammock, and a wheel-chair, and could stay outdoors all day," said Nancy.

Here Loring came in angrily. He gave a shrug as he saw how Nancy had established herself, but shouted:

"You, Reub! you've let a board get off the pen, and the young pigs are off up the road. I've a mind to flog you!"

"You'd better spell able first," retorted the boy in the doorway. "You'll put in your time better if you go for the pigs."

"Pigs up the road?" cried the boy who was looking in at the window. "I'll go for 'em," and he was off.

"And, Ellice, what's 'come of the eggs? The nests are empty, and there's not many chickens."

"Violante has been up to her old tricks, gathering them to sell for morphine for her Aunt Peggy," said Ellice.

"Don't switches grow about here, that you couldn't stop her? I'll give her a taste of one now."

But Miss Violante, hearing her doom, dashed to an apple-tree, and being active, lithe, and light, was soon out of reach among the topmost branches.

"Where's Liane?" was Loring's next demand.

"Gone to live with Mrs. West and learn millinery. She says she won't come back; she can't stand her Aunt Peggy another day," said Ellice, washing zealously.

Loring flung angrily out of the gate, and went down the road.

“Off for the Corners, where he’ll sit drinking beer all day,” said Reub; “but I say, Ellice, if you can’t stop Violante’s gathering the eggs for Aunt Peg, I will.”

“It’s all one,” said Ellice, working away, “whether the eggs pay for your aunt’s morphine or your father’s beer. You see what it is, Reub—beer, and chloral, and morphine, and ale, and opium—nice way to spend cash, and our eggs ought to bring in money.”

“Why don’t you save the eggs and buy this poor child a nice, easy hammock, so she can swing out under the trees, and not lie hour after hour in a hot cradle?”

Thus Nancy, intervening in family affairs.

“Well, upon my word!” cried Reub.

“Reub,” said Ellice, “pour the boiling water over the clothes in that tub, and then put them through the rinse water and have Violante lay them out; it is late.”

She did not answer Nancy, but when she looked toward her that scorn and hardness were

gone out of the beautiful face. Nancy felt encouraged.

“I’d help you,” she said, “only I have on my best dress.”

“I don’t need help,” said Ellice; “but if you can get the baby his feeding bottle; it is in the buttery over there, in a dish of water. It’s his time to eat.”

Nancy carried Seraph into the buttery; it was clean and cool, and not unprovided.

When Reub had finished his work with the clothes, and Ellice was starching little calico gowns and aprons, and a hammering from far proclaimed that the other boy was mending the pig-pen, Reub came for Seraph, saying he would carry her about the garden. She went off clinging to his neck as if she loved him.

“Can’t I get dinner for you, it is twelve?” said Nancy to Ellice.

“I have soup on the stove, and Indian pudding and potatoes in the oven; you can set the table. As you have come to stay you might as well do as you choose.”

CHAPTER IV.

NANCY FINDS AN ALLY.

“Little white cottages all in a row,
Gardens where bachelors’-buttons grow;
Swallows’ nests in roof and wall,
And up above the still blue sky,
Where the woolly-white clouds go sailing by.”

THE clothes were on the grass and the lines; the tubs were put away. Ellice pulled down her sleeves, hung up her big apron, shook the wrinkles out of her blue calico gown, set in order the little ruffle at her throat, and arranged a dinner neatly on a tray for Aunt Peggy. As she tied a towel about the old woman’s neck she said calmly :

“Remember, if you go to throwing dishes, I will give you your food in a tin pan for a week.”

“You wicked girl!” said Peggy. “Your mother never acted so.”

“My mother stood a good bit more from you than ever I will,” retorted Ellice, taking her place at the table.

It was a good dinner, and through door and window came the lovely country sights and odors that Nancy’s soul delighted in. All the years of her exile in the city had been years of longing to go back to the fields and the woods; her savings had been made in the hope of being able at last to return to die in the country. The wholesome meal and the fair surroundings of her new home cheered her not a little. But where was her husband?

“Won’t your father be here to dinner?” she said to Ellice.

“He is not my father; my name is Ellice Ward. No; he is down at the Corners, idling, bragging, and drinking.”

When the active Ellice had sent the boys to work in the garden, and Violante to weed the beets and onions, she cleared away the dinner. Nancy meanwhile rocked Seraph to sleep, and now at last had a chance to cuddle the baby.

“What is the dear little fellow’s name?” she

asked Ellice, who had taken her place by the doorstep with a basket of mending.

“Angiolino,—it means little angel.”

“Well, it just suits him,” said Nancy, admiring the “tender, pink, five-beaded baby-soles,” the fat, aimless arms, the life and rollicking fun in the baby’s eyes.

At last he, too, fell asleep, and was laid in the cradle.

“The country freight wagon is to bring my things about three o’clock,” said Nancy to Ellice; “will there be any place to put them?”

Her quiet kindness, springing from a simple, unselfish heart, was disarming Loring’s step-daughter.

“I might as well show you what there is of the house,” she said, putting down her work. “You’ve seen the kitchen and buttery and this room”—she opened a door, “I suppose this will be your room, it is his.”

A rag carpet, a chair, a bed and a washstand, paper curtains rolled up over the two windows, that was all; but the room was large, had the afternoon sun, and looked upon the beautiful

old-fashioned garden, where box, roses, fleur-de-lis, and peonies were all abloom, with plentiful promise of fox-glove, pinks, sweet-william, and hollyhocks to follow.

“Mother and I always kept up the garden,” said Ellice.

Up-stairs there were two rooms, with low, crooked ceilings, and windows in the roof; and there was a little loft over the kitchen.

“The boys have that room; I have this, with the two babies; Liane and Violante had the loft, but now Violante has it alone. Liane has gone, and she did well to go where she could learn some trade. She needs to earn money, we are so dreadfully poor. I should have been glad to go, this last four years, but mother needed me, and now I cannot leave the children. I care for them, especially for Seraph and Angel, and Jason.”

The rooms and the loft were bare enough; a braided mat on the floor, a box draped in calico to serve as a table, a chair and an old post bedstead in each, that was all, but Nancy noted that the bed-clothes were whole and clean.

She stood meditating while Ellice waited.

"I was just studying it out," Nancy said. "I have always had to be on the jump, and unless I had planned beforehand I could never have got on. I am thinking where to put the things. They're not very nice, but they will make all the rooms look better, if you will let me put them where I like."

"I sha'n't interfere," said Ellice indifferently.

When they returned down-stairs the freight wagon with its big, round, white canvas top was in sight, slowly coming up the road, Eugene Loring following it.

Eugene had been several hours at the Corners drinking beer and bragging. But while he had been in charge of Stitt's market-stall, and boarded with Miss Nancy, he had been forced to take far less than his usual quantity of beer, and after this partial abstinence he found that he could not drink so much as he had formerly taken. He had sat boasting of marrying a woman with money; of having paid off the mortgage on his place; of intending to buy Peter Gregg's wagon and horses and take his

round of trade. In return, he had been treated to an account of Peter Gregg's illness, death and funeral, and some amazing pathological statements about the havoc wrought by beer in Peter Gregg's body, and Eugene, who was always in anxiety about his own health, began to feel squeamish.

The sight of a big white wagon-top had afforded a diversion. "There's my goods! I must go help unload."

Therefore he came up when the wagon did, full of high spirits and officiousness; called the boys and Violante to come carry in "their mother's things," and said effusively to Nancy, "Now, my dear, have it all your own way; boss the job, tell us where to put the duds."

Nancy was both slow to wrath and easily placated. The children made grimaces at the word "mother," but as all children delight in a bustle and in meddling, they came to carry in property.

Great improvements were speedily made in the Loring home. A bureau, table, carpet, two chairs, muslin curtains, the counterpane and

pillow-shams transformed the bedroom to such an extent that Violante shrieked admiration, and Aunt Peggy ordered the door to be set wide open, so that she could see the splendors.

“Oh, you’re coming here to set up for a lady, are you!” she cried; “I’ll teach you!”

The room of Ellice received bureau, washstand with bowl and pitcher, a rocking-chair and a stool; the boys’ room had a washstand with drawers, a blue bowl and pitcher, and two chairs. Violante scowled terribly until she saw her room receiving also a stand, bowl and pitcher, a chair, and a breadth of red carpet.

When Eugene had put Nancy’s clock, vases, and a red tray on a long, bare mantle over the fire-place in the family room, and had also bestowed in that room an armchair and a lounge covered with turkey-red calico, he remarked proudly, “Now this looks pretty nice, as nice as when my great-grandfather built the house and moved here; we were ‘some’ in those days, if we are run down now; isn’t that so, Aunt Peggy?”

“You believe it is, and I was born here, and

I wasn't a deformity like that Seraph, nor a lean, yellow, skinny thing like this new woman," quoth Peggy.

"Don't mind her," said Ellice wrathfully to Nancy, "she is possessed of a devil like the people in Christ's time, and no Jesus of Nazareth has come by to cast the evil spirit out."

Then seeing Eugene and Reub bring in a very good sewing-machine, Ellice ordered, "Have that put into your own room," and Nancy obeyed.

Nancy had made up her mind that whatever any one said or did, Seraph and Angel should be her children; she could teach them at least to love her.

Next day she devoted herself to them; washed and dressed them, ironed and mended their clothes, made Seraph a little frock out of some gingham left from her own new gown, and sat out in the grassy front-yard all the afternoon, sewing, with the baby rolling on a folded quilt at her feet, and Seraph pillowed comfortably in the big rocking-chair, wherein years

ago Nancy's mother had "fallen on sleep." Nancy was expecting visitors ; for, in the hilarity of the previous afternoon, she had heard Eugene shout to a passer-by :

"Hi, Moss ! Tell Jabe Long that there's a cousin of his, named Mrs. Loring, living here, and he may call and see her, if he chooses, for all me."

However, no one came.

After tea Nancy took the two babies to Ellice's room and put them to sleep. When she came down-stairs the house was empty, except for Peggy, whose stertorous breathing proclaimed her last dose of morphine. All were gone, and Nancy opening the side gate went slowly up the road. After a little she came to the country burying-ground, its low stone wall draped in a riot of blackberry, rose, smilax, and Virginia-creeper vines. Nancy was very sad and nothing better suited her mood than to turn into the place of graves, where best she could realize how short at longest are earthly cares. As she walked among the low mounds, she came upon a girl kneeling and carefully

tending the plants on a grave. It was Ellice Ward.

Nancy sat down on a fallen stone. "Ellice," she said, "is this your mother's grave? When did she die?"

"January," said Ellice shortly.

"And what of?"

"Of heart-break, over-work, and discouragement!" cried Ellice bitterly.

"Poor soul; she must have been handsome, all her children are so very pretty."

"She was beautiful—once," said Ellice, "but, oh, how she broke down! So many children, no help in raising them but from me; poverty, that fiendish old Peggy, and Eugene Loring, heartless and shiftless."

"Poor soul, poor soul," repeated Nancy, with deep compassion for this life that had been so burdened. "But why didn't she send Mrs. Peggy away, if she was helping to kill her?"

"You needn't think of that," said Ellice hotly. "Peggy has to stay. She is Eugene's great-aunt, and the place was left to her and Eugene's grandfather, and so she has stayed on;

and when she became bed-ridden she signed over her share to Eugene on condition that she was to be taken care of as long as she lives. That's her right, and that's what she calls owning the place."

"How much of a place is it?" asked business-like Nancy.

"Twenty-five acres—worth a hundred dollars an acre."

"And won't you tell me what you live on, so many of you?"

"The two boys get work with the farmers, from October until nearly December, and earn enough for their year's clothing. They sell some nuts, too, from our woodland. From December until April they go to school; then they work on our garden and fields the rest of the time. Reuben is lazy and selfish, just like his father, and would not work at all if I did not lay down the Scripture rule—'If any will not work neither shall he eat.' I can't do that with his father, for he is competent to raise money on mortgages, or by selling what there is on hand. We have five acres in woodland;

that provides fuel, and our two cows and our pigs feed there. The cows are very good black Holsteins, and I sell some butter, and have all the milk we need. Sometimes I sell a little milk and cream. Every fall we have about twenty turkeys, as many fowls, and three pigs for sale, and generally a yearling. Our garden gives us plenty of vegetables for the year round, and there are cherries and currants for sale, and parsley, mint, thyme, and sage. I have apples for our use all winter, and we have some other fruit trees that give us fruit for eating and enough also to dry. The five acres nearest the house we use for ourselves; two are in hay, one in potatoes, and two in corn. We have corn for our cows, pigs, and fowls, and all the cornmeal we use; potatoes for the year, and enough sorghum for molasses for ourselves, and some to trade for sugar. We have a very rich pasture of five acres, with a brook in it, and we take calves and colts to board; we usually have five there, at a dollar a month. The other ten acres are fine wheat land, and we rent it for wheat, rye, or oats to a farmer, for cash or on shares.

If Eugene Loring would work like a man he could lay up money out of the place. Instead of that, he idles and drinks. My mother was a splendid manager, very beautiful and good."

Ellice was sitting on the ground as she talked, one arm thrown over her mother's grave as if to protect it from the intrusion of Nancy. When she had taken breath for a minute, she went on :

"Mother was a good dressmaker and she always did a little at that, and she and I made overalls and carters' frocks for the store ; but about a month after she died Eugene carried off the sewing-machine to pay his beer and tobacco debt at the Corners, and since then I haven't been able to sew for the store, and have had to make the children's clothes by hand."

"Sold the machine!" cried Nancy, to whom this seemed an awful sacrilege, for her machine, tea-kettle, clock, and work-basket were her Lares and Penates.

"Yes ; and that's why I told you to put your machine in your own room, or it would walk off some night as hers did," said Ellice.

“I'll see to it. It is a good machine ; you shall use it all you want to.”

“When mother was first married, Eugene did not drink so much, and worked pretty well. For the last six years he wants to spend half his time at the Corners drinking beer, smoking, and gossiping. Reub is following in his ways, and spends part of what he earns on things no boy should have.”

Nancy nodded ; she understood. She had lived in the city and viewed boys through her window, as she sat stitching vests—cigarettes, beer, and petty gambling. She had seen boy after boy destroyed by them, just as he was growing into a man !

“Still Reub has some good in him,” said Ellice ; “he really loves poor little Seraphina. Jason is a splendid boy—honest, steady, a hard worker, a good manager, like mother, but not much at books. Violante is a little wretch, hand-in-glove with old Peggy, has no heart, and is selfish beyond words ; afraid of nothing, crafty as you can imagine ; she steals the eggs and sells them at the drug-store for morphine or

opium for Peggy. The lies that child tells are amazing! She is her father out and out. Liane went to school until a year ago—she is past fifteen; since then she has done the housework, while mother and I sewed. Liane don't care much for the family; she is real bright and lively; likes dress and nice things better than people; looks a little like both her parents, so she is very pretty indeed, and I am glad she has gone to learn millinery and dressmaking over by the station. We live on from hand to mouth, while if Eugene would do market gardening we might have plenty; the boys need some one to lead them and help them. You see we have the taxes, and a little insurance on the house, and some repairs to meet; the buildings are very old."

"And there is sewing to be had at the store? and a little dressmaking? I could do that. I make all my own clothes, and am a first-class vest-maker. All my life I have worked hard and saved close, and I can yet. Seems as if one would not mind work in this lovely country air, with the nice, fresh, country food! That

dear little Seraph ought to have plenty of things she hasn't—a hammock, a wheel-chair, a large baby-carriage to be drawn about in, some picture-books, and toys. She looks so mournful lying there with nothing to do!" cried Nancy.

"Mother spoke of those things; but for five or six years mother was so broken down and discouraged, and there were so many babies."

"Yes, I see; but now I mean to do for this poor little child. She never will be like other folks; she will need more money and comforts than the rest, and I mean to get them for her," said Nancy earnestly.

"I believe," said Ellice, "that you are a good woman."

Nancy was silent. Presently Ellice took her arm from the grave and laid it instead on Nancy's lap.

"See here," she said, "there are two ways for us to get on. We might be enemies and quarrel."

"No, we mightn't," said Nancy, "for I can't quarrel."

"Neither could my mother. That is what

makes me a fighting character. I had to begin early to defend her and myself; and I see I'll have to defend you, or you'll be walked over. So, shall we be friends? You'll help the children, and I'll help you."

"Oh, will you?" cried Nancy gratefully; "and you will not keep Seraph and Angel from liking me?"

"They'll like you; and for the rest, though we have more debts than revenues, no doubt we shall get on. And you paid the mortgage? Did you know Eugene borrowed that three hundred on the place to invest it in a patent gate that was to make his fortune? He always wants to make money in some way without work. He never made a cent out of that gate."

The next day Nancy was sitting under the trees, Seraph propped up in the big chair, and the baby kicking, bottle in hand, on his quilt, when Cousin Jabez dismounted from a big plow-horse at the gate. Nancy flushed as she went to meet him.

"How is this, Nancy?" cried Cousin Jabez.

“I warned you not to marry; and you’ve not only taken a husband, but a ready-made family of a dozen or so.”

“Only seven, unless you count Mrs. Peggy,” said Nancy. “Perhaps the children will make it all the better. I like children, Cousin Jabez.”

“You need to, among this lot. Nancy, why did you deceive me? Didn’t I tell you this Eugene Loring was an idle, false, guzzling, no-account, vain rascal?”

“Cousin Jabez, I did not deceive you. I did not know you meant the man I have married, and——”

“Hoh, then, Nancy, the scoundrel lied to you!”

“Cousin Jabez, I have married him,” said Nancy firmly, “and it will not make matters better to speak of his faults; and you don’t see all that is good in him.”

“No, I didn’t bring a telescope or a microscope, or whatever it is you look with for things too small to be seen. Nancy, you’ve made a bad job of it.”

“Perhaps not, Cousin Jabez; and besides,

it is done, and now I must make the best of it."

"I see how it is. He got all your money away from you."

"No, indeed," cried Nancy, "I have half of it still!"

"Oh, half? He has been generous. Well, Nancy, I'm more sorry than I can tell you, so is Loviny; but what is done is done, and keep it in mind that me and Loviny will stand by you, and whenever you need any advice, or help, send for me, my name is Jabez Long."

"You are very good, Cousin Jabez, but I think I won't need any more help than I can get from Ellice Ward; she and I are friends."

"Oh, you've made friends with Ellice, have you? So, you'll get on perhaps. Ellice is a girl in a thousand. It is a main shame she has had to slave away here without getting educated, and able to do well for herself. Her father was Loviny's second cousin; he would have got on in the world only he died so young. Splendid man, Harry Ward. Poor Ellice, she

has paid dear for her mother's folly in being beguiled by Eugene Loring's good looks and slick tongue. Confound the rascal!"

"Cousin Jabez, if you please," protested Nancy.

CHAPTER V.

A WOMAN'S RIGHTS.

Another round, another round
Of labor thrown away,
Another chain of toil and pain,
Dragged through a tedious day."

"HELLO!" cried a shrill, mocking voice, "seems to me you're coming on here; father's at work in the corn-field, and Seraph and Angel, it appears, are set up with a child's nurse. Have we come into a fortune by any means, Ellice?"

"Hush, Liane," said Ellice, to whom, sewing by the window, these remarks were addressed, "it is as well to be kind."

"Kind! I care more for my mother than to be fawning on a woman who has walked so soon into her place."

"I showed my love for my mother by helping her faithfully while she lived, and caring for her children after she died," said Ellice angrily.

"It makes small difference to me how things go here," said Liane, "I shall never live here again. Sitting outdoors and tending babies for effect, isn't she? Before long she will be boxing their ears!"

"She is a good woman," said Ellice; "come, Liane, you had better get pleasantly acquainted with her."

Liane shrugged her shoulders. "Mortal homely, isn't she?" she said, peering through the branches of a rose-bush growing before the window.

A cackle of laughter and a "So she is! So she is!" from the corner, caused Liane to turn her eyes to Mrs. Peggy's bed.

Her attention thus diverted to the room, she noticed the red chair and lounge, and the articles on the mantel. "Ho! You've been fixing up here," she cried.

"They are her things," said Ellice.

Liane opened the bedroom door and looked in. "Quite scrumptious—for herself; but, of course, the rest of you are up in the bare garret, same as ever. That reminds me, I left a pair of

gloves on a rafter in my garret, and I am going up for them."

Ellice heard her passing from one renovated room to another. Presently she came down swinging her recovered gloves by the thumbs. "Well, we are fine," was all she said.

"Stay home, Liane," said Peggy, "you and Violante together would make the new woman's life miserable!"

"Violante is a regular scandal," said Liane laughing.

Nancy, finding that her eldest stepdaughter did not intend to come and speak to her, took the initiative by coming to the house herself.

"This is my sister Liane, Nancy," said Ellice.

"Happy to make your acquaintance," said poor Nancy, in set phrase, greatly embarrassed.

Liane curled her lips scornfully. "You may count me out of your responsibilities—I sha'n't live here any more. You must have been badly off for a family, to be willing to undertake eight."

Nancy looked so confused that Ellice ex-

plained, "Poor soul, she didn't know there were any."

"What!" screamed Liane. "Did dad play off bachelor? Never told her about this raft of children? Oh, how she must have looked when she saw them. I wish I had been here to see it!" She went into peals of laughter.

Nancy ran into her bedroom and sat down to cry. Violante, weeding onions as usual, came to the window and made faces at her.

Unfriendly as Violante's appearance was, when Nancy looked at her red, moist, dirty face and dirty hands, and considered that she was but seven years old, and that Ellice kept her working all the time as a means of moral regeneration, she pitied her.

"Violante," she said, "if you'll run, wash and brush, nice and clean, I'll give you something out of my trunk to play with till dinner."

"I don't believe you will," said Violante, but went to wash, nevertheless.

Nancy took from her trunk a sheet of tailors' fashion-plates, and went into the next room. Liane was gone.

"Don't mind Liane, she'll come round after a while," said Ellice.

"I don't mind," said Nancy, whose red eyes contradicted her assertion. "Will you let Violante play until noon? I think she works too hard for such a little thing."

"If she don't work she'll be into some badness," said Ellice; "but all right, have her do just what you choose."

The fashion-plate and a pair of scissors, with an account of how some of Miss Nancy's little city neighbors had played paper dolls, made Violante very peaceable until Ellice called her to set the dinner-table.

At dinner Eugene sighed much, held his head low and pressed his forehead with his hands, as if in great pain.

"What is the matter, Mr. Loring?" asked Nancy anxiously; she really cared for this man.

"I have worked very hard," moaned Eugene, "and I have gone without my usual tonic. My doctors have all told me to use beer, Nancy, but as you object to it, why, I shall give it up; but I feel very weak."

“ Eat your dinner, that will be a better tonic ; there is no strength-giving in beer,” said Ellice.

“ Indeed there is. A glass of beer has all the value of a loaf of bread.”

“ Then,” said Jason, “ what is the sense of taking fifteen or twenty loaves of bread a day ? ”

“ Beer is not nutritious,” said Ellice, “ and besides that, it is hurtful ; it has a great many harmful and poisonous things in it, and they are harming you. I can remember when you took very little beer, and you were not sighing and groaning, and telling how sick you felt. Just in proportion as you have used more beer you have complained more of being sick and not able to work.”

“ Beer killed Mr. Gregg, everybody says so.” Thus Jason.

“ Well,” admitted Eugene, “ there are some folks that beer does not agree with. It makes them fat and full-blooded, and apoplectic ; cucumbers don’t agree with some folks, and other folks can’t eat potatoes. If I found beer making me red and bloated, as it made Gregg, I’d know enough to stop using it.”

"It hurts you in another way," said Ellice, "it makes you weak, and encourages you to be lazy. You learn to depend on a brief stimulus; it has a bad moral effect, too, it makes you selfish and irritable."

"Well, you are a nice girl to talk," said Eugene; while Nancy looked greatly distressed.

Jason spoke up: "You've tried your beer ever since I can remember, and it hasn't done you any good. Suppose you give the other way a fair chance, and swear off for a year. Then we'd make the place pay, instead of always running behind."

"There is a way I can see that will make plenty of money, and keep me from needing or wanting my beer, and be the making of all of us," said Eugene; "and it all depends on Nancy, whether I can do it or not."

"I'm sure," said Nancy eagerly, "I'll help you all I can."

Ellice looked cloudy and suspicious.

That evening Eugene sat down by Nancy on the doorstep, saying:

“Nancy, you can do me a great favor, and be the making of me, if you will.”

“How can I?” asked Nancy.

Ellice came and took her place near them.

“What are you here for, Ellice?” said Eugene.

“To listen,” replied Ellice calmly.

“Nancy,” said Eugene, turning his back on Ellice, “in four weeks Gregg’s things are to be put up at a vendue. If I could get his wagon and horses, I could take his route, and make a fortune ; truly I could.”

“What at ?” asked Nancy uneasily.

“Why, you see, he gathered up market stuff, in its season, between here and the city, and took it to the marketmen, and made good money all the year. Spring he had early vegetables, and then chickens, new potatoes, eggs, butter, fruit ; and then summer produce, and fall vegetables and fruit, and fowls, geese, turkeys, sausage, head-cheese, souse, cottage-cheese, apple-butter. Oh, I know it all, I know the prices, I’m a first-rate buyer and salesman ; you know that, Ellice ; else why did Stitt get me to

run his stall when he fractured his leg in two places?"

"Yes, you are a good salesman, if you'd stick to it," said Ellice.

"And why won't I stick to it? This is just the thing I need. Nancy can see that farm work is too hard for me, and I hate it; but this riding about, buying and selling, that is brainy work, and just suits me. I'd get rich at it."

"Gregg didn't," said Ellice.

"He might have," urged Eugene.

"Yes, only for beer. And it would be the same story with you."

"No, it would not. I'll swear off. I'll take a pledge. If I can have this work I like, honest true, Nancy, I will not drink a glass, if I die for it. I'll work like a man."

"Why don't you try it, then?" said Nancy.
"I wish you would."

"It's just here, Nancy; cash down is wanted for the outfit, and I haven't any money. If you'd lend me two hundred dollars to buy the team and wagon, I'd be the best fellow you ever

saw in the world. And I'd pay you back, some every month. Just a loan, Nancy !”

Nancy's heart sunk. That money was as part of her life, painfully earned and saved, dollar by dollar. Ellice spoke up :

“ You've had half her money already.”

“ It is the same as an investment ; she has her share of the house.”

“ Not any more than she would have if she had not paid a cent of mortgage,” said Ellice.

“ Nancy, you listen to me. If you let me have that two hundred dollars, it will be the saving of me. I am drinking too much, but that will be the way to wean me from it. If you'd trust me so much, Nancy.”

“ Two hundred is a deal of money, Nancy,” said Ellice ; “ don't do it.”

Nancy hesitated. Was this a chance to save Eugene from himself ?

“ Is it really a good bargain and a good business, Ellice ?”

“ The bargain is good enough, and so is the business,” said Ellice ; “ but it is the man that is not to be depended on !”

"It is my right to help the man," said Nancy. "Eugene, if you will promise to give up your beer, and attend to business, I will go to the vendue with the money, and you can bid on the team and wagon ; but not over two hundred."

"Seems to me, Nancy, your rights are rather costly," said Ellice.

"Queer, isn't it," said Reub to Ellice, "that the missus can be so fooled by the dad. He tells her that he is out in the evenings asking for trade for his truck wagon ; and all the time he is at the Corners, and comes home chewing cloves."

"My lad," replied Ellice, "you'll run a much shorter course than your father, as you have begun earlier. Where are you in the evenings ? And why do you chew cloves ?"

Perhaps Nancy was not as much deceived as she appeared to be ; there were various means of enlightenment. Coming down-stairs after putting the babies to bed, she saw through the open door of her room Eugene busy searching the pockets of her dresses. He had not heard

her soft tread, and intuitively she realized that he was searching for her purse, or the key of her trunk. But the purse was in the trunk, and the key hung by a string about her neck ; for Ellice had begged her to be careful in this matter, as Mrs. Peggy incited Violante to pilfer to get morphine for her. Very likely behind this hint about Violante, lay the fear of Eugene, and perhaps Nancy realized it. Her heart sunk as she saw what her husband was doing, and she stole softly back up-stairs. It was a comfort to sit down by the bed there, and hold the hands of the little children, to note the baby's beauty and caress Seraph's saintly, sad little face. Children are the best human comforters of sorrow-laden women.

Nancy had felt so happy that evening ; Eugene had been very flattering, and better still, she had concluded a trade with Mrs. Evans, a neighbor, giving her a kitchen safe with tin doors, in exchange for a big, strong baby carriage ; the safe was one Nancy had long owned, and the baby carriage would do for Seraph for several years.

"How much money have you, Nancy?" asked Ellice, as they two were washing dishes next morning. "I mean here in the house."

"Ten dollars nearly," said Nancy. "I had eight from the sale of some of my goods when I left town, and I have earned two, making two calico frocks for Mrs. Evans."

"You'd better hide it well. I saw Eugene taking a wax impression of your trunk key-hole."

Nancy dropped the dish-cloth and went out on the back porch. There seemed to be no place for her anywhere. She felt implicated in this man's shame, and she dreaded to look Ellice in the face; in the front room was old Peggy with her mocking eyes and taunting tones, and the old colored woman who came in the morning to dress Peggy, make her bed, and prepare her for the day. Peggy was very resentful that the doctor had positively ordered this hired attention for her, and the dimes which it represented out of her little income, she regarded as so much lost money. Ellice finished the dishes and came out on the porch, as if nothing had happened.

"Nancy, suppose I lay out a dinner for the boys and Eugene, and we take the babies in the wagon you bought for them, and go and spend the day with your cousin, Jabez Long?"

"Yes," said Nancy, brightening, "if Violante can go. I will call her, and dress the babies. Violante needs more fun."

It was a pleasant two-miles walk, and Ellice and Nancy took turns wheeling the little carriage, while her one white frock had put Violante on her best behavior. They were in sight of the Longs' chimneys, when Cousin Jabez joined them, coming from a field where he had been at work.

As they neared the house, "There he is! There's Tomsey!" cried Jabez, pointing to a wee fellow in the doorway. He was supported on crutches, and his face was almost as wan as Seraph's, but singularly happy.

Just within the door, in a big chair, sat a white-haired, very old woman, with a placid face, peace seeming to be written on the gently smiling lips, and folded hands. Her black gown,

white soft shawl, white cap, were marvels of neatness, and she was good to see.

"There is dear old Grandma Bent!" cried Ellice. "What a contrast she always looks to Peggy."

"It is the contrast between goodness and badness," said Cousin Jabez; "God's child, led by His hand, through all a long life, waiting at the door of heaven; and the forlorn soul that has served self, and forgotten God. And here is Tomsey, Cousin Nancy; he isn't very strong now, but he's coming on bravely, and he'll make a man yet, please God"; Tomsey's mother sighed.

"Such a comfort as this boy is to us, Nancy!" said Cousin Jabez, taking the child on his knee. "How are you coming on to-day, my man?"

"Fine!" cried the small shrill voice.

"That's right. Why, Nancy, when I am in the field, I get to thinking perhaps Tomsey needs me; or maybe Tomsey is sick, and I cannot rest until I come to the house and have a look at him."

Ellice took from her bag a round frosted cake.

“ Oh, one of your nice spice cakes, Ellice !” cried Tomsey, as she gave it to him ; “ thank you !”

“ Why don’t you eat it ?” said his father.

“ I must wait for the boys, to give them some.”

And sure enough soon came the boys, four stout fellows, from three to nine years old, Tomsey’s big, hearty twin heading the band. They came in, their round faces stained with wild strawberries, their fingers streaked with the brown earth.

Tomsey clambered from his father’s knee to divide his cake in the doorway. The others knelt about him.

“ What good cake.” “ Not so much, Tomsey. Don’t give me such a big bite. Little Bobbie, don’t be greedy of Tomsey’s cake.” “ Tomsey, here is such a nice birch stick to chew !” “ Tomsey ! here’s some sas’fras root for you !” “ Tomsey, I got you these flowers.” “ Open your mouth, Tomsey, for these big berries.” “ You can have all my cup of berries, Tomsey ; I got them all for you.”

"Why, how good and generous your children are!" cried Nancy, viewing the group with astonishment.

"It is all owing to Tomsey; they are always so to him. Between themselves they will snatch or dispute, and they may quarrel with their mates, but with him they are always kind. He is a great blessing to them," said Jabez.

"He is a great blessing to us all," said Lovina, his wife. "He and my grandmother sit hand in hand, talking by the hour; he is the joy of her old age. As for me, I never hear the tap of his crutches, but I lift up my heart to thank God that He has left him to me for so long."

Tomsey soon wearied of his noisy mates, who went off to play with Violante, while Tomsey brought his rocking-chair and sat down by Nancy, who was holding Seraph.

"What is that blue ribbon with a charm on it, in your button-hole?" asked Nancy.

"That isn't a charm," said Tomsey, with dignity, "that is our Temperance Society badge. We have a Band of Hope; I'm President."

"Tell us about it, Tomsey," said Ellice.

“There are ten in it, and some are real big, but I’m President. We meet here. When it storms father goes for them in the wagon. If it is warm, we meet under the big apple-tree ; when it is cold, we meet in this room. We have these badges to show we’re Temperance. Wait till I show you the things we have. See this little hammer ? I hit on the table with that if they whisper, and they stop right off ! Here’s the pledge-cards we sign. These other cards are to give to the boy who has the best piece to speak or read, or the most texts to say. Here are our Temperance Speakers—we buy them if we want one ; and do you see these books ? They’re our library ; we change round every week : cost only ten cents each, and they’re such fine stories ! We pay a cent a week ; nickel sometimes, if we’re rich. We buy more books with our money, and we give contribution to the Temperance Society. Once we gave fifty cents to it !”

“Would you let Jason belong to it ?” asked Nancy.

“Course,” said the little President.

"Then I think I will buy him a badge, and a pledge-card, and a Speaker, if you can let me have them," said Nancy respectfully, getting out her purse.

"Nancy, you spend your money for other people all the time," said Ellice uneasily.

"It is my right to do all I can to help Jason on," said Nancy, "and I would so like to have him join this society."

What a pleasant day that was after all, and it ended pleasantly, for Jason signed the pledge-card and tied the blue ribbon of the badge in the button-hole of his Sunday jacket.

Cousin Jabez walked part way home with Nancy, and when he left her he had her pocket-book to keep for her. She also told him of her promise to invest two hundred dollars in the market wagon.

Cousin Jabez shook his head. "The bargain is a fair one," he said, "but if I know Loring, in six weeks he'll tire of his new business and want something else. Take my advice, Nancy, and buy the wagon yourself, in your own name, so he cannot sell it."

“I'd hate to do that,” said Nancy.

“Don't buy him a rope to hang himself with, woman ! This husband of yours is very weak, and you should stand in the way of his destroying himself. You take my advice.”

“Well,” said Nancy reluctantly, “perhaps you know best.”

“He'll value it all the more, if he thinks he cannot get rid of it the first fancy. Beside, how do you know what he might do with the price of it ?”

CHAPTER VI.

HOW NANCY MAINTAINS HER RIGHTS.

“I squander on a barren field,
My strength, my life, my all,
The seeds I sow will never grow,
They perish where they fall.”

“It beats all,” said the dames of the neighborhood, “how Ellice Ward gets on with that new woman ; you would think they were a pair of sisters.”

“It is because she takes so to those two little ones ; I hope it will go on. A new broom sweeps clean.”

But it went on, and there were other grounds for the friendship of Nancy and Ellice than mutual love of Seraphina and Angelino. Nancy considered herself honored by the affection of Ellice ; she thought Ellice the most beautiful girl, and the strongest-hearted, whom she had ever met, and at the same time felt as if she

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owed Ellice an apology for coming into the Loring family.

Ellice, grateful to Nancy for her goodness to the little ones, was deeply impressed by her humble, forgiving, self-sacrificing nature : these were qualities which did not belong to Ellice, and she regarded them with an admiration largely mixed with pitying indulgence. Between the two the relations became more and more confidential.

Eugene had secured the wagon and horses and begun his new business ; Jason was working with all his might, as on his young shoulders seemed to rest the care of the acres farmed by the family.

Nancy had begun dressmaking, and sewing for the store ; and Ellice, using Nancy's machine, was again making overalls and carters' frocks.

" Oh, how tired I am of all this ! " cried Ellice one August day. She dropped the blue-jeans overalls in which she had finished the button-holes, and leaning back in her chair threw her arms above her head. " Nancy ! don't you wish you were back in the city ? "

“No,” said Nancy, sewing very fast, “I don’t like the city.”

“I do,” said Ellice. “I long for it ; I want to live there, and make my way at something better than dish-washing and sewing. Nancy, honor bright, aren’t you sorry you married and came out here ? You were quiet and independent, with no one to bother you.”

“I am not sorry now it is done,” said Nancy. “I am sure I ought to have thought longer, and been more certain of what I was doing, but the life I lived there was more selfish, all for myself, scarcely thinking of any one but Nancy Kimball, except now and then to do a kind turn for a neighbor, or give a little money in my church. The Bible says, ‘None of us lives to one’s self or dies to one’s self’ ; we are much better if we have other people to think for, and do for.”

“Even if they plunder you of all your money ?”

“Yes, even then ; if only one can be more useful. I was very lonesome and had no one to love ; now I love Angel, and Seraph, and you, Ellice, and Jason——”

“And Eugene,” said Ellice; “I believe you care for Eugene.”

“Yes, else I should not have married him,” said Nancy meekly.

“You are making the children better off,” said Ellice, “but if by being useful to the rest, you mean making them better, I don’t believe you’ll ever make anything out of Eugene, or Reub, or Violante.”

“Our minister said that all teaching and living the truth must do good,” said Nancy. “I shall hope and try. But, Ellice, I often think you were made for something better than to live here doing housework.”

“Mother and I began to talk about my going to the city to learn book-keeping, stenography, and typewriting. When I was about thirteen we planned it, and were to save up money for it; but then Seraph came and was so deformed, and then the baby, and poor mother died. If I had tried to leave them, I should have felt as if a spirit stood in my way with a drawn sword, as in Balaam’s. And then—Eugene found the little money we had laid up for it, and took it—

and when I was fourteen I had gone as far as the school here goes, and since then I have studied some with the minister and his wife, until mother died. After that I could do nothing but drudge."

"You must begin your plan again," said Nancy ; "you must stop drudging, and study ; and we must find money to take you to the city to learn the things you wish to."

When Ellice mentioned that Eugene had taken her hoard of savings, Nancy at once felt responsible for its restitution ; she assumed all the debts to the community of this reprobate. As she spoke heartily, she heard the gate-latch click, and there was the minister's wife, Mrs. Hutton, coming in. Nancy made her little stiff, old-fashioned courtesy, and placed a chair, uttering the formula :

"I hope you are quite well ?"

"Yes, thank you, and busy. Ellice, I am re-organizing my study class for girls, which was broken up in the spring. I want you to come ; and Mr. Hutton says you should try and go on with your typewriting ; you can practice on his

typewriter. He is going to teach two or three young folks stenography, one afternoon in a week, if they will get the books. We want you to try it, Ellice. Do not give up your plans for an education."

"I have had to stop it all for lack of time," said Ellice.

"She has time now," said Nancy; "she must take time."

"It is not time alone, Nancy," said Ellice impatiently, "books are needed, and if I am to do any good at it, I should go to the city after a while, and I can't; and if I wanted to hire or buy a typewriter, they cost so much."

"All the same, you can do it," said Nancy stoutly. "I will help you, I ought to help you, I want to; I must lay up the money for you to go to the school in the city!"

"You think you can do a great deal, Nancy," said Ellice in a tone half-bantering, half-affectionate.

"And so I can," maintained Nancy, "I have worked hard all my life; I can yet, I don't mind it."

“And how long did it take to lay up the money we have ‘spoiled you of already?’” asked Ellice.

“But then I had rent and water-rates, and fuel, and food to buy,” argued Nancy. “Ellice shall go on with her education, Mrs. Hutton; I will see to it.”

“You good soul,” said Ellice, laying her arm across Nancy’s shoulders, when Mrs. Hutton had gone, “how do you expect to do it?”

“God will show me how, and help me; He always has,” said Nancy simply.

Here was Nancy’s hidden strength; her child-like trust was the secret of power, the mighty unknown quantity in the problems of her life.

That afternoon Nancy set off early with a package of overalls for the store. From the store she went to the minister’s, and thence on to Jabez Long’s. After a little, Jabez junior, Tomsey’s stout twin, riding an aged family horse, went to Ellice and told her that “Cousin Nancy would not be home until the next evening.”

It was about half-past four next day when

Jabez Long's big market wagon, returning from the city, left Nancy and a number of big parcels at her own door.

"Ellice! Ellice!" called Nancy in great excitement.

Ellice, who was out on the back porch spreading trays of plums and peaches to dry for winter use, ran in.

"I've been to town with Jabez," said Nancy breathlessly. "Here is a typewriter for you! Help me to put it on the side-table! It is paid rent for for three months. Mr. Hutton gave me a note to the man that has them. This one is pretty old, but that made it cheap, and they said it would do just as well to practice on. And here are all the books for book-keeping and stenography, and here is a High School Dictionary, and the books for Mrs. Hutton's class; she told me all what to get. And now, Ellice, you must put in every afternoon and evening on these lessons, and if you'll just study and wait for a year, I know I'll have enough laid up for you to start to the city. A hundred will do it to begin, Mrs. Hutton said."

"Nancy," said Ellice, "I believe you have spent your last hundred dollars."

"No, indeed, I have not touched it. I bought all this with the money Cousin Jabez was keeping. You see, most of the books are second-hand. I'm going to keep my hundred, lest something happens to me, like a fall or getting a fever. I would not want to be a charge to anybody. I mean to earn the money for you, and as soon as you are finished, and get a good place, then I'll lay up money to buy Seraph a wheel-chair."

"Nancy! Nancy!" said Ellice.

She did not know that Mr. Hutton had passed eulogy on this lean and homely woman, that "she was the most complete Altruist he had ever seen"—perhaps neither she nor Nancy would have known what that meant; but her big, beautiful eyes filled with tears, and putting her arms about Nancy, she said :

"Yes, I will get my education with your help, and as long as you live I'll be like a daughter, or a sister to you, like whatever is most faithful."

Nancy's heart was brimming over with happiness. She opened another bundle.

"Things were so cheap in the city I bought each of the children a dress, and that big crooked bundle is for Violante ; that poor child don't have fun enough. Where is she ?"

"Splitting plums. Violante ! wash your hands and come here !" called Ellice. "Your mother has bought you a frock."

"Sh' 'ain't my mother," said Violante, coming in scowling. "That the dress ? Don't like plaid. Sadie Evans has a bran fire-red one. Why didn't you get me fire-red ?"

"This will be real pretty when it's made-up, for you to begin school," said Nancy, looking unhappy at once. "That crooked bundle is all for you, Violante ; untie it."

Violante went down on her knees to tug at the strings. Out came a doll, whose large size and flaming cheeks made it magnificent in Violante's eyes ; its tow hair hanging luxuriantly about its shoulders ; and there was a real doll buggy, a bit small for the doll, but Violante did not notice that, nor that both doll and buggy

had been shop-worn enough to bring them within Nancy's limited means. No, Violante simply shrieked with delight, and when Nancy said, "You and I will dress the doll, and fix up the buggy," Violante shook her fist at old Peggy, and cried :

"See if I steal eggs or make faces for you any more ; Sadie Evans' doll ain't to name with this !"

"I thought she'd learn to sew and crochet, if she had a doll to do for," apologized Nancy to Ellice.

"I might as well go and finish the plums," laughed Ellice.

"You must be made of money, Nancy, to buy all that rubbish," whined Eugene, coming in. "What did you get for me ?"

"She has spent nearly all she had on you already !" flamed Ellice.

Eugene was so angered at the gifts brought to his children that he put his hat on sideways, glared defiance at Nancy, and walked off to the Corners.

"There's the way he keeps his Temperance Pledge to you !" cried Jason.

The open criticism of Eugene by his family distressed Nancy terribly ; she knew it was all wrong, and was injuring the children themselves, but if she ventured a reproof all made common cause against her.

Ellice noticed Nancy's suddenly fallen face and felt sorry for her. "Sit down and rest, Nancy," she said, "I'm going to get the supper, and clear it away."

"Then," said the indefatigable Nancy, "I'll cut out these little frocks, so as to have the pieces for the doll, and Violante and I can begin to dress it right away. Run up to the scrap-bag, Violante, and find some white muslin, and get your needle and thread, and we'll begin a nightgown for the dolly."

After tea, as Nancy and Violante sat sewing on the front porch, Reub came and laid himself down on the step.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Violante.

"I've got a dreadful headache," said Reub gloomily.

"Glad of it ; you slapped me this morning."

"Because you pulled up turnips instead of weeds."

"I'll be glad when school begins, so I don't have to weed and work all day," said Violante.

"I'd be glad of anything for a change. Say, Nancy, is it true that you've got a pile of money?"

"No," said Nancy; "I have hardly any left."

"Thought so; folks with money don't work as hard as you do."

"I'm going to work as hard as ever I can, to earn enough money in a year, for Ellice to go to the city to a commercial college for a while. When she is able to get a book-keeper's place, she can make a good salary."

"Didn't you hate to come back to-day from the city?"

"No, indeed, I like the country much better."

I don't; and I don't mean to stop here much longer. Tell me what you saw down there?"

"I saw some things I have often seen before, and which always make me miserable. I saw

crowds of big boys standing idle on the corners, or at the doors of low theatres. I saw little boys fighting, swearing, playing in the gutters, and learning to be bad men ; and I saw boys and young men crowding the grog-shops, and lounging on the streets, smoking cigarettes."

Violante here buttoned on the doll's finished nightgown, and ran off at the order of Ellice to go to bed.

" Reuben," said Nancy, "you complain about headache, and you are thin and sallow, and look sickly. You are not growing well ; Jason is getting ahead of you. It is all from smoking cigarettes. You may think I don't know, but I do ; I've read, and I've watched boys. Cigarettes make many boys crazy, and they kill plenty of boys before they are twenty. You take no comfort in life if you feel sick and have a headache all the time. Why don't you give up beer and cigarettes ?"

" Why, Nancy, I can't ; I can't live without 'em, 'pon my word."

" But you are only fourteen ! Are you a slave already ?"

“Better believe I am. I’ve smoked and drank beer for six years. Dad thought it was funny when I was eight years old, and showed me off at the Corners. He don’t think it is so funny now ; it takes money, and time too, but I can’t stop ; I’d die if I went without.”

“I’m afraid you’ll die if you keep on. Did your mother like it ?”

“I didn’t let her know it mostly. No, she didn’t like it.”

“Perhaps even now she could know, and be glad if you quit it.”

“Don’t believe it,” said Reub uneasily. “I believe when people die they’re ended and done with ; Pat Evans says so.”

“Don’t you believe the Bible ?” asked Nancy horrified.

“Pat Evans says there isn’t a word of truth in it.”

“But that is only the word of one bad, ignorant man ; Mr. Hutton would tell you that every word is true, and that when people do as the Bible says, then they are happiest and make others happy. I think people say the

Bible is not true because they love the sins the Bible forbids."

"Queer, ain't it," said Reub, "that a pious woman like you married a fellow like dad, that's out and out bad."

"Oh, Reub, you ought not to speak so of your father!"

"Dad isn't ravin' and tearin' bad, because he isn't strong enough to be that; he's a weak kind of a man."

"Then his son ought to help him to be better," said Nancy.

"You can't help him," said Ellice in a bitter tone, coming up behind them.

"God can help him," said Nancy; "and, Ellice, it is not right for the children to speak disrespectfully of their father; the Bible forbids it, and the children cannot be in the way of God's blessing, when they are disobeying God's commands. That is the only thing I see wrong in you, Ellice, that you forget that he is the father of the children, and they should try to think well of him."

"Precious hard work," muttered Ellice,

turning away ; Eugene was her especial aversion.

“ You’ll think less of him pretty soon, Nancy,” laughed Reub ; “ he is getting tired of his new business already, and will be at you to get him something else, and sell the team.”

Nancy feared it ; she sighed ; these children might call her Nancy or “ old girl,” as Reub often did, might make faces at her and torment her, but all this was not so painful to her as their clear-sightedness as to their father’s weakness and vices, and their particular plainness of speech concerning it.

In all these troubles Nancy had certain great comforts ; the undisputed possession of Angel and Seraph, the quiet beauty of the country, the old country fashions. Day by day the memories and methods of her first fifteen years of life came back to her, and proud indeed was Nancy of her achievements in garden and poultry yard, and of her triumphs in butter-making. She was up and around before five in the morning, enjoying the sweet, dewy air, and the awakening stir of country life.

Sometimes it seemed to her that she was awake all night, for Eugene, gathering his load of produce on his return trip in the afternoon should start for the city by three in the morning. But when a man stayed at the "Corners" boozing until ten or eleven at night, how could he be ready to rise before the first gray band of dawn was drawn along the sky? It needed repeated efforts for Nancy to get him out of bed, and then she had to go to the barn and see that he harnessed and started off, or he would lie down on the hay and sleep until seven.

"It is altogether too hard a life for me, Nancy," fretted Eugene when late September brought chilly mornings; "I shall die of it; my side hurts, I have a dreadful cough. I suppose you want to be a widow, so you can take your share out of this place and go back to the city, with more than you ever had, and leave these children to starve! You and Ellice would go off and leave them to the poorhouse! I must live for them, I must get an easier business for their sakes. The doctor says I am dying by inches."

"Quit the Corners, and go to bed at seven, and you'll be all right," said Ellice.

"It rests with you, Nancy, whether I live or die," said Eugene. "I can get a nice, easy, money-making business, if you'll agree."

It came out presently that he wanted to take half share of the grog-shop at the Corners, selling the team and wagon, and giving a note. But, obedient to Jabez Long, Nancy owned the wagon and team, and when it came to selling it to enter as partner in a liquor trade, the soft Nancy suddenly became flint.

"You would have Reuben and Jason ruined!" she cried; "and do you think we should live on such evil-made money? It is the price of souls! I'd die rather than agree to it. Could I look a woman or a child here in the face, if we were living on the ruin of their men folks? No, Eugene, I will not do it."

"Wish I hadn't married such a desperate Tartar!"

"It was bad luck for her that you did!" cried Ellice.

"I'll not be martyred in this huckster busi-

ness to please you," said Eugene gloomily. "I'll help myself if you won't help me. I will go into the 'Corners.'"

So one November day, when the world was all Indian Summer glory, and the lads were husking corn, Ellice came home from her class at Mr. Hutton's, to find a man from the city looking over the house and land. She knew what it meant, she had seen the affair before. It meant sale or mortgage, and when her mother had yielded, Jabez Long had told her what she might have done. She pulled Nancy into the pantry.

"Now, Nancy, if you'll stand by me, I'll stand by you, and we will stop this thing. We can, if you show proper grit. If you yield, Eugene will be a liquor-seller."

They returned to the sitting-room. Eugene had furnished Peggy with plenty of opium, and her claims of ownership were hushed in deep slumber. Papers lay on the table. "I can let you have six hundred on it," said the man to Eugene.

"Very good; I'll sign. Nancy, come here,

and put your name on this line," said Eugene autocratically.

Ellice stepped to the front. "That paper will not be legal unless my mother signs it. She has not only dower right in this property, but really more, for she paid three hundred of her own money on it. Still she only stands for her just third, and you cannot get the mortgage, Eugene, unless she signs—and she won't sign."

"She will, she shall! Nancy, sign as I tell you, quick!"

"Hello! No duress!" cried the business man.

"I won't sign," said Nancy, "not if you kill me; I'll maintain my rights."

CHAPTER VII.

COUSIN JABEZ SPEAKS HIS MIND.

“Toiling, rejoicing, sorrowing,
Onward through life he goes,
Each morning sees some task begun,
Each evening sees it close.
Something attempted, something done,
Has earned a night's repose.”

THE city man having strongly expressed his indignation at being called to look at a property where there was “an insuperable impediment to the placing of a mortgage,” went his way. Then Eugene's wrath burst out at Nancy. “How dare you act so? What right have you to refuse?”

“As much right as any woman could have; she is your lawful wife,” spoke up Ellice.

“Now don't you be putting your oar in,” cried Eugene.

“Eugene, it was for your good—for the children's sake,” pleaded Nancy.

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“And what right have you to interfere about the children? This is what you married me for, to get power over my property.” Then for a fortnight Eugene would not speak to his wife. She lavished cares on him, rose in the middle of the night to get his breakfast, made him a muffler, and the pies which he liked best, but Eugene was obdurate. One night as he tarried at the “Corners” Nancy said, “He will not be fit to start to-morrow if he stays longer. This morning it was all I could do to get him out. Reuben, can’t you go and bring him home?”

Yes, Reuben thought he could. He went, and did not return. “They are both drinking beer, playing cards, and betting on dice,” said Ellice angrily. “I’ll go for the pair of them.”

“No, indeed, Ellice, you shall not go to that den,” said Nancy with unexpected firmness. “Your mother would not have sent you, and I have her to answer to, for all of you children. I oughtn’t to have let Reuben go, knowing his temptations. Come, Jason, you and I will get them.”

Eugene and Reuben were both mild and

biddable when they had been drinking; they obeyed Nancy's summons delivered at the door of the Corners, and came staggering out, the men about the bar laughing as if it were very funny to see a father and his young son intoxicated. They went reeling up the road, stepping high, starting at shadows, and making maudlin remarks, as Jason upheld Reuben, and Nancy steadied the steps of Eugene. As they neared the house singing in high falsetto "Grandfather's Clock," the light in the room of Ellice moved, and when they entered the house door, she was coming down the stairs, in her nightgown and bare feet, holding a candle, which, casting its pale yellow light over her statuesque figure, made her appear supernaturally tall and fair. Eugene chose to consider her the ghost of his late wife, and fled shrieking to his room.

"He will not be able to start in the morning," said Ellice.

"Yes, he will," said Nancy. "I'll bathe his head with cold water, and give him some strong coffee." But at three she appeared at the bedside of Ellice, saying, "I can't wake him up at

all, and the wagon is loaded with things that will spoil."

"Call Jason and he and I will go," said Ellice, rising.

Eugene found it admirable to lie in bed and be waited upon. "Take it all the time, some of you," he snarled—"I don't want the thing, and I won't run it. You just bought it to kill me by overwork and exposure."

The next day Nancy and Jason went, and then came Sunday, which Eugene spent at the Corners. On Monday Nancy and Reuben went to the city with the wagon, but Nancy found Reuben a disastrous coadjutor, and came home nearly worn out.

"I've been to see Mr. Long," said Ellice, "and told him that Eugene had struck work, and we women cannot run the market wagon, and Jason is too young and must go to school. He neither reads, writes, nor spells well, and can't cipher. I told Mr. Long, Eugene had struck to force you to sell the team. He says Timothy Powers, that he's had for nine years, is a good market man. He is a Christian boy,

and has been trained to the markets by Mr. Long ; he will do well for us if we give him wages, or a percentage, and his board. He is nineteen, and owes Mr. Long two years more, but Mr. Long will cancel his indenture now, and make him his own man. The Aid Society wants him to take another ten-year-old boy, anyway. So I told him to send Timothy over to-night. I've made up a bed, with some of your things, in the boys' room."

"Oh, you are a dear comfortable girl," cried Nancy, dropping into a chair ; "I feel completely used up marketing !"

When Eugene found himself outgeneralled, Timothy driving the wagon, and no one coming to hurry him home from the Corners, his anger against Nancy increased. Jabez Long had warned Reuben that if he hung about the Corners drinking and gambling, he would have him arrested and put in a reform school. Eugene considered this "some more of Nancy's interfering." "I'll teach you to let my affairs alone," he said, giving her a slap on the cheek.

Nancy burst into tears.

“Don’t you dare do that again, Eugene,” said Ellice, “or you’ll have me to settle with.” She looked so angry, and so strong, that Eugene stepped back.

“Hit her again ! hit her again ! I like that, and hit Ellice, too !” croaked a voice from the bed.

This encouragement from his Aunt Peggy roused in Eugene a shame which Nancy’s tears and the wrath of Ellice had not evoked. He mumbled something about “forgetting himself,” and hurried away.

“Don’t be afraid, Nancy, he shall not do it again,” said Ellice.

Poor Nancy was not afraid, she was heart-broken. But there were the children. She picked up the creeping baby and hugged and kissed his soft, pretty face, and then sat down to her sewing, with Seraph and her toys close by her side.

It was always a comfort to Nancy to have her Cousin Jabez come to see her. She felt a sense of security not only in his presence, but in the recollection that he felt constant interest

in her welfare and assumed the right of protection. Not that Nancy would ever tell him of her domestic troubles, or make any complaint ; but there still was Jabez, who could give advice if she were driven to ask it. Ellice was not so reticent. Her father had been a relative of Lovinia, Jabez Long's wife, and Jabez was one of those big-hearted folk who claim kin a long way, so that Ellice from childhood had constituted him her court of appeal.

Cousin Jabez could no longer make his calls under the apple and cherry trees ; winter was near, and the world was swept bare of leafage. Nancy was forced to keep herself, her work, and the two babies in the common room, which seemed filled with the uncanny presence of Aunt Peggy. The kitchen was small, and the cooking, eating, washing, and ironing kept it occupied. So in the sitting-room the children played, Nancy sewed, Ellice studied, and the click of the typewriter and the whirr of the sewing-machine seemed never to permit of silence.

Nancy, on the morning after Eugene's out-

break, was cutting out a dress for a neighbor, and her work and patterns were spread on the big table in the centre of the room ; Seraph, propped in the red rocking-chair, played with toys manufactured by Reuben and Nancy ; Angel, just beginning to walk, made his slow way about the room, holding by the wall or chairs ; Ellice, who spent what time she could spare in the mornings in making overalls for the store, was busy at the machine.

No one noticed Peggy, who, after a long, malicious stare at Nancy's lean shoulders, caught the pillow from under her head and whirled it at Nancy. The pillow was of hair, and heavy ; Peggy's arms were strong, and from much practice her aim was better than that of most women. There are plenty of excellent women who could not hit any one with a pillow, even if they tried. The pillow flung by Peggy struck Nancy on the head, and she fell to the floor, striking her cheek against the edge of a chair. As the pillow whirled from Peggy's hand, the door opened to admit Cousin Jabez. Peggy incontinently hid her head under the bed-clothes.

As Jabez hastened to lift up his cousin, Ellice flew at Peggy ; she dragged her from her refuge of quilts, put her head back on the pillow with a motion full of vigor, and remarked :

“ You sinner ; I’ve a mind to shake the breath out of you.”

“ Why can’t I hit her ? ” screamed Peggy ; “ I will hit her ; Eugene did. I saw him ! ”

Here Nancy, who was rubbing her cheek, and telling Jabez that she was not hurt, suddenly sat down and covered her face with her apron, as one greatly ashamed.

“ Eugene struck you ! ” shouted Jabez. “ Did he do that ? ”

“ He—didn’t mean to,” sobbed poor Nancy.

“ He never will again,” said Ellice ; “ I’ll see to him.”

“ No, he never will again, surely. I’ll see to him,” said Jabez grimly. “ Where is the fellow ? ”

“ Down at the Corners, of course,” said Ellice ; “ and, Cousin Jabez, there is more you ought to see to. Neither he nor Reub will get up any wood. The wood-pile is very low ; win-

ter is close by, and we have to keep two fires all the time, and we ought to have three. There is plenty of wood in our lot for hauling and cutting. Jason cannot do it alone; Reub won't work unless his father does, and Eugene says 'he don't care whether we are cold or not; he is warm enough at the Corners.' Eugene is angry because he has not made Nancy give up her last penny, sell the market team, and mortgage the house to buy him a share in the 'Corners'; he wants to feed his family on the flesh and blood of the neighborhood."

Nancy was crying bitterly.

"Oh, Nancy, Nancy!" said Cousin Jabez, "why did you come into this den of wild beasts?" He was thinking of Eugene and Peggy, of Reub and Liane.

Nancy sprung up, sobbed, "Oh, how can you talk so! See Ellice and the babies!" and so fled into her room and shut the door.

"Poor soul," said Ellice ruefully; "she takes real comfort in me and the children. She cares, in spite of all, for Eugene; and even Reub and Violante she would do anything for."

“And Liane?”

“Liane hardly ever comes here; and when she does, she scarcely looks at Nancy or speaks to her. And yet Nancy is planning to take two of Liane's frocks, that are here, and buy some trimming and make Liane a nice suit for a Christmas present.”

“Poor girl,” said Cousin Jabez; “I wish we could make over Eugene and Reub and Liane, for her sake.”

“There's not as good making-over material in them as there is in Liane's old clothes,” said Ellice sharply, going back to her work.

Cousin Jabez went to old Peggy. “See here, my woman, there's a contract to keep you here, and do for you, while you live; but mark you, insanity can step in and invalidate such a bargain. If you are crazy, you must be taken to the crazy ward of the county house; and nobody but a crazy woman would throw pillows and knock people down. I'll have you carried to the county house, if I hear of your doing any such thing again.”

Cousin Jabez spoke as one in authority; he

being one of the Board in charge of the county poor-farm: Peggy began to form resolutions of amendment; it seemed that she could not throw pillows as she chose.

"I think I can persuade Eugene to do better," said Cousin Jabez to Ellice. "He will get up the wood. There's an extra stove at my house, and I'll send it over for Nancy's bedroom, so that she and the children can stay in there more. It is too crowded in here. Hard work to study in such a throng; isn't it, Ellice?"

"I can study anywhere," said Ellice.

"But as for Reub," said Cousin Jabez, "I really think that boy should be sent to the Reform School; he isn't doing a bit of good."

Here Nancy reappeared to protest: "No, no, Jabez, the Reform School don't help boys: it makes them worse. They are put with those worse than themselves."

"You're thinking of the House of Refuge, and that is better than nothing, Nancy."

"Jabez, Reub will be all bad if he is sent away; here he loves Angel, and he may make

him good. I don't want Reuben taken off, we must love him better." -

Jabez doubted the remedy and its results in this case.

"Here, Angel," he said, "Tomsey sent you a red apple, and a pig's tail to roast. Tomsey thinks a roasted pig-tail fine eating. I don't see much in it myself.

"Well, good-bye all! Nancy, I'll send Eugene home to dinner."

"If he is coming to dinner, Ellice," said Nancy, bustling about, "I'll run to the kitchen and make a meat pie."

What arguments Cousin Jabez brought to bear on Eugene are not known, but home came Eugene at noon with Reub, very chatty and pleasant, and hurried up dinner in great shape, so that he could go to the lot and begin cutting wood. With more or less vigor he and Reuben, aided by Jason out of school hours, cut and hauled, sawed and split wood, until the shed was nicely filled; the stove in Nancy's room was kept going, its pipe heating the room for Ellice, and winter snows found the family comfortable.

Reub went back to school, and worked enough on Saturdays to earn his spending money; he had learned that Nancy was not a millionaire and that he must still clothe himself.

When Reuben realized how deficient Nancy was in the means to maintain him as a golden youth with nothing to do, he regarded her with malevolence, setting his elbows on the table and staring at her with his face fixed between his hands, until poor Nancy did not know which way to turn. Then again he would whistle if she made a remark, or in a jeering tone repeat what she had said; he would stretch out his feet to be in her way, complain of the litter of her work, and call her "Nance," "old girl," or "Missis." All this Ellice was disposed to resent.

"Don't notice it, I beg of you," said Nancy, "it will only make him worse, and I have read in the papers about boys that were found fault with and went off from home and were killed, or did something awful and were sent to the penitentiary. You'd feel terribly if that happened."

"I feel terribly now," said Ellice, bursting

into tears, a very unusual proceeding on her part—"of course I do care for all of the children, but Jason and Angiolino are the only comfortable ones. Poor little Seraph is such a suffering body, and Violante is so naughty, and Liane is so selfish that she does not care for any one, and Reub is just like Eugene. It is all Eugene's fault,—lazy, selfish, filled day in and day out with beer and tobacco; what right had he to marry, to make a wife miserable, and send his sins and his ailments down to his children! Isn't this world hard enough, and dangerous enough, for poor immortals, without children coming into it burdened with double propensities to evil, and furnished with half their rightful physical strength?"

"You'll choose better when you marry," said Nancy.

"Choose better! You believe I will, or not marry at all. There's a right and a wrong in these things, and girls ought to know it! They jest over a young man's 'wild oats,' and laugh at his 'being fast,' or are so flattered by his attentions that they don't see that he is intolerably

selfish and self-indulgent, that all the spiritual nature is neglected and the animal nature pampered; and then, when middle age comes, they have a noisy, idle, brutal, bloated tyrant to contend with, or a miserable, weak, selfish, irritable creature like Eugene, and children heirs to the father's sins. I'm thankful my father was a good man! Look at the difference between Eugene and Cousin Jabez! Jabez Long is honest, generous, busy, cheerful, clean, makes things better wherever he goes; he is the sunshine of his home; the nearer his children are like him the better they will be; his wife is happy; his old grandmother is cherished like a princess; he is always holding out a helping hand to boys to try and make them sober, useful men like himself."

"That is all true," said Nancy, "but, Ellice, some day Jason and Reub may be just such men as Jabez. I wish we could find some way to interest Reuben. Jabez has made him afraid to spend his evenings at the Corners; he won't study as Jason does, nor go to the Temperance Society, and he don't care to read.

All he does care for is to make toys with his knife."

"If we were rich enough to have a Christmas tree we could get him to make toys for that," said Ellice.

"That's just it!" cried Nancy, "let us talk to him about it, and get him to think it is all his doing. I have helped with Christmas trees at our church. It will cost almost nothing! We can get the tree from our woods, trim it with pop-corn, and make our own candy. I've got a little book that tells how to make all kinds of candy. We'll have Liane home for the day, and we will make things, and I'll go to the city and buy some things. I won't spend but a little."

Ellice laughed. "You seem to think I hold a mortgage on your money, Nancy," she said.

"I feel as if I should be of some use in the world, after all, if I can earn what will help you on," said Nancy.

Nancy expounded Christmas trees to Reuben, in the light of her church experiences, and of stories which she had read in her paper.

Reuben condescended to be interested. He assumed management of the affair, selected the tree, and began the manufacture of toys. Nancy's little book on candy-making offered him an object in life. He began to make candy and succeeded amazingly; he boasted of his products at the store and was bantered to bring on some specimens; he exhibited a pound of "assorted" and the store-keeper offered to buy what he made. Thereupon Reuben stayed home from school and boiled and manipulated the family molasses and sugar into taffy, nut-candy, stick, butter-scotch, and caramels, which he sold for his own profit.

Finally Ellice interfered. "Reub, we can't afford to have you using up the sugar, molasses, and butter, and putting the price in your pocket. We need the things for the table; there's little enough. If you want to make and sell candy do it, but buy your material out of your profits."

Reuben grumbled, but Ellice locked her store closet, and then he yielded.

As his pocket-book filled and he had something to do which he liked doing, Reub became

more amiable and showed considerable skill. Nancy told him how one of her city neighbors had made candy-boxes and baskets, and Reuben set up quite a trade at the store.

“But the trouble is,” said Ellice, “that the money is worse than wasted ; he buys cigarettes, and gambles, and gets his beer in spite of Cousin Jabez.”

By degrees all the Loring family became interested in the plan for Christmas ; Liane offered to make a gorgeous bonnet for Violante’s dear doll ; Ellice shut up a turkey and a pair of chickens to fatten for the great dinner ; and Nancy ransacked the old cook-books handed down from her own mother and grandmother, to find the best recipes for making chicken and mince-pies, doughnuts and seed-cakes, and for stuffing fowls. Reuben sniffed contempt.

“You’ll make a botch of it all, Nance ; you won’t dare to put a bit of brandy in your pies, and I’ve read how a Christmas pudding ought to be all in a blue blaze of brandy, and no big-bugs have a Christmas dinner without brandy-cheese and brandy-peaches.”

“All the same,” said Eugene, “I’ll order half a dozen of ale or porter ; I can’t eat a big dinner without something to help my poor, weak digestion ; my doctor says——”

“Now don’t trot out a make-believe doctor, and a make-believe prescription,” said Ellice the strong ; “if you can’t eat a big dinner, eat a little one, and be thankful ; but if you bring ale or porter up here, I know some one who’s going to break every bottle of it, and her name is Ellice.”

“Seems you think you own the place !” cried Eugene and Peggy.

CHAPTER VIII.

REUB HELPS HIMSELF.

“ Monster ingratitude !
The ingratitude of this Seleucus does
Even make me wild.”

NANCY, who always addressed Eugene, and indeed the whole Loring family, in the most meek and placating fashion, heard aghast the autocratic deliverances of Ellice. The girl so openly antagonized Eugene that Nancy wondered why Eugene did not turn her out of doors. But since Ellice was eight years old she had been the mainstay of the family, the children's nurse, the little housewife, the helper of her mother. Then for nearly a year before her death that mother had been feeble, and given all the charge of the family to Ellice ; and for the six months of his widowerhood, Eugene had been still more dependent on his step-daughter ; he had become accustomed to her domination ;

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he was weak and she was strong, and he had learned to lean upon her. True, for an ill-doer to lean upon, Ellice was something like leaning on a thorn hedge or a cheval-de-frise, still some one to lean on Eugene must have. Nancy remarking the asperity of Ellice to Eugene, and the dark looks she turned upon him and Peggy, wondered at the sudden change in the girl when she directed her attention to other members of the family. To the little ones she was all tenderness and sunshine; no babies were more gently fondled than Angel and Seraph; to Violante she was just and faithful, to Jason full of genial *camaraderie*, to Reuben anxious and forbearing, to Nancy full of protecting sisterly goodness;—then out of these moods, quick as a flash of lightning, she launched wrath on the culpable Eugene.

However, Ellice was not the girl to permit her personal feelings to spoil a family holiday. The Christmas celebration was more than a success; the tree was a beauty, and everybody had presents. Liane unbent so far as to say that her dress fitted perfectly, and she “thought

Nancy was real smart to do it." Indeed, Liane was in a strait for clothes, and the pretty gown made by Nancy, the pair of boots given by the two boys, with gloves from Ellice, and handkerchiefs from her father, were more than acceptable.

Liane was Eugene's favorite child ; he did not scruple to say that she was "in all ways more like him than any of the others, and was the only one whom he ever expected to be a credit to him."

Cousin Jabez brought Tomsey over to see the tree, and admire the toys and candy made by Reuben. Reuben had bent strips of thin tin into outlines of dogs, pigs, cows, and horses, set these in hard-packed smooth snow, and poured into the moulds thus fashioned, some of his clear candy ; currants and caraway-seed were then used for eyes and mouths, and a very amazing assortment of animals was produced. A box of these being given to Tomsey, Jabez looked with relenting eyes upon that ne'er-d-o-weel, Reuben ; felt that he might make something of himself after all, and remarked :

“Reub, you must be a sugar-baker. I declare you were cut out for a confectioner ! You may be the greatest candy manufacturer in the States yet ! I shall buy all my candy of you, surely. My name is Jabez Long.”

Reuben was highly gratified, and before his fancy rose a four-story candy-factory, swarming with working people ; out of one door of the factory went an endless stream of candies, and into the other poured an endless stream of money.

Later in the day, as Nancy and Jabez were having a little confidential chat in the angle of the room where the kitchen door opened, it unluckily chanced that Reuben stood in the kitchen near the door, lighting the candle in a jack-o'-lantern for the children. He heard what was said, and from that day his whole manner to Nancy changed. He no longer tried to vex her ; he called her “Nancy,” in a gentle tone ; he asked her opinion, conversed with her, laid plans with her, and took especial pains to please her. Nancy felt that the conquest of Reuben was complete, and she was happy.

Early in January Eugene was taken ill ; exhaustion and a slow fever forced him to his bed. "It is all," he said, "because Nancy made me get that market wagon, and drive it in all weathers. This is her work."

"Market wagon don't hurt Jabez Long," said Ellice.

"Great mountain of a man, he is stronger than I am !"

"He doesn't drink for a living," said Ellice ; "it is not the market wagon that has hurt you, but the Corners."

"I think I know what hurts me, and what don't," said Eugene.

But the doctor upheld Ellice. "You are killing yourself, Loring," he said. "What you need is plain food, early hours to bed, out-of-doors work. Your tobacco and beer will be the death of you ; you haven't constitution to stand such capers."

"Do you think he'll die?" Nancy tearfully asked the man of science.

"He'll live long enough, if you can stop his tippling."

Those weeks when Eugene lay in bed were really happy weeks to Nancy. She enjoyed having some one to nurse, indulge, wait upon ; she took no end of pride in keeping Eugene and his room particularly neat, and in making all manner of dainties to tempt his appetite.

Being of a social nature, and having no other society, Eugene became very friendly with Nancy and the two babies.

As the winter wore away Nancy had other sources of gratification than those afforded by the mildness of Eugene, and the urbanity of Reuben. Ellice was succeeding wonderfully in her studies, and Nancy was fortunate beyond her hopes in earning money by her needle ; dresses and plain sewing came in, and Nancy regularly carried her little gains to Jabez Long, and her hoard grew in his hands. She was sure now of having over a hundred dollars by the first of September, to send Ellice to the city, and then she could go on in her self-appointed task, until spring, completing the amount needed ; and then in February Ellice would be through the course at the commercial college,

and could get a good position. Beautiful air-castles Nancy built about the prosperity of Ellice, and all this could be accomplished without touching that last precious one hundred of her savings of many years. That bit of money seemed to her sacred, dear as heart's blood ; it represented sacrifices, privations, hard work in the past, and her one hope of self-help and independence in the future. Should she ever be able to add to it for herself? Oh, yes, she hoped so. Once let Ellice be provided for, and then money laid up for that nice wheeled-chair for Seraph, and then a little more money to help Reuben make a start in the world,—for Reuben had confided to her that he was now laying up money, saving up every cent so that he could do well by himself. Yes, yes, after Ellice, and Seraph and Reuben, had been helped, and perhaps some of the others, then Nancy meant to do a little work and saving on her own behalf once more. Cheered by such hopes and plans Nancy was happy, and sung ‘When I can read my title clear’ and ‘Here I raise my Ebenezer,’ heartily if not very musically, as she

worked. People who live for others are never really unhappy for very long at a time.

Spring came and Eugene was well again, his system renovated by long abstinence and feeling the impetus of returning strength. There was the spring work to be done, and though Eugene did not like labor for himself, he dearly loved giving orders to others. He would have been at the height of his desires if he could have lorded it over a score of underlings; as he could not, he got all the satisfaction he could out of ordering Jason and Reuben about, and keeping them hard at work. He even went to the city a few times in the market wagon, "to show Timothy Powers a thing or two." Timothy was phlegmatic; he allowed the irascible, excitable Eugene to talk and direct as much as he pleased, and then stolidly took his own way and did the best that he could for Nancy. Of course the market wagon was not largely profitable when Timothy's board and wages were to be provided, but it was better than nothing, and the Loring family were more comfortable than they had been for many years.

Spring went by and summer was nearly gone, and Ellice had grown from hope to confidence in these plans of Nancy's which at first had seemed so chimerical. This good fortune appeared very wonderful to Ellice. After the failure of the plans lovingly laid by her own mother, and then after that mother's death, Ellice had felt not only that means would be lacking for her studies, but that she was hopelessly held at home by the needs of the children; there was no one else to care for them. Strangely indeed had the Lord provided for her and for them, by means of her step-father's wife.

And now soon, very soon she was going away; she had earned money for her books and clothing; her wardrobe was nearly ready. She began to talk of her prospects. Jason was interested; 'if Ellice liked to work in the city, why, let her go; as for himself he would ask nothing better than to live in the country forever, if only he might thrive and be some day like Jabez Long.'

Reuben too was interested in the departure of Ellice,—the most interested of all. 'Maybe

she would find a place for him by and by ; if her money came short she should have his ; he would work and earn more for her.' Nancy was very much touched by this spirit in Reuben ; she talked to him about her gains, and told him how much she had.

The money was with Cousin Jabez, but late in August Cousin Jabez and Lovinia decided to go to New York with Tomsey, to make a last effort for Tomsey's betterment.

"We shall be gone three or four weeks, Nancy, and meanwhile you'll want your money for Ellice, and there is no bank within five miles," said Jabez.

"It is all the same," said Nancy. "Ellice is going in two weeks. Give me the money ; I know a splendid place to hide it, safe from fire, or rats, or folks."

"Be careful," said Jabez anxiously as he counted out one hundred dollars, representing the earnings of fourteen months.

"It is all right, it will be safe," said Nancy, her eyes shining, her cheeks glowing with the joy of service.

“You are happiest when you are helping somebody,” said Jabez, “and as there are plenty of Loring’s to be helped, I reckon you won’t be without happiness. Be sure and don’t tell any one about that money, unless you give it to Ellice right away, which would be the best plan.”

“Oh, no,” said Nancy ; “by the time she goes I shall have in fifteen dollars more, which are due me, and I want to give it to her all at once. Besides, we will all feel dreadfully when she leaves, and I want the pleasure of giving her that money, to cheer me up.”

The hiding-place which Nancy had decided upon for her money was an ancient brick oven, which stood in the garden in a thicket of gooseberry and clove-currant bushes. The brick work and the iron door were solid, the oven had been abandoned when a modern cook-stove came into the house, and no one ever went near the cobwebbed old structure. Fire, rats, thieves, Nancy counted up these enemies, and concluded that none would approach the brick oven. She went home in the gloaming and when all the

family were supposably asleep, went out and hid her treasure. Surely it would be safe; she meant to look at it twice a day.

Nancy's confidence grew, as for three successive nights she found all right with her foolish banking establishment. This hiding money in out-of-the-way places, old stockings, old cans, under hearths, in the angles of beams, seems to be a craze with some people, and Nancy shared it; she felt that her dollars were safer than in any safe deposit vault, and did not realize that in ignoring the aid of civilization in taking care of property she was not only risking loss, but provoking some one to evil.

Reuben knowing that Jabez Long and his wife had gone away for some time, began closely to watch his step-mother.

"Where is Reuben?" asked Eugene fretfully one morning at breakfast. "I want him to work at the barn."

"He's gone to town," said Jason.

"Gone to town! I didn't give him leave to go."

"He didn't wait for it, then; he's gone. I

woke up just enough to see him dressing, when Timothy had gone down, and then he went down too."

"I suppose Timothy needed him and woke him up," said Nancy.

"If you'd sell that wagon and dismiss Timothy, we should have some peace of our lives," said Eugene. "Jason, you'll have to mend the barn."

"All right if you'll help," said Jason, but Eugene lounged off toward the Corners.

"Reub has helped himself pretty well in the pantry," said Ellice, coming out from putting away the breakfast things, "he must have filled a paper bag that I had left on the broad shelf."

Nancy was finishing off a dress in a hurry, but when Ellice made this report, she laid down her work and went up to the boys' room. In the drawer of the stand that belonged to Reuben, little was left; most of his scanty stock of clothing was gone. She went swiftly down stairs and out into the garden, and disappeared behind the clump of bushes. The oven door stood wide open, and the tin baking-powder

box in which Nancy had kept her hoard, was gone! Reub had surely helped himself. This was what all his interest in her plans meant; this was the result of her confidences. How like his father, oh, how very like his father! Nancy's knees shook so that she could not stand; she sank on the dew-wet earth among the bushes, and laid her head against the rusty iron door that had betrayed her trust. What could she do,—Ellice cruelly disappointed, Reuben a thief!

But in a little while her habit of thinking for others resumed its sway. There was Reuben to be considered. Some day he might repent, then how very terrible it would be to have that brand on his name. Need it rest there? No. No one knew that she had hidden this money here, and lost it; no one could ever know unless she told of it; she would never tell. Cousin Jabez might insist upon tracking the thief and bringing him to punishment; the children would be covered with shame if this deed of Reuben were bruited abroad. No, she would never tell of it; she would not close the doors

of his home and of hope against his return. How then explain the disappearance of her money? The way was plain and it settled that other question about Ellice; Nancy must take from the bank her last precious one hundred dollars, and give it to Ellice, and Ellice must never know at what terrible cost to Nancy she received her education. Yes, that was the way for Nancy, the only way, a *via crucis*, sharper than the thorns in the over-grown bushes around her; but what matter after all? Life at the best was short, and its troubles would end by and by in the Christ-bought compensation; all that was really needed was for Nancy to make the world what little better she could, by helping fellow travellers as she passed along. To sacrifice, suffer, be silent, that was her lot. She accepted it, and rising brushed dead leaves and grass from her garments, and tried to calm her countenance as she returned to the house. She was not so very calm, but it was easy to pick up Seraph and hide her face in the child's pretty brown hair.

Ellice had finished her morning's work and

seated herself to sew upon her best winter gown. She turned to Nancy with surprise. "Why, Nancy, where have you been? I was wondering what I should do without you, when it came to frills and furbelows."

"I was in the garden—it is such—a lovely morning," faltered Nancy, hastily looking about for her sewing.

"Dear me," said Ellice merrily, "what an idle person you are becoming. When I am gone what will you do?—you will play all the time."

That was a terrible day for Nancy; she was planning to send for her money from the bank, and her heart followed the poor criminal boy, banished from his home by his own cruel deed. How soon his spoils would be gone, stolen from him, or gambled away, and then what would become of him, idle and ignorant and self-indulging as he was? Would he take the money to try and set himself up in business? Nancy knew that he would not, people do not so lay the foundations of honest livelihood, and Nancy had lived in the city, and had seen many

boys taking the downward way to death. However, having chosen her path, Nancy walked in it bravely. She was not sadder than during the next few days the disappearance of Reuben would naturally make her, for when Timothy came home that evening, he knew nothing of Reuben and said that the lad had not gone to the city in the wagon.

Seraph cut Nancy to the heart by lamenting after the brother, who had been always ready to amuse her and carry her about. Jason had to do his work, and Reuben's too as far as it was possible, and Eugene animadverted on the course of Reuben in deserting the family, as if he himself had been a model of all the proprieties. "I never acted so when I was a boy," he said.

"Evil increases in each generation as a snow-ball increases in rolling," said Ellice. "I expect you had a much better bringing up and example than ever Reuben has had. Jabez Long says your father was a good man as far as work and morals go. You are not good that way, and Reuben is likely to turn out worse

than you, as he has begun earlier in evil, and has had less moral help ; and if Reuben ever has any children, no doubt they may be thieves or murderers instead of mere runaways, like Reuben."

"And what will you say about Jason, Miss?" cried Eugene.

"That he is not one bit like you and never will be ; he had the good luck to inherit from my mother's father." The misfortunes of her life had made Ellice something of a pessimist.

"Reub will get tired of fooling about without a home, and when the weather gets bad, he'll come back," said Jason.

"He won't come here," fumed Eugene ; "he has chosen to go, and now he can stay ; I won't have him back."

"Ain't you a pretty father," screamed Peggy suddenly from her bed ; "the boy's as good as you, any day, and you made him what he is, and you took him to the Corners, for all his mother begged you not, and now you don't like your own work !"

There was shrewd sense now and then in Peggy's talk.

“If Reub comes back he’s going to stay if he wants to,” said Jason; “I’ll not live and work where my brother is driven out like a vagabond.”

“Oh, of course we must take him back, and not quarrel with him for going, poor boy,” cried Nancy eagerly.

“You hush up, Nance,” said her liege-lord. “Who asked you to put your oar in? Reub never cost you anything.”

Nancy’s lip quivered; well, no one would ever know what he had cost her; but Nancy’s heart yearned toward this juvenile scapegrace.

Her experiences in the Loring family were bearing fruit in Nancy; she was a stronger woman spiritually than when she left her city home; her heart had enlarged its boundaries; her life now was not a way that went to a grave’s mouth and there stopped; it was one of the life-ways that take hold on eternity,—the way of service, not of self. She had grown, and even consciously grown, since that bitter hour of loss and self-abnegation, spent down among the gooseberry bushes beside an open rusty door.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEPARTURE OF THE SHULAMITE.

Birds in the bower, and lambs in the green field,
Could they have known her would have loved."

THERE came a day when Nancy went to the city with Timothy in the market wagon, and drawing out her last one hundred dollars closed her account with the bank with which she had done her small business for sixteen years. Her bank-book had been to her the ægis of her respectability, but she had surrendered it.

When she reached home in the afternoon, Ellice was packing a little old hair trunk which had belonged to her maternal grandmother; on the table and chairs lay the clothes which Ellice had washed and ironed into a beautiful state of whiteness and smoothness. Violante, Seraph, and Angelino, in their chairs, were respectfully admiring their sister's possessions, while Peggy from her bed was one while croaking out ma-

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lignant stories of girls "who had gone to the city and come to no good," and then incontinently lamenting her own fate, that in youth she had not gone to the city and made a lady of herself, instead of staying at home to be neglected and abused by everybody, especially by Ellice.

After tea, when the children were in bed, Nancy and Ellice sat by the window of the girl's room and talked softly together. Ellice had fastened the roll of bills securely into her dress waist.

"You don't need for me to tell how thankful I am, Nancy," she said, "I couldn't if I tried. Every penny of this money, that I have seen you earning so hardly, shall be precious."

Ellice had no idea of the greater sacrifice that these dollars represented.

"Don't deny yourself things that you need," said Nancy.

"I sha'n't need much. I am saving of my clothes, and I have earned enough for my books. To-morrow I will pay for a month's board, and for three months' tuition, and put the rest of

the money in the bank you told me of. At Christmas there will be ten days of holiday, and I shall try and get a place in a store, to earn a few dollars, and have a little practice in city ways. You know the principal of the business college is Mr. Hutton's cousin, and he has promised to get me a place as soon as I have finished the course. I mean to pay you back the money some day, Nancy."

"No; I wish instead that you would help the children."

"I'll help them too. You and I, Nancy, will always do well for poor little Seraph, and we'll educate Angiolino to be a doctor or minister. Violante seems real bright; and if she takes well to her books, we will make a school-teacher of her. If she doesn't want that, we will make a first-class dressmaker of her. Since you bought that doll, she does wonders with her needle."

"Don't forget Jason, he is such a good boy," said Nancy.

"We'll give him a lift too," said Ellice.

"And oh, Ellice, whenever you are about in

the city, look for poor Reub. Look in the police reports of the papers; he may get into trouble, he is so young and so thoughtless, and he may be destitute and ashamed to come home."

"Young and thoughtless,"—it was all her condemnation for the one who had robbed her!

"I'll look out for him," said Ellice.

"And be very, very kind to him, and tell him to come back. And when will you come home for a visit, Ellice?"

"I don't know, Nancy; I must work now."

"How I shall miss you!" cried Nancy, quite breaking down. "You have been so good to me, Ellice."

"And who has been 'so good' to me?" said Ellice, taking the work-worn hand, which had twice earned her school money.

"Good-night," said Nancy. "Go to bed, Ellice; you will be up so early."

She went down-stairs, and when she saw Eugene sitting by the table, she felt as if the burden of one of his sins was lifted from him, that school fund which he had stolen from Ellice

and her mother was repaid. But sins cannot be thus vicariously borne by humans.

They were astir early next morning, for the market wagon set off before four. Eugene himself was up, not to bid Ellice good-bye, but because he had engaged to go with his neighbor, Evans, to take some cattle to the abattoir. Jason was down to see Ellice start, so they all ate together in the yellow lamplight in the kitchen.

Then Nancy, left alone, set the house in order, prepared Peggy's breakfast and the children's, woke Violante, dressed the babies, and when the second breakfast was cleared away and the children furnished with their playthings, she sat down to sew. She must be very busy now, to make good the place of Ellice, and to earn more money to send to her by Christmas. First of all, "Violante, who grew like a weed," must have clothes prepared for going to school next week; there, too, was an out-grown best frock left by Ellice, which, with a little trimming and additional cloth, might be made up nicely for the slender Liane, and Liane surely

would be glad of the gown, though she never said "Thank you !"

As Nancy sat there with her sewing, sad enough thoughts crowded upon her. The girl who had been her friend and defender was gone ; she had bidden her go. Reuben, whom she had tried so hard to propitiate, had robbed her ; Liane openly scorned her ; Eugene, her husband, was a drunken idler, almost always sharply unkind in his manner and language ; the savings of years were gone. Just then the laughter of the two little ones broke into her miserable thoughts. Ellice had given Seraph a jointed-doll for a parting present, and had made for Angel a canton flannel rabbit ; the two youngsters were having great fun. Nancy looked at them. Perhaps their dead mother could know that her babies were tenderly cared for and were happy ; perhaps she could know that the plan for Ellice was fulfilled, and that a fair future lay before her ; perhaps that mother knew that her sinning boy had not fallen out of the circle of God's protecting love, and that he was to return a penitent prodigal ; perhaps from

some fair home, that mother looked with sisterly love on the plain, common woman who had loved her children!

Then Nancy's thoughts took a higher range, out of the region of "perhaps" into "surely." Surely the Christ that loved little children looked upon these two little ones, and blessed them as He blessed babes of old, and knew of and sympathized with Nancy's love for them. The loving Lord knew the path that Ellice took, and would hold her hand, and accepted the silent sacrifice of Nancy's all as done unto Him: that gracious One could find Reuben and bring him to himself: He could even help Eugene! The days might come when Nancy could look back on these anxious hours, and find that all her need had been supplied by riches of grace. Cheered by such certainties, the heart of Nancy passed out of shadow-land, and she began to sing, "One there is above all others," and "Rock of Ages," and "When I can read my title clear."

Nancy's singing had more heart than harmony, but it always helped her along, when,

as she said, "She got uplifted, so as to do a little singing."

The day grew on in fairness, the baby toddled in and out of the open door, bringing little offerings to Seraph, who fashioned play-houses on a wide board which Reuben had fastened as a table before her chair. Nancy still sang on; they were all in the big front room, for Nancy felt as if it would be unkind to leave Mrs. Peggy alone, while she and the children sat in the garden or the bedroom. Suddenly Peggy burst forth shrilly :

"Am I to lie here all day and never get a bit of waiting on, now that Ellice, who waited on me like a lady, is away! Ellice and her mother did not think that after old Harriet was gone, I could be left without even an asking what I wanted. But then, Ellice had a mother who was a handsome lady, not a scrawny, withered-leaf looking thing like you! Oh, a very nice person you are, pretending to be a wonder to all the neighborhood, and treating me like a dog!"

"What is it you want, Mrs. Peggy?" asked

Nancy, dropping her work in a great flurry of haste and anxiety.

“What is it I want? What would I be likely to want? What would anybody want? I want a drink of water, of course, if you aren’t too much of a lady to fetch it.”

Nancy hurried into the kitchen to get the water; she was terribly afraid of the uncanny Mrs. Peggy. When Peggy had finished drinking she returned the glass to Nancy, at the same time seizing both her wrists in a sinewy grip. Thus having made Nancy prisoner, she demanded:

“Where did you get that money you gave Ellice to-day?”

“I earned it, of course,” said Nancy.

“How did you earn it?”

“Sewing—that is the only way I have of earning anything.”

“When did you earn it?” pursued the inquisitor.

“I should not think you need ask that,” said Nancy uneasily, striving to get free. “Haven’t you seen me sewing here, day after day, ever since I came?”

“When did you lay up that money, I say?”

“Why, Mrs. Peggy! Didn’t you see Mrs. Evans pay me five dollars one day last week; and didn’t Jason bring me back my pay from the store the other day?”

“And was that all of it?” insisted Peggy, her little, gimlet-like black eyes fairly boring into Nancy’s troubled brain. “Oh, I know! Do you think I don’t see things? Do you suppose I think Reub went off without a penny, eh? How much did he take? Where had you hidden it?”

Nancy broke away from her tormentor and ran into the kitchen. There she sat down to cry a little. How much did this old woman know? Were all her cares to screen Reuben vain? But Nancy was not one of those who have time for lamentations; she had affairs to attend to—for instance, there was dinner to prepare for Jason and the children.

Meanwhile Violante came in from the garden, where she had been shelling beans. Peggy was lying back on the pillow laughing, a shrill, croaking, evil laugh.

"What are you laughing at, Aunt Peggy?" demanded Violante.

"I'm laughing at a fool," shrilled Peggy.

"A fool?" said Violante, looking about. "Where? I don't see any. Are you laughing at yourself, Aunt Peggy?"

"Look into the kitchen,—the fool's there," said Peggy.

Violante looked and returned.

"I don't see any one but mother there," said Violante, virtuously, "and she isn't a fool. She has nearly finished my new frock, and she says I may go to Mrs. Evans' and play all the afternoon."

That afternoon Nancy concluded it the part of discretion to sit out of doors with her work and the children. After a time she heard Peggy calling loudly. She went in hastily.

"Why do you leave me alone?"

"I need to keep the babies out of doors; it is good for them."

"I've got something to tell you. It's a story of old times. Why don't you ask me about old times ever?"

"I suppose because I never knew any of the old times folks, but I'll sit here and sew in the doorway, so I can watch the children, if you like to tell me a story."

"It's about me,—about me twenty-five years ago. I was fifty then, and I didn't look as old as you do, and I was a sight better looking too. I liked dress always, and I saved up all I could one summer to get me a fur collar and muff for winter. I did quiltin' and made jell' for folks, and I knit, an' so on, for I was never one to use up my bank money like some folks I know. My father left me seven hundred, and it grew to a thousand, but now it don't grow any more because I have to pay black Harriet and the doctor, and that takes all my interest, you are all so mean. You might better wait on me than on those squealing, no-account babies!"

"I hope you got your collar and muff," said Nancy.

"No, I didn't. I daren't keep the money in the house because Eugene was always prying around, and all he found was his. Boy and man, Eugene wouldn't work; he wanted what

some one else worked for. So I hid my money, —thirty dollars, mind you,—and where do you think I hid it? Out in the yard in the old oven behind the gooseberry bushes! That oven hadn't been used for five years. What became of my thirty dollars, do you think? Eugene stole it. He went off to town and stayed three days, attending all kind of shows and a circus and eating the fat of the land. Oh, Eugene is a honey, I tell you, and ain't Reub like him! Eugene, being afraid of his father, lit a fire in the oven, and said he'd been burning leaves and weeds and didn't know there was any money there. Reub wasn't afraid of nobody, and oh, ain't Reub like his father!"

"Did you ever tell Reub that?" demanded Nancy with sudden suspicion.

"Didn't I? Three or four weeks ago! And, Nancy, the day Reuben went off I see a lot of gooseberry leaves a-hanging on the tail of your gown!"

"Poor boy!" cried Nancy, rising from the door-sill, "poor tempted boy! I hope God will forgive you for that, Mrs. Peggy!" And she

went out to the children. Peggy seemed to her too evil to look at longer. But perhaps Peggy was deceiving her about Eugene! When Eugene was washing his hands in the kitchen before supper, Nancy said :

“Peggy says when you were a boy, you took thirty dollars of hers that she had hidden in the old oven.”

Eugene burst into a laugh.

“Why, ain’t Peggy done harping on that yet?” he cried carelessly.

While the family were seated at tea, Peggy gave her orders from the bed :

“Jason, after tea you’re to go to Lawyer Fink, and tell him to come here to-morrow at ten o’clock to make my will.”

“Bosh! Aunt Peggy,” said Eugene. “You’re not fit to make a will. You’re not of sound mind; you’re crazy; your will would be broken.”

“Jason,” said Peggy, as sole answer to Eugene, “you stop also for Doctor Bearse, and tell him to come up here with Lawyer Fink, and see if I ain’t fit to make my will.

There's nothing crazy about me. I know to a cent what I've got and how I want it spent."

"But, Aunt Peggy, you've made two or three wills," said Eugene.

"This is going to be the last one, sure," retorted Peggy.

"And there's no one but me to leave your money to."

"There ain't? Eugene Loring, who stole the money out of the oven that I'd laid up for my fur cape and muff?"

"Pooh! you needn't bear malice for that joke."

"'Twasn't a joke to me, and it won't be to you," said Peggy.

After tea, when the work was done, the children in bed, and Jason gone, Nancy sat down to her sewing. Eugene, too weary with his day's work to go to the Corners, lay on the lounge with his hands under his head. At intervals he detailed some of the city or neighborhood gossip to his wife and aunt. He took pains to make Peggy laugh and put her in a good humor. Finally he said :

“Come now, Aunt Peggy, don’t think of cutting such a nice fellow as I am out of your will. You leave all to me.”

“I’ll do as I choose,” said Peggy.

“If you do anything but leave the money to me, folks will be sure you are crazy, you know.”

For answer Peggy’s pillow came flying at his head.

“There,” said Eugene, dodging the missile and putting it under his own head, “you won’t get that again till I say good-night.”

Peggy was accustomed to having her pillow at once returned to her and she looked dismayed.

To lie with her head low hurt her. She rested on her elbow for a little. Then Nancy, pitying her, went to the bedroom and brought her own pillow and put it comfortably under the old gray head, saying :

“Now please be good, Mrs. Peggy.”

“Oh, good ! Who can have any peace now that Ellice, the only decent one in the lot, is gone?”

“Nance,” ordered Peggy next morning, “I

want you to take the young ones and your work and go out under them lilacs in the northeast corner of the yard, so's I can see you through the window and know you're out of hearing while my will's being made. You can't be in your room, or in the kitchen, or nigh the window, where you can be list'nin' through cracks to hear."

"I don't want to hear. Your will is nothing to me," said Nancy.

"Of course 'tain't; all the same, you sha'n't hear it."

"I'll go wherever you like," said Nancy soothingly, "don't fret."

The doctor and lawyer having come, and the doctor professing to be willing to certify that Peggy was of sound mind and capable of making a will, that amiable person addressed herself to business:

"Now, Fink, you put down all that, 'In the name of God, amen,' and 'sound mind,' and 'this tenth day of September,' and all that, and then give and bequeath my entire property, and so on——"

“ Well, it is all done, ‘ to ’—what name, Mrs. Peggy,—Eugene ? ”

“ No, not Eugene. If I left my thousand to Eugene, he’d sit bragging at the Corners, smoking, and drinking wine and beer, and gambling, and thinking he was having a glorious time, and glad I was dead, and so my money would go. I haven’t had any fun out of my money, and Eugene sha’n’t. No, not Eugene.”

“ No doubt that is the way Eugene would use it. Well, one of the boys, or both of them ? ”

“ No ! ” cried Peggy ; “ Reub is just like his father, and would use it the same style, and be delighted I was gone, so he could have a hurrah-boys, over my leavings.”

“ Jason is a real good, steady boy,” suggested the doctor.

“ Yes, steady enough. He’d buy land, and cows, and pigs, and set out to farm it like Jabez Long ! Jason would have a good time with it, happy as a king ; he sha’n’t have it ; I don’t want to make folks happy.”

“ I see. Well, give me the name to put here, —Liane ?” as Peggy still hesitated.

“ Liane !” screamed Peggy, “ vain chit ! she despises me ; she would fairly dance over my grave in the new clothes my money had bought for her. Liane ! No, no, no !”

“ This will you have just revoked left all to Violante.”

“ Little wretch ! she sha’n’t have it ; she would be a proud one, with a thousand dollars piling up interest for ten years, to make her a rich lady !”

“ Well, make your choice. Is it Ellice Ward ?”

“ To Ellice ! To help her get a husband and furnish a house, and cut a swell in the city, and be happy as a queen out of my lying here beggarly, for twelve years !”

“ But you can spend it all on yourself, if you choose.”

“ Spend all ! Spend my money ! Ain’t it bad enough that the doctor makes me spend my interest on old Harriet and my medicine, so I can’t lay up a cent !”

“Not Ellice? True, she is no kin, but where will you bequeath your money?—to some charity?”

“Charity!” said Peggy with scorn; “to orphans, or widows, or churches, or hospitals? I hate ’em all. I don’t need to will to kin, nor to charities—well, there, Fink, set it down to”—with a great sigh—“to Nancy Kimball, second wife of my nephew, Eugene Loring.”

“To Mrs. Loring?” said the amazed lawyer, thinking he had not understood, or Nancy had not considered. “Are you sure—why to Mrs. Loring?”

“Because she’s such a fool—the greatest fool I ever heard tell of! The rest of them, Fink, would spend all the money on themselves, and have a good time out of it as long as it lasted; a good time after all the bad time I’ve had lying here on my bed for years! But that Nancy is such a perfect fool, that she won’t use one cent of that money on herself; she’ll spend it all on other folks, here and there, till it is gone, and they won’t say ‘Thank’y’ for it, either; and when it is all gone, and she’s a helpless, bed-

rid pauper, won't she be sorry for her lavishness ! Won't she, though ! Put her name down, Fink ; she's the one that will get the least comfort out of it, and that's what I want !"

Lawyer Fink wrote ; half-smiling, he thought that of all the suggested legatees, this humble altruist, whom Peggy called a fool, would get the most joy out of the bequest. But he looked at Peggy queerly.

" I wonder if you are of sound mind ? "

" Just as sound as ever I was," asserted Peggy.

" I believe that. I've heard of you from a child."

" Finish the will," said the doctor, " and I'll witness it, and call in Jason to witness too. Never fear, Peggy ; if that will is disputed, I'll stand up for its validity."

CHAPTER X.

WHAT NANCY BROUGHT FROM MARKET.

“ Full soon thy soul shall have her earthly freight
Of custom lie upon her as a weight
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.”

“ THERE was a man,” said Timothy to Nancy, “ who told me there were a lot of boys arrested this mornin’ for bein’ drunk and disorderly on the streets ; and they’ll be brought up in the police court to-morrow, and likely get sent to jail. He thinks Reub was one of ’em.”

“ Oh, dear me ! dear me ! ” cried Nancy, dropping her dish-towel and almost dropping a cup that she was wiping.

“ I did think of going by and giving the word to Miss Ellice about it, if so be she wanted to look after him ; but then a police court ain’t no place for a young woman, and I thought I’d better tell you instead.”

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“ Yes, yes, that was right,” said Nancy. “ I’ll go to town with you to-morrow morning ; don’t speak of it to anybody.”

What should she do ? Was there any one to whom she might tell of her errand ? Eugene had constantly been very virulent in his denunciations of Reuben, and in his assertions that the boy should not be allowed to return home ; Nancy had sometimes thought that Reub was old Peggy’s favorite ; she even had an idea that he was to be her heir, but Peggy was so unreliable and malignant. Finally, there was Jason. Jason had spent the afternoon in the barn, getting fowls ready to be sent to market, and was still there, finishing his work by the light of a lantern, for now the first of November had come. To Jason went Nancy, through the dim twilight, and told her story.

“ I’m going to the city with Timothy to be at the court when it opens.”

“ What good will that do ? ” said Jason lugubriously, as he singed a fowl over a blaze in an iron pot.

“ I’ve read about such things,” said Nancy,

“read in the papers ; sometimes the judge lets such young boys off, if their people come, and promise to take them out of the city. If I go and tell the judge that I’m his—folks, and that he has a good home out here to come to, he may let him come with me, and maybe poor Reub will be so scared he’ll promise to do better.”

“If you can work it that way,” said Jason, “you’d better go ; I guess poor Reub has had enough of skulking around without home or money.”

“Your father is so set against him, Jason, he may make a fuss about his coming home,” said Nancy uneasily.

She had made up her mind to stand up for Reuben, as she never had for herself ; yet she was a rather timid woman, and anxious for an ally.

“You’ll stand by me, won’t you, Jason ?”

“Yes,” said Jason, who was a slow, stolid boy, and found it difficult to express himself. Yet, as Nancy turned to go back to the house, he called after her :

“I say ! our own mother couldn’t act nicer

to him than you do, Nancy ! I'll stand by you, sure."

This recognition by Jason cheered Nancy as she put the house in order and got the children to bed. With Violante she descended to bribery and corruption ; promising to bring her a new bonnet from the city, if she would dress the children neatly in the morning, and set their room in order before school-time. After that she brought her gown and wraps up-stairs, so that she might dress there in the morning, and then went to plan for the next day with Jason.

"I can take care of the house and Peggy and the babies," said Jason, "so we needn't have any one in."

"And can you get a good breakfast and dinner for your father, so he won't be overly cross when we get home ?"

"He won't be here," said Jason, "he promised George Evans that he'd go to Stinsonville with him for eight hogs, and he's in for an all-day job of it ; hogs don't drive easy."

Nancy reached the city at seven. The court opened at nine. She thought of going to see

Ellice in the interim, but refrained ; for why should she harrow the girl's feelings and disturb her mind from her studies, by the tale of Reuben's misdeeds ?

Finally, the court-room doors were open, and she made her way to a place as near as possible to the desk of the judge. Presently the policeman brought in seven or eight untidy, unkempt boys, from nine to sixteen years of age : already known as old offenders, some of these infants in law ! Yes, Reub was among them ; haggard, shambling, misery stamped upon him. He did not look about, but dropped into a seat, as if too weak to stand, and then he bent down his head.

When Reuben's case was called, and he stood up, came the questions, " Charge ? " " Drunk, noisy, vagrant ; no home ; no guardians." " Arrested before ? " No, the police had not taken him in charge before ; he had been seen about the streets for two months. Too much money at first ; none of late, it seemed.

The Children's Aid Society now claimed charge of the youngest offenders. The oldest

and largest boy, arrested for the fifth time, was sent to the House of Refuge; two others to a reform school. Reuben stood up for sentence. Then Nancy stepped forward :

“ Please, your Honor——”

Reuben looked about. There was Nancy come to charge him with theft of one hundred dollars. It would send him to the penitentiary ! He reeled, turned deadly pale, but Nancy went on :

“ Please let me take him home. He belongs to me.”

“ To you, my good woman ?” said the judge, marking her eminently respectable appearance.

“ Are you his mother ?”

“ I’m—his step-mother—and—I care for him. I am sure he will be good after this. We have a nice home, fifteen miles from town, and land for him to work——”

“ And he left all that ? He must be a bad one. I’ve no doubt punishment is what he needs, a two months’ sentence——”

“ Oh, no, your Honor ; please not. I’d rather go to jail myself ! His brothers and sisters

would be so 'shamed if he was in prison, and they are such good children ! And indeed, your Honor, he is not all bad, he is the kindest ever was to a poor little crippled sister he has. She calls for him and mourns for him all the time to come carry her about, sir. She would be so happy if you let him go home ; and the child hasn't much to make her happy, sir."

At this plea and mention of Seraph, Reuben hid his face in his hands and sobbed bitterly. The judge carefully eyed the boy's bent, thin shoulders, his hollow temples and cheeks, his lean, pale hands, his dry, dusty curls. "The boy is not all bad ; that sorrow is real," he said, finally, "and to me he looks more sick than sinning. Madam, if I let you take him home, will you keep him there ?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, sir !" cried Nancy, recklessly.

"Let him go with her," said the judge, nodding to a police officer, who had the boy culprits in charge.

Reuben was led out from the rest and handed over to Nancy, who, clasping his arm, scarcely

crediting her good fortune, led him out of the court-room.

At the door he paused, staggered, fell forward—but fell into the arms of Jabez Long, whom Timothy had sent to Nancy's aid. A city dispensary was near, with the doctor fortunately in the doorway; Jabez carried Reuben there.

"Ænemic," said the doctor, examining Reuben's thin, wan face, neck, and hands; "scarcely a drop of good blood left in his body. Beer and tobacco—and people allow boys to run to destruction, and then wonder that they cannot make men of them! Why haven't you brought up your son better, ma'am?"

"She's not his mother and did not bring him up," interposed Jabez, "but now she wants to save him."

"Where do they live?" asked the doctor, carefully pouring some medicine down Reuben's throat.

"About fifteen miles out in the country."

"Better get them out there as soon as possible. With good nursing the boy may pull through.

Take him home and call a doctor. He is in for a course of typhoid and his habits have left precious little to build on. 'Oh, Ephraim, thou hast destroyed thyself!' I see this wreck of boys every day. 'The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint'——"

They had laid Reuben on a little sofa in a room behind the office.

"If they can stay here until I get my market wagon emptied, I will come and take them home," said Jabez. "I will be here in about an hour."

Nancy went to the dispensary door and beckoned an old woman who was selling small wares from a basket.

"Give me two of those handkerchiefs and a pair of socks," said Nancy. "Doctor, if I can have hot water, and an ounce of soda, and a towel, I can make this poor boy more comfortable."

The doctor called into a hallway :

"Jane! come here."

Jane appeared.

"Jane, give this woman whatever she needs.

I am going my rounds soon. See to the shop. Sell only what is plainly marked, and leave all prescriptions for me to make up."

Jane brought Nancy what she requested, and Nancy gave Reuben's head, neck, arms, and feet a thorough washing; then she put on the clean socks, took off his ragged, dirty jacket, wrapped him in her own shawl, and tied a kerchief wet in bay-water about his neck. The doctor watched her from behind the counter.

"You're a good nurse," he said, "and you may pull him through, but he'll have a close shave of it. Be sure and get a doctor to-night. And, remember, if the boy goes on as he has done, he will never see twenty."

It was twelve o'clock when Jabez returned. He had put a quantity of fresh straw in his wagon and bought a thick chintz quilt.

"Sit on the straw," he said to Nancy, "so Reuben's head can rest in your lap, and we will let him lie on one half the quilt and bring the other over him."

Jane and Jabez lifted Reuben to his place. The boy's eyes were partly open, but he saw

nothing, and sometimes lay in a heavy stupor, sometimes muttered rapidly and incoherently. Jane handed Nancy the medicine and the bottle of milk and repeated the doctor's directions.

"There's your dinner, Nancy," said Jabez, handing her a paper bag, "eat all of it, you look faint."

The horses jogged along at their usual five-miles-an-hour pace, and at length the city lay behind them. Jabez turned :

"What will you do with the boy when you get him home?"

"I was just thinking," replied Nancy the practical. "I ought to put him in the down-stairs bedroom, for I don't see how I can nurse him and do the house-work and take care of Mrs. Peggy and the children, if he has to be up-stairs."

"Of course you couldn't," said Jabez ; "a steam-engine couldn't."

"But Eugene hates so to be bothered or interfered with. He likely won't give up the room."

"He has to, and that ends it ; you'll have your hands full."

"I don't see how I can get time to take in any sewing."

"Certainly you can't. I should say not!"

"Then what will Ellice do? I was to send her twenty-five dollars at New-Year's, so she could finish up, and I have only earned seven so far, and I had to spend nearly two of that to-day, for things for the children."

Jabez whistled a few bars of "Old Grimes' Cow." Then he said:

"You could take the money out of your hundred in the bank and make it up later."

Nancy bent her head and flushed as if confessing a terrible crime or extravagance on her own part, as she said:

"I—haven't any hundred in bank, Jabez."

"What, gone? All gone, every dollar of it?"

"Yes," faltered Nancy. That was a very sore subject.

Jabez whistled low and long,—pondered. Perhaps he saw as clearly as Mrs. Peggy; perhaps not. Then he tried a few more bars of "Old Grimes' Cow," and again turned toward Nancy:

“You’re a safe party, Nancy. I tell you what I’ll do. New-Year’s I’ll lend you the twenty-five for Ellice, and you can take your time paying me. I don’t want any interest, either ; my name is Jabez Long.”

“Oh, thank you, Jabez !” cried Nancy, relieved at not being questioned, and at the promise of the money for Ellice. Then recurring to the previous question, she said :

“What shall I do if Eugene won’t take Reuben in ? He is so angry at Reuben, and I don’t know how Mrs. Peggy will be, you never can count on her ; and there will be only Jason and me to stand up for Reuben.”

“See here, Nancy, quit worrying. I’ll stop at your house to-night. As soon as we get there I will put Reub in a tub of hot water, and Jason and I will scrub him well and put a clean shirt on him, and put him in that bed downstairs. Then Jason can take my wagon home and send the doctor, and I’ll be there when Eugene comes, to read out the law to him ; my name is Jabez Long.”

This programme was carried out excellently

well, until about five o'clock, when Eugene, who had heard on the road, from Violante, the facts of Reuben's return and occupation of his room, burst in at the front door in a rage.

"Nancy! what's this? who gave you any leave to bring that rascal boy from the city, and put him in my room? You'll learn your place some day, will you? He'll out of this house."

"But, Eugene," pleaded Nancy, "where could the poor, sick creature go?" and she glanced through the open door to the bed, fearing the boy had understood. But Reuben was sunk in coma.

"Go! he can go to the poorhouse!" shouted Eugene.

Then Jabez Long's burly figure came unexpectedly into sight.

"Do you suppose, Eugene Loring, that the township will lay out its taxes taking care of the children of a man with a house and a market wagon, and twenty-five acres? No, sir, they won't."

"And what's the poorhouse for?" demanded Eugene.

“For the poor and friendless, not for those who have homes and relatives, who are bound to support them. If you won’t do a father’s part because you ought, the court will make you do it, and my name is Jabez Long.”

This “oath of confirmation” of Jabez, somewhat staggered Eugene, and lo, Doctor Bearse appeared as ally for Jabez.

“Loring, your bad habits haven’t left much humanity in you, it seems, that you wish to turn into the street a nearly dying son.”

“What’s a son like Reub worth?” said Eugene sulkily.

“As much as the father who gave him a bad inheritance, and then neglected him,” said the doctor. “Here, where only it is possible for your wife to take care of the boy, he stays, until he dies or gets well; and if you make yourself ugly about it, you’ll have me to settle with.”

“As if I cared where he stayed, or how long!” cried Eugene, who gave up when he had to. “Nancy, why don’t you get me my supper? I’ve worked all day.”

“Sit you down, Mrs. Loring,” said Mrs.

Evans, who had heard the news and come in, "you look ready to drop. I'll get supper for all of you. A cup of tea and some griddle-cakes will set you all up."

A good hot supper has a mollifying effect on humanity in general, especially on humanity that is weak and nervous; Eugene felt the beneficent effects of Mrs. Evans' cooking, regained his good humor and went unremonstrating to the room formerly occupied by Liane and Violante. Nancy and the children had the room of Ellice, and now that Reuben was at home and she was not tormented with visions of him as starving or a prisoner, now that Jabez had assured her of the money needed for Ellice, and Eugene had been brought to hear reason, Nancy set her prayers to the tune of "The Lord hath dealt bountifully with me," and so went to sleep.

The next day, Indian summer having put in a balmy appearance, Nancy kept the children out of doors most of the time. But Reuben was very ill, Peggy particularly cantankerous, and Eugene overhearing and sulky; so that with nursing and cooking, and cleaning house,

and bearing with everybody's humors, Nancy was nearly worn out, and thought of her quiet room in the narrow, steep street, where she had sat in peace, stitching vests.

In the afternoon Cousin Lovinia Long appeared in her buggy with Tomsey.

"I brought you a couple of apple-pies, and a pan of doughnuts," said the good woman, bringing in her gifts; "they will save you a little work and time, and there's nothing like a good pie to keep men well-tempered; mine have all-spice in them. But la! at our house, Tomsey has sense to do for us all. I never saw anything like the wiseness of Tomsey! This noon me and Jabez at dinner was saying how sorry we was for you all, and how we wished we lived near enough to help, when Tomsey pipes out, 'Í know what you can do; bring Angelino down here, and I'll take care of him, that will help.' Did you ever hear the like of that conjuring for a little fellow? So, Nancy, bundle up some of Angel's clothes, and I'll keep him for you for a couple of weeks."

Here was truly a door of escape, for Angel

was an active child at the mischievous age, and Nancy lived in terror of the well, the highway, the pig-pen, and the stock-yard, where unnumbered evils might overtake him.

“ You look awful tired,” said Jason at tea, to Nancy.

“ Whose fault is it ? ” snapped Eugene ; “ she would bring him back.”

“ What else could she do ? ” said Jason, rising to answer a knock at the door.

On the threshold stood a man in a long, straight, Quaker-like coat, a wide-rimmed drab felt hat, long white hair falling over his shoulders, on his back a knapsack or package, which made him look like burdened Pilgrim in the “ Progress ” ; his hands crossed on the top of a big oak stick.

“ Ho ! Brother Benedict ! ” cried Jason, “ come in,” and he placed a chair by the table.

“ No plate for me, son,” said the stranger, “ I ate at Friend Jabez Long’s.”

“ I’d like to know what you are here for ? ” said Eugene.

“ Because I am needed. I came to nurse the

boy that lies near to death. Thee need not quarrel with me, friend Eugene, because I bore witness against thy sins. Who could better give warning, than he who has so greatly sinned? Thee knows I spoke for thy soul's salvation."

Nancy with an entreating look put a cup of tea by the unbidden guest's hand, and he quietly drank it. Then turning to Jason, he said :

"I will go now to the sick lad's room."

Jason led him to where Reuben lay, and came back to finish his supper.

"Who is it?" asked Nancy, much overawed.

"They call him Brother Benedict. He is the best nurse in the country. We are in great luck to have him, and he don't charge a cent. Wants nothing but his board. Father is down on him because Brother Benedict hates the Corners' and bears witness against whiskey. They say that he isn't as old as his white hair looks, and he has had some dreadful trouble about drink, and is trying to do good to make up for some evil he did."

Nancy felt that she had seen this grave figure dimly revealed among the shadows of a corner

of the church gallery, and that she had seen it stealing out of some room at Jabez Long's as she entered ; Jason explained :

“ He makes his home at Jabez Long's when he is not nursing, but that isn't often, and he don't care to see people or speak to them, unless he is nursing the sick, or ‘ bearing witness ’ against something. He will watch nights, Nancy, and take tip-top care of Reuben, and all he'll want will be an hour each day to walk in the fields, and a few hours to sleep when he has watched all night. When he walks in the fields folks say he prays, and that his prayers do as much for his sick folks as his nursing. He is never mad, and he never smiles. You can feel real comfortable about Reuben, now that he has come. He will stay till Reub gets well, or until some sicker person sends for him, and it will be a circus to see Peggy when she gets eyes on him ; she hates him.”

“ Some one brought Mrs. Peggy a lot of morphine when I was gone yesterday,” said Nancy.

“ Violante, I reckon,” said Jason ; “ she skiped off after school, for a long time.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRST FRUITS OF HARVEST.

“To whom God will, there be the victory.”

“I THINK he is going to die ; it don't seem as if any one so sick can possibly get better.” Thus Nancy to Brother Benedict, when day after day Reuben's illness had dragged along.

It was a raw, late November morning ; the house was still. Mrs. Peggy had been very sick for some days, and now under a heavy opiate lay in a stupor. On the lounge in the large room was Seraph, asleep. On the red lounge she lay, white and still like some half-withered lily broken before it had fully bloomed. These sick-rooms were no place for the frail Seraph, and Nancy kept her out of doors as much as possible, sitting bundled up in a quilt in the wicker-carriage. Jason was working too hard

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to take any care of the child, and Eugene never would touch Seraph or do anything for her, the child's misfortunes had closed his selfish heart.

When Nancy, standing beside Reuben's bed, spoke to Brother Benedict so hopelessly, that experienced nurse merely shook his head.

"If only he would come to himself, so he could know the danger, and say even one prayer ! He has not been a good boy, he is not fit to die ; oh, if he only could pray !" she added.

As Nancy spoke the lids slowly rose from over Reuben's sunken, black eyes, but the eyes were filmy and vacant, there was no speculation in them.

"Did he hear me ? Do you think he heard ?" cried Nancy.

"We cannot tell. I have had people who got well, after being very near death and seeming unconscious, tell me that they knew all that was passing, heard all that was said. And so, even when one lies as if insensible, I often bend my head to the pillow and pray aloud or repeat texts of Scripture. One patient I had, who recovered when he had been so low I thought his

breath was gone. He told me that at the worst he knew his state, and heard the prayers, and prayed them in his own heart, and gave himself to God, and I know it was so, because ever after he led a Christian life. So, Mrs. Loring, I have not failed to pray for this poor lad, and to repeat in his ear the words of the Holy Book. 'Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out.' 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and rise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' 'Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee.' 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' 'Lord, hear my voice.' 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.' 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.' 'By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.' 'The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ.' 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.' And so, Mrs. Loring, I find hundreds of comfortable verses, now one and now another,

to whisper in his ear, and who knows but God may bless them to his soul."

"God bless you for all you are doing for us, Brother Benedict," said Nancy; "how we could get on without you, I don't know. I didn't know there was such goodness in the world!"

"Don't say goodness," said Benedict; "I am the chief of sinners, but saved by Jesus Christ; and I try to work for Him whose laws I broke, and whose ways I hated. Not that I can earn or deserve anything of God, Mrs. Nancy; but now having felt the great goodness of God, I cannot but give myself to serving Him. And since I once did great harm and caused sin and sorrow, now I try to help those who are in need, and make human sorrows a little less. You are new here, and don't know about my history, but I want you not to think of me above what you ought to think. Once I was a wild and reckless drunkard. I cared only for myself, and to do my own will. I wasted my father's property and made my mother's life wretched. I had an only brother, my twin, and he was as good as I was bad. He bore with me, and loved me to the

last ; he shared his earnings with me, and kept a home for me. He was taken very ill. Of course I loved him and grieved over him, and tried to nurse him. The illness was so long and severe that watchers were worn out, and one night I sat up alone with him. The doctor wanted me not to taste a drop of liquor, and carefully gave me my orders ; but I felt faint, the old thirst came upon me. I drank and drank again. Not knowing what I did, I gave him three times of powders that should have been given only once if he was restless. He was overpowered in his feeble state by the excessive dose, and passed from sleep into death. We were found in the morning—he dead, and I, lying in a drunken sleep against his pillow. I had brain-fever after that, and when I came back, with white hair and a broken heart, to life, the Lord had mercy on me a sinner. Then I gave myself to the care of the sick, to save lives as I had destroyed life. The little property of my brother was all I needed to live upon, and to keep me ever in mind of him I put that ‘Brother’ before my own name Benedict. Some

day, by the great mercy of God in Christ, I hope to meet my brother and parents in heaven. But here I am a man who cannot forget the record which God has promised to forget, and which men seem to have forgotten. As God had mercy on such a wretch as me, then I cannot despair of any, and God sometimes uses me as His messenger to the sick ones I am nursing. I hope, Mrs. Loring, that this boy will receive the grace of God ; we must not despair, for the words of the Holy Book are, ‘ Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great.’ ”

They were silent awhile. Then Nancy pointed to the clock.

“ It is your hour for your walk in the fields, and you are looking very tired to-day ; you need the air.”

When Brother Benedict had gone, Nancy sat by Reuben and held his long, bony hand in hers. Her tears fell upon the almost lifeless fingers.

“ Oh, my poor boy ! ” she said, “ if you had been my very own son, and I your real mother had brought you up all your life, could not I have

saved you from this ? Could I have helped you to be strong and good ?”

She rose to bathe his face with bay-water, and as she did so, she kissed the pale forehead which she felt would soon be forever hidden from her sight by a coffin-lid and the brown mould.

Seraph woke and gave a plaintive wail. Angiolino was still with Lovinia Long. Nancy lifted Seraph up and returning to the bedside sat in her rocking-chair holding and comforting the feeble child. This little one, so dependent upon her cares, so grateful for them, was unspeakable consolation to Nancy. With the perversity of love Nancy had preferred Reuben to the other Loring children ; whether it was the boy's handsome face, his resemblance to her ne'er-do-well husband, his kindness to Seraph which showed sympathy and tenderness of heart,—for some reason, or for no reason, Reuben was preferred to the silent, undemonstrative Jason. Now, it was as much for Reuben as for Seraph, that she sang, when Seraph, patting Nancy's cheek, said, “Sing, mommy, sing.” And Nancy sang, “Around the throne of God

in heaven," "I think when I read," and "Happy Land."

As she sang Eugene came in. He looked about frowning, and said peevishly: "Of course there is nothing done for me,—I'm of no account here."

"But what do you want, Eugene?" asked Nancy.

"It don't make any difference, so long as there are sick folks and children in the way," retorted Eugene.

"If your head aches and you want to go to bed," replied the practical Nancy, "your room is all set to rights; if you only want to rest awhile, there is a pillow on the lounge; if you want your dinner, it will be ready at noon,—it is not yet eleven."

Eugene sat down, put his elbows on his knees, his face in the palms of his hands, and groaned piteously.

"Eugene, are you sick?" asked Nancy.

"Sick at heart," mourned Eugene. "Nancy, have you any money?"

"No-o-o," said Nancy, taking the alarm at

once. She had only about four dollars now, and that must be saved for Reuben's needs if he convalesced.

"Seems strange," snapped Eugene, "that a woman that works as you do, never has any money; you must be very extravagant or very selfish."

It was superfluous to answer this charge. "How much do you need, and what for?" asked Nancy.

"I don't know as you've any right to question me," said Eugene, who was very pleasant abroad, and very disagreeable at home. "But I want fifteen dollars for taxes. You can shirk other debts, but not taxes. If the taxes ain't paid the sheriff will sell us out. This is a disgrace,—Lorings to be sold out for taxes. But here is what it comes to, with such a pack of children and extravagant women about."

As the children were his, and not hers, Nancy did not feel called upon to vindicate their right to be. This matter of taxes and selling out alarmed her; suppose that extortionate sheriff should fix his official mind upon the Holstein cow!

“ Couldn’t you help Job Warren for a couple of weeks, and earn the money, Eugene? Job wants a man to help on the thrasher—wants one very much.”

“ With my weak lungs, and poor head !—that’s like you, Nancy, to ask me to go in the noise and dust and chaff of a steam thrasher! You must want to be a widow. All right—let him sell us out, I shall soon be in my forgotten grave.”

Nancy rocked to and fro with Seraph, but singing was out of the question. Ellice would have routed the enemy by raising “ Hark from the tombs a doleful sound,” but Nancy only rocked—and presently those words about “ not shirking taxes,” and “ sold up by the sheriff,” droned through her head with a familiar sound. “ Why, Eugene,” she cried, “ the taxes are paid till next August. Ellice paid them.”

“ No, she didn’t.”

“ But yes, Eugene, she collected the board money for the colts and calves in the pasture, and paid taxes; and you were angry about it, and she said ‘ taxes couldn’t be shirked,’ and

‘we must not be sold up.’ I heard you quarrelling about it in the back yard. Ellice gave me the receipt, and told me to take care of it. I will get it for you, Eugene, so you need not worry over that.”

She bolstered Seraph in the rocking-chair, unlocked a box, looked over the papers, and brought one to Eugene,—receipt for taxes. Eugene looked at it angrily, snatched it from her hand, tore it in two and flung the fragments on the floor. Nancy picked them up, smoothed them, pinned them together and locked them up in the box. It was now borne in on her mind that Eugene had been merely trying to get money from her for his own ends, and had had no idea of paying taxes. No doubt he had some betting debt, or debt at the Corners. This was very unpleasant thinking; she wanted to fly from the sight of Eugene. When such troubled hours came, work was a great recourse, because she must think about her work, and so could brood less over these unmanly manners of Eugene. Fortunately Brother Benedict’s hour in the fields was over, and he was at the

door on his return—he would look out for Reuben, Seraph, and Peggy—and as for the kitchen, it was time to get dinner, and no doubt the soup was burning.

Eugene stretched himself upon the lounge, his hands under his head, sighing: Why had he married such a mean, selfish woman as Nancy! How he had thrown himself away! She had paid a mortgage on the farm, and wouldn't let him make another! She had bought him a team and wagon, and wouldn't sell them! How stingy!

Brother Benedict looked at his patient, whispered softly near his ear, "O Ephraim, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help found." Then he looked seriously at Eugene.

"It is written," he said, "'strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it.' It is bitter to thee, friend. Thee is feverish and weak; thee has no energy to work, no capacity to enjoy. Thee should be in healthy middle age, a strong happy man, a good father, a useful citizen. Thee is none of these things, because of strong drink—life is withering away in the indulgence

of appetite. Man, thee should rule thy passions, not let passions rule thee. Rise up, friend, and stand here by me, and ask God for the life of this sick lad, for his physical and spiritual life. Ask that thee may help him to live well, and serve God. It is not too late; awake to righteousness, the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger."

"I don't see why you should talk as if I was a great sinner, Brother Benedict!" cried Eugene. "I never fight, I never abuse my family. I never steal, I never was arrested, nobody hears me brawling or using bad language on the street. Most men, with the aggravations I have, with such a perverse woman as Nancy, or Aunt Peggy, and such a raft of children dragging me down, would burst out at them. But I never burst out. I'm too weak to work, and—and I sit at the Corners, where I can see my friends, and talk politics. How is the country going to be saved, if we don't talk politics? These temperance prohibition cranks are going to ruin the country just as the Abolitionists did. I take a whiff of smoke to settle my stomach, and a

glass or two of ale, or beer, or porter, to strengthen my system, and you come at me as if I was a reprobate and a scoundrel ! I'm good enough ; I'm too good—if I wasn't I shouldn't be imposed upon as I am by my family. I tell you what, Benedict, I need to travel, to get away from these drags, and start fresh, and when Peggy dies and I get the money she's left me, I mean to travel ; to go to California, or Florida, or Brazil. I have heard that in any of those places a man can get rich, easy, if he has a little money to make a start."

" I think a man with a family must be out of his mind if he can speak in that way," said Brother Benedict with indignation.

Looking beyond Eugene, he thought he saw in the direction of Mrs. Peggy's bed a pair of snapping, black eyes, open and shut as instantaneously as the fire-fly flashes ; but he could not be certain. Presently, when Nancy came to say that dinner was ready, Mrs. Peggy woke up and asked for plenty of dinner, saying that she was very hungry ; all the afternoon the old woman was very hilarious.

Brother Benedict slept in the afternoon from four until nine, then at nine Nancy gave him supper, and he watched with the sick ones all night, while the others of the family went to bed. That afternoon Cousin Lovinia brought little Angelino and Tomsey over to inquire after Reuben, and to see Seraph. The three children were established in a corner of the sitting-room, while Cousin Lovinia and Nancy sat by Reuben.

“If he could only come to himself before he dies, so I could know he took thought for his soul”; this was Nancy’s plaint.

“The Lord will not send you more than you can bear, Nancy,” said her guest; “He tempers judgment with mercy. When I realize that before a great while we must part with our Tomsey, for the great doctor in New York said surely there was no help for him, and he couldn’t stay with us a great while; and it breaks my heart to think I shall not hear the sound of his little crutches, nor his wise-like words more; then I reflect what a comfort it is that he has been such a dear little saint, and so happy all his life,

and how joyful he will be in heaven. It just seems as if the dear Lord had taken our little, feeble one in His arms from the very first, and blessed him. So God gives one comfort and another in His own way, and who can tell but He may send you the comfort of Reuben getting well and being a true Christian? I'll keep Angelino until all is right here, one way or another. Tomsey is so fond of him. He likes his name, says it fits him; but, land-a-me! if ever I heard the like of two children called Seraph and Angel!"

"Eugene chose those names, and Violante's and Liane's," said Nancy, with due pride in such achievement. "Mrs. Loring named Reuben and Jason after some of her people. Eugene is a great reader and he had found the names which he gave, in books."

Mrs. Long sniffed a little; she considered that the names were in very poor taste, and that Eugene's reading was not worth much.

Eugene stayed at home that evening, whether because he was in debt at the Corners, or did not feel well, or had it in mind to find out what

Nancy did with her money. Nancy was patching Jason's working trousers.

"You won't earn much money that way, Nancy," Eugene said.

"No ; but I'll save it."

"How much have you earned since you came here ?"

"I haven't counted."

"Well, what have you done with it ?"

"I promised Ellice I would earn enough to put her through the Commercial College. As Reuben is sick, I cannot earn any now, and I am going to borrow twenty-five from Jabez."

"Oh, you are ? Well, you haven't any right to lay out all you earn on the children, Ellice or any of them. Your board is worth something, it seems to me."

"Don't I do enough to pay for my board ?" asked Nancy quietly.

"Well, a husband has more right to the money than children have. I know what is the matter, Nancy, you never forgave me for fooling you with a ready-made family. He ! he ! he ! that was a pretty steep joke ! How you stared !"

“ I think it was wrong to deceive me,” said Nāncy, sewing vigorously ; “ but if you had told me the truth, and had been always a good, kind, faithful father, trying to bring up your children right, I should have been glad and ready to help you. I like the children, I am willing to do all I can for them. They are about all the comfort I have. If you would take care of yourself, Eugene, and cease going to the Corners, we should do very well.”

Eugene felt that he was not making progress in conciliation, and yawning, said he must go to bed.

Finally Reuben began to improve — by slow degrees he returned to consciousness and gathered strength, and then he did not need watchers at night, at length he could sit up in bed. Brother Benedict was called to another patient ; but he and Reuben had some long, earnest talks before the good man went elsewhere on his errand of mercy.

Mrs. Peggy was as usual ; and the baby still at Jabez Long's, and Nancy took care of her house and her invalids. Liane came over one

Sunday and spent the day. She was pleasanter than ever before to Nancy, and informed her, "Everybody is talking about how good you are to the children."

That was comfortable to hear, for Nancy liked praise and to be appreciated, as who does not? But her far richer reward was to come. Reuben, like most convalescents, was captious and spoiled, and Nancy was patience itself in waiting on him, and dime by dime her last dollars went in buying him luxuries. She would watch him eat, and would say :

"Oh, how proud I am to see you getting on so fine !"

One day, when she removed his tray, and bent down to brush crumbs from his pillow, Reuben clasped his arms about her neck.

"You dear, good mother ! I know all you have done for me, and never told that I robbed you ! I'll be a good son to you from this out, and a good boy, too, if God will help me !"

Oh, was not Nancy well content ?

CHAPTER XII.

"MORE ARE THE SONS OF THE DESOLATE."

"His very face with change of heart is changed."

"I DON'T want you ever to say anything to any one about that money," said Nancy one day to Reuben, as she sat by his bed, "and I have told Cousin Jabez and Timothy not to say a word about that morning—I brought you back. I want all to be forgotten, and a fresh start made. I think that is God's way with us; He says, 'Thy sins shall be remembered no more,' and that 'He casts them behind His back forever.' Yes, start fresh, every way; you will get new strength, and your mind and heart will be made over new, and you have new growth; you have stretched up almost into a man since you have been lying here; and in the spring all the world seems fresh and new, and, Reuben, you must have some new clothes. I must have Timothy measure you and get you a suit."

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“I wish I could earn some money, or do some work quick,” said Reuben. “Father will kick about getting me clothes.”

“Never mind, you must have them.”

“Isn’t there anything I can do?” urged Reuben. “After next week I can go about the house.”

“If you would help with the kitchen work, you are so handy, and look after the children, I could take in sewing again. There are five or six frocks wanted by the women folks about here, and I’d like to do them. I owe Cousin Jabez twenty-five dollars, and I need to get stuff at the store for shirts and underclothes for you. I knit a lot of socks for you and Jason since you’ve been sick.”

“All right,” said Reuben, “I’ll be your hired girl. Ellice used to say I was real good help, when I felt like it. And in the spring I’ll make all the garden.”

“After a while,” said Nancy, “you can make candy again. When you are able to go out, why not try and get orders at the grocery and drug-store for all the candy you can make?”

You earned a good lot of money that way last year."

"And wasted it like a fool, buying things to poison myself!" said Reuben bitterly. "Oh, you don't know what a terrible time I had in the city! I thought all was going to be grand, and that a hundred dollars would last forever! The first day or two, I ordered fine food and bottles of wine, at a restaurant, and bought a fancy hat, and necktie, and big silk handkerchief. Then I fell in with some boys and bragged and flourished the money, and they made me drunk and stole all I had. Then I worked with a coffee-stand man, until he struck me for dropping a cup of coffee, and after that I couldn't find any work because I had no recommendations. And I went hungry, and slept in boxes, and finally some fellows treated me, and we all got very drunk, and then—if you hadn't come for me I should have died in prison, weeks ago! Isn't that a dreadful story?"

"Yes, it is," said Nancy, tears of pity running over her face; "don't think of it any more, except to help yourself to be satisfied with honest

work, and a clean, quiet home, and to help you to fly from all that will lead to such terrible ways again."

"Oh, if once I get well and strong, won't I try and help you, and all the rest of them," cried Reuben.

"I'll tell you what I want to do," said Nancy confidentially, taking up another garment from the week's washing to patch, "as soon as that money is paid to Cousin Jabez, I want to begin to buy some things for Jason. He works so hard he ought to have something of his own. I'd like to get him a colt, and a pig, and some fowls to raise, and give him a black Holstein calf to bring up. He wants to farm; wouldn't it be nice to start some stock for him!"

"Oh, wouldn't it! I'll help you!" said Reuben.

Nancy was wiser than she knew, thus to fill Reuben's mind with plans for the others, and to set him at work. Christmas had been quiet; Reuben went to the table for the first time that day, and Nancy made a chicken pie and boiled a ham. Ellice sent up a little box of presents,

and Nancy made Liane an apron trimmed with knitted lace. On New-Year's Day she and Reuben and Jason made candy and pop-corn balls, and sent some to Ellice and to Tomsey. On St. Valentine's Day came a joyful letter from Ellice, announcing that she had an excellent position as book-keeper, stenographer and telephone operator, and typewriter, in a wholesale china store, with salary of forty-five dollars a month.

"Don't tell any of them what I get," she wrote to Nancy, "or Eugene will go in debt at once, and expect me to help him out. My board is twenty dollars a month, and I have my washing to put out. This first month I shall have to take what is over from board and washing, to buy some spring clothes. I am obliged to be properly dressed in this new place. After that, I will send you some money. I want to pay you back what you spent on me, you dear good Nancy."

Nancy had not told Ellice of all the troubles with Reuben. She had feared Ellice would think she must come home to help, and that

her mind would be burdened and turned from her studies. She had merely written that Reuben had come home, had been quite sick, was well again, and was now a very good boy, as good as Jason—whereat Ellice had marvelled.

These seemed to be days of good cheer. The happy fortune of Ellice made sunshine in Nancy's heart. Reuben developed great capacity for helping in the house, and Nancy found plenty of sewing to do, so that she hoped by May to pay her debt to Jabez.

About the end of April came a letter from Ellice with thirty dollars in it. Then Nancy felt that she must go to town and settle affairs. She left the house and the children with Reuben, who was making a garden, and with Timothy she arrived early in the city and appeared soon after at the store where Ellice was employed. Ellice saw the plain, quiet-looking figure entering the doorway, and came from her little desk to greet her. Senior clerks and buyers who were examining goods, and were ready to cast favorable eyes on the handsome girl, glanced

superciliously at the faded woman, whom she welcomed and led into her little enclosure.

"I didn't come to disturb you, Ellice," said Nancy, "only to tell you we are all doing well, and I'll keep that thirty dollars, because I owe twenty-five of it to Jabez, as I had to borrow that last money I sent you, Reuben being so sick he took up all my time; and with the other five, I'd like to buy some things for Jason. But you are not to send any more, Ellice. If you do I'll put it in the bank in your name, and you'd better do it for yourself. It is so nice," said Nancy with an unconscious sigh, "to have a little money of your own in the bank! And by and by, Ellice, you may want to marry, and then you ought to have some money to buy furniture and other things. So mind you don't send any to us; if we need anything I'll surely let you know. I'm happier when I work, and have something to work for."

"Will you promise to let me know if you or the children need anything?" asked Ellice.

"Yes, indeed I will. We are very comfortable now. You don't know how good Reuben

is. He says 'mother' to me! and yesterday Mrs. Hutton was to see him, and he talks of joining the church. Then, I think that will help Jason on."

"Was Reuben very sick?" asked Ellice.

"Yes; we expected him to die every hour."

"And you never told me?"

"Brother Benedict was there, and we didn't need you. I thought it would be such a pity to worry you away from your studies, and now you see it is all right, and you have a good position."

"Dear Nancy," said Ellice, laying her soft white hand on Nancy's mended brown cotton gloves, "how unselfish you are! And how is Violante? Here is a little box of doll's dishes to take to her. They were sample dishes from Germany, but not as nice as this firm wanted, and one of the partners gave them to me for some child. Violante will like them, especially because the little Evans girl has none! Poor Violante, maybe I was too hard on her!"

"I must not keep you any longer, Ellice," said Nancy, taking the little box of dishes and pulling her shawl straight. "Good-bye, dear."

"You must walk about the store and see the beautiful dishes and vases and statuettes," said Ellice, looking about and beckoning to an unoccupied clerk; he was a tall, straight, blonde fellow, with close-cropped hair, a strong chin and happy, honest eyes, and he flushed with pleasure as Ellice motioned to him.

"Mr. Harry Waite, will you show my friend some of the handsome goods; just for the pleasure of seeing them—if you are not too busy?"

"I'm not busy yet, it is so early in the day," said Waite, turning to escort Nancy.

"It appears as if I had seen you before," said Nancy, as they passed through lines of vases and jars, and china groves of statuettes and candlesticks and centrepieces; "did you ever go about much in C—— Street?"

"I have boarded at the lower end of C—— Street for five years."

"Oh! I used to live on C—— Street, and you probably passed by my house."

"And you are related to Miss Ward?"

"No—I am her step-father's wife. But she has been very good to me."

“ I suppose so.”

“ She is the best and sweetest, and smartest girl that ever lived,” said Nancy with enthusiasm.

“ I don’t doubt it,” replied Waite heartily, and he attended Nancy to the door as if she had been their most magnificent customer.

“ As if I were a fine lady,” said Nancy the humble to herself. And perhaps in the eyes of the angels there was no finer lady in the city.

Nancy returned home that afternoon, like a cheap variety of Dame Fortune. She had the box of dishes for Violante ; for Angelino a little red cart, price ten cents ; for Seraph a paper doll, with its wardrobe, value ditto ; and then, lo ! Timothy lifted from the market wagon a box containing three black Spanish hens and a cock ; and another wooden prison wherein were two delightful little Berkshire pigs, with thin skins, fine ears, and curly tails. Upon these fell Angelino, calling them “ kitties ” and “ doggies ” and “ baby horses,” and deep was the joy of Jason when Nancy said to him :

“ Here is a present to you, from Ellice. This is to begin your fortune. I read of a man who

sold, for eight hundred and fifty dollars, the increase of two pigs for five years. Who knows but you may do as well by the time you are twenty-one ! ”

Jason was too happy to speak articulately, but he and Reuben disappeared with the prize in the direction of the barn, and soon a loud hammering indicated the preparation of private quarters for this aristocratic stock. Timothy told the boys that he and Nancy had stopped at a “vendue” of stock, and had made these purchases.

Eugene had been away for a week, up the country with one of the farmers buying cattle, and after tea Nancy and the boys talked freely in the kitchen, while Nancy washed the dishes and set sponge for bread.

“ I want to get you a nice colt to raise, Jason, just as soon as ever I can,” said Nancy ; “ and if the next calf is a nice one to raise, you must try and keep that.”

“ Father won’t want me to have them,” said Jason ; “ he will want to sell the things, and take the money for himself.”

"Maybe he will be glad for you to have them ; or perhaps he will not notice them at all, or perhaps we can persuade him about them," said the optimistic Nancy. "Anyway, Jason, you work hard, and are a good boy, and we must begin to lay up something for the time when you are a man, and raising stock will be the easiest way to do it, as you can care for the animals yourself, and they have the place to run in."

"Oh, but you are the best !" said Jason.

He was a quiet, well-principled, hard-working, and generally discouraged boy. The course of his father and Reuben had angered and mortified him ; now hope dawned upon him in the plans of Nancy, and the "string of his tongue was loosed."

Nancy, having had fifteen months' instruction and example from that administrative damsel, Ellice, had become almost the equal of Ellice in the management of the affairs and the small economies of the Loring establishment ; the possession of the market wagon added something to their income. If Eugene had been

willing to work for the general weal, they would have been very comfortably situated ; but Eugene only worked for what money he wanted to spend at the Corners, and the work he preferred was riding about the country gathering up stock. At home he felt that Nancy and the boys distinctly disapproved of him ; he could not bear the sight of Seraph, and there was something taunting in the expression of Aunt Peggy's black eyes, that filled him with vague fears that she would cheat him of her inheritance. He was disappointed in Nancy ; he married her supposing that he could dominate her completely. He found that she "withstood him to his face !" She might have yielded all, and have died of discouragement, had not the care of the children, especially the three little ones, aroused all that was strongest in her to their defence. To indulge himself without thought of the future or his children's lot therein, this would have been Eugene's way ; but here Nancy rose to combat him. In all these questions of social life it is the woman who has most at stake and whose voice is least heard ; her opinion is ruled

out of politics, even out of her church affairs, and frequently the battle is waged to rule her out of the household destinies where the fortunes of the children, whom she represents, are to be made or marred. For a while she struggles, then too often she goes to the wall, unless upheld by a strong, unselfish devotion to others, and a mighty faith in God, which makes the world to come loom large and compensatory, dwarfing all present ills by its marvellous contrasts.

Nancy had instinctively turned to woman's finest opportunities, in attaching herself to the children about her, and moulding them to the best of her ability toward goodness and right thinking. Her work for them was already bearing fruit.

She had builded better than she knew in asking Jason to join Tomsey's Temperance Band; the Band was helping all its members toward a higher manliness.

There came one very sad meeting of the Band, when little Tomsey, from his high chair at the head of the long table, made a speech to his

friends, telling them that the doctors said he couldn't stay with them much longer.

"I never wanted to be a man," said Tomsey, "because I couldn't be big and strong like the rest, and I couldn't get along very well when I didn't have my own folks to take care of me. But I would like to live a few years more. I have a very nice time living, and my folks will feel awful to have me go away. But I'm not at all afraid, and I think I shall like Heaven very much, when I get there. I want you to keep up the Society, and meet here, and get all the boys to join that you can. And I am saving up all my money now, to buy a Temperance book for each of you, to have to remember me by when I am gone."

After that speech the boys were very teary about the eyes, and went off silently toward their homes. Three boys were in the company of Jason on his road.

"I say, isn't it awful about Tomsey," said Jason, mournfully.

"And his folks will be just about broken up," said Ned Hunt.

"And the Society won't be good for a cent, after Tomsey's gone," added Sol Bush.

"Seems like I couldn't stand it, to bury Tomsey," said Joe King.

"Tell you what," said Ned Hunt, "mother says if we ask God for things, we get 'em, and if a few agrees they get 'em sure. I know it's so, for I've heard mother tell of things she got praying, and I've tried it myself once when I was lost in the swamp woods and was dreadful afraid of tigers, and once when my dog was lost, and when the baby was sick, and when our best horse was sick. And once I read of three or four young men, on a rainy day, under a haystack, praying for something—I don't recollect what, but something great came of it. So let's all pray for Tomsey, not to be a man, but to stay here and have a good time till he's sixteen or seventeen."

"Say we do try it!" cried Sol Bush, "there's a haystack."

The boys scrambled over the fence, and in the faint starlight made their way to the stack and knelt down. Then there was a profound

silence, but Ned Hunt, who was a deacon's son and knew how such affairs could be conducted, spoke in a sepulchral tone :

" Brother Jason, will you lead in prayer ? "

Jason, whose praying had been a mumbled form in his own room, made no response. Sol Bush administered a sound punch with his elbow, insisting, " Go ahead, Jason ! " Jason, feeling as if Tomsey's life now depended upon him, began :

" O Lord, I ain't much of a hand at praying, but I do want you to keep Tomsey alive a while longer. He don't care to be a man, and, of course, you ain't able to make him like other folks, and we don't ask it, but won't you please let him live till he's older ? Amen. "

" Now, Sol Bush, it's your turn, " added Jason, having happily concluded his effort.

" Can't ; don't know how, " said Sol.

" You have to, " cried Joe King. " Do you want Tomsey to die ? "

" Say something, Sol, " urged Ned Hunt.

Sol began almost inarticulately :

" If you please, God, his folks feel awfully to

lose him, and you don't need him, and Ned says folks gets things for praying, and won't you strengthen him up a bit somehow? Amen."

Joe King broke in with a rush. He was a boy with very few scruples or hesitation about anything:

"Lord, if you take away Tomsey, our Society will all break up, and it's dreadful to hear him talk about giving us books to remember him by. It's poor little Tomsey we want, and we know you can do it, if you will, and you said you would, for praying forever 'n' ever. Amen."

Ned Hunt cleared his throat and prayed:

"Dear Lord, if you'll please, leave us Tomsey a little longer. We know you can do anything, and that you hear prayer, and that you don't mind if our praying isn't very good, because it is the best we can, and, for Christ's sake, we pray to hear us about Tomsey. Amen."

The boys rose from their knees feeling very solemn, and in some way committed to different lives by this exercise.

"I say," spoke up Ned, as they clambered back over the fence, "let's go back to Mr.

Long's and tell them to cheer up, for now Tomsey will live to be quite old, perhaps as much as eighteen."

Away then back at a round pace, and Jabez opening the door, Ned began :

"Mr. Long, we're sure Tomsey will live a good while now. We've had a prayer-meeting for him, and you know God promises to hear, and He keeps His word."

"We asked for him to grow up to sixteen or so," said Sol.

"And don't you and Tomsey and Mrs. Long get down-hearted," said Ned, "for God is sure to do what we asked ; I have tried it, and mother says so."

"Just all of you keep comfortable, and tell Tomsey he is sure to be here five or six years yet, and that's a long while," said Jason.

"Mother, come here and listen to these boys," said Jabez. "'Pears to me, if the good Lord put it into their hearts to ask, it is because He means to grant it ; and, doctors or no doctors, I reckon God means to leave us Tomsey longer."

Jason found Nancy sitting up for him.

“You are so late ; I was getting frightened about you,” said Nancy.

“We had business,” said Jason importantly.

“But you don’t sit up for father.”

“Well—no—he’s older and can—take care of himself.”

“I reckon he can’t do for himself as well as I do for myself,” said Jason.

CHAPTER XIII.

BROTHER BENEDICT.

“ For once, when I was so high up in pride
That I was half-way down the slopes of hell.”

THE wheat and clover were ripening for cutting; the bluebirds had led out their second broods, and the blackberry bushes along the roadside had little green cones where white blossoms had been.

Reuben Loring was driving a spring wagon along the turnpike. His cheek was now firm and brown with returning health and out-of-door work. He whistled as he drove along, and seemed well content. Presently he saw a tall slim figure wearing a drab Quaker coat and hat, and with a little knapsack-like packet on the shoulders, turn out of one of the side roads opening upon the highway. Reuben flicked his horse with the whip and soon overtook the pedestrian.

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"Ho, Brother Benedict! Where are you going?"

"I have just come from Friend Worth's, where I have been nursing old Abel, who died of paralysis last night, and I am going to Peter Turner's, for I had word yesterday that his hired man had fallen from the barn they were roofing and had fractured his leg in two places."

"You have come a mile and a half and have three miles to go. Get into the wagon, Brother Benedict, and I will take you to the Turners. You'll be there the sooner."

Brother Benedict climbed to the place beside Reuben.

"Thee has Amos Hunt's horse and spring wagon, Reuben."

"Yes, I'm working for Mr. Hunt for a month."

"Thee looks right well, my boy."

"Yes, I never felt so well before in my life, and it is thanks to you and mother that I am alive."

"And the good Lord," added Brother Benedict.

“And the good Lord ; but I can tell you I owe Him for more than being alive. No one but myself knows how wicked I was getting to be, and how near ruin.”

“It is true,” said Brother Benedict, “that no one can know of our wickedness as we ourselves know it, but the good Lord knows more of it, and sees more evil in it than we do, for sin blinds our reason and hardens our conscience, while His eyes are pure, and all His thoughts are right. We must look very black in His sight. And yet, thee knows, Reuben, that in the Lord Jesus Christ, He sees us white and clean and righteous and we are accepted in the Beloved as without spot and blameless. That is very glorious and wonderful.”

“Yes, it is,” said Reuben. “Mr. Hutton* preached about that last Sunday. It was the day I joined the church, and I kept the sermon in mind.”

“As I met thee,” said Brother Benedict, “I was thinking what a change had come over old Abel Worth, since this time yesterday. Then he was a lump of weary, suffering clay ; now

he is a glorified spirit in the 'Land that lies very far off.' That is a great wonder, Reuben, that in so short a time the sons of earth may put on glory and immortality and the heavenly life. 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things the Lord hath laid up for those that love Him.' Abel and I took sweet counsel together of the things that belong unto the King, so long as Abel was conscious and could speak."

"Well, you ain't likely to take much sweet counsel with this next man you are going to," said Reuben bluntly, as they trotted along. "He is a bad one. He was drunk yesterday morning, and that was what made him fall off the barn. Of course, I'm not the one to pick flaws in him, for I've been drunk myself; but that's the truth. Perhaps, now you've got him laid up, you may do him some good, as you did me. Why, Brother Benedict, you know I began to smoke and drink when I was real little, and I never did like the taste, for it made me faint and headachy; but still I sort of craved

it. It was a habit. Well, since I was sick and have been asking God to help me, do you know I don't crave the stuff at all? The thought of it makes me kind of sick. I hope I'll always feel that way."

"I hope thee will," said Brother Benedict, "for a world of ruin is wrought by those evil things. I sit sometimes and think how it might have been with me if I had not followed the devices and desires of my own foolish and wicked heart, but had heeded the word of God and the commands of my parents, as my brother did. Our father left us each ten acres of land. On my brother's land stood the homestead. I had money given me for building a house. We had each a good trade and a thousand dollars. We might have lived there side by side, bringing up our families in the fear of God. I think how we might have worked together and spent the long evenings together planning for the future of our families and the good of the community. For him the years have gone by in the glory of God, and I have trodden the long, sad way of penitence. And yet, Reuben, I tell thee, when

I was a young man and my parents and the elders remonstrated with me on my course, I refused to admit that I was doing any wrong ! I said that I robbed no man, I spent what was my own, and if I found more pleasure in that way I had a right to it and no one had any right to interfere ; just as if pleasure should be man's object here below, and as if God had not set people in charge the one of the other. Cain said unto God, ' Am I my brother's keeper ? ' I think as men go away from righteousness they refuse more and more to keep or be kept by their fellows. And then, Reuben, I used to say I did no one any harm by my course ; I only harmed myself, and no one need quarrel with me for that. That is all wrong. The Holy Book tells us we are God's instruments here below, bought with a price, temples of God, and we are bound to keep ourselves in as fit order as we can to work for God, and to honor His name. Besides, it was not true that I harmed no one but myself. I dishonored the name of my dead father ; grieved greatly my mother ; set an evil example in the community ;

wasted the time and strength that God had given me ; robbed my brother of comfort, and, finally, of life. That was what I called doing no one any harm ! We human beings, Reuben, are so closely bound together that no one can harm himself alone. When he injures himself the injury goes farther in the community. Do you see those two houses yonder to the left ? That one this way is my old home, sold to Friend Morse, and the one next it is the house Friend Morse built for his only son. In that place my brother and I might now be living if I had not followed after strong drink ! But there, Reuben, I have talked enough about myself. Tell me how thee is getting on, and how long thee will work for Friend Hunt. I hope thee is not neglecting his work to carry me to Peter Turner's, for I can well walk."

"That is all right," said Reuben ; "Mr. Hunt will be glad I could do a good turn for you. Every one is willing to help you, Brother Benedict, because you are always helping other folks. I have only work for a month, through haying and harvesting with Mr. Hunt, and I'm pre-

cious glad to get that. When my month is up, and I get my money, I'm going to town for a day with Timothy Powers to buy a strong little rocking-chair for Seraph. Mother is going to pad it well and fix a band for it, so we can have Seraph sit in it and move her easy. Seraph likes so to sit by the flower-beds. She will sit for hours beside flowers that she likes. It is just as if she talked to them. Then, when I get the chair, I mean to buy mother a gingham frock. She has been at our house two years, and never bought a thing for herself but shoes, and she has earned about a hundred and thirty dollars. It has all gone for the rest of us. I am going at noon for Ellice when I am in the city and have her go with me to buy the chair and gingham, and what clothes I can get for myself with what is left over of the money. I reckon Ellice will be glad to see me. Timothy never goes where she is, because he says he is 'only the hired man,' and mother never went but once. She says, 'Maybe it might harm Ellice for shabby folks to go to see her.' Jason won't go to the city,—he hates it, and father

won't go where Ellice is, because she finds fault with his ways. I wish, Brother Benedict, that father could be brought to do better! Mother seems discouraged and don't know what to say to him; Jason is angry and ashamed—Jason always has been so straight, he don't see how any one can go crooked! I'm more like father, and maybe that is why I feel for him more. He says it is all right about my quitting drink and tobacco, because I am too young for such things, and was hurting myself, and my work is needed by the family. He don't seem to think that he is hurting himself, or owes anything to the family! And then—do you know since I began to think that it was wrong to speak to my father and of him as I used to, why, now he says because I am pleasanter, that I approve of him, and that when Jason is as old as I am, he will approve him also; and he uses that as a reply to Jason when Jason grumbles at his going on! Sometimes I wonder if he believes it."

"No, he does not," said Brother Benedict; "but do thee go on honestly, Reuben, in doing well and speaking in kindness, and that may be

used by God in helping thy father. There is danger sometimes, that young folks lack reverence for those that are older ; talk little and live well, Reuben. Now thee can let me get out of the wagon, and go to Peter Turner's across field, the near way. Thank thee kindly, lad."

Reuben turned his horse back toward Mr. Hunt's farm, and urged it to a brisk trot. It was almost time for milking, the west was aglow with the sunset, and a ruddy glory lay across the land. In that fair evening light the clerks were leaving the great china store of "Peckham Brothers." Ellice came out with the rest, her bag and parasol in hand ; as she reached the threshold Harry Waite joined her.

"It is a beautiful evening, Miss Ward ; will you take a little walk ? Perhaps you would like for me to show you the house on C—— Street, where that Mrs. Loring, who called to see you, used to live ?"

"Yes, I should like that ; how did you find out where she had lived ?"

"I have boarded five years on the lower part

of C—— Street, and when she spoke of having lived on the upper part, I remembered that a Miss Kimball, who did sewing and took a few lodgers, had married one of her lodgers, and gone away, about two years ago. Her neighbors all liked and respected her, and were afraid she had not done very well. I am glad they were mistaken.”

To that suggestion Ellice did not reply, but as she moved on by Harry Waite’s side, she said :

“ It was a great good fortune for my half-brothers and sisters that she married their father. She has been wonderfully good to them. She is the most patient creature, unselfish, and meek, and doing good for evil. Liane, my half-sister, is pretty hard on her yet, but Liane don’t live at home, so that makes less difference.”

They had reached the drinking-fountain near C—— Street. Harry Waite was one of the folks always thirsty if water is in sight, and he asked leave to stop for a drink.

“ I scarcely ever pass this fountain,” he said, “ but I think of a man whom I met here once. I

was taking a drink, when he complained that he was thirsty, when he had just had 'two glasses of nice cool beer.' I told him a little of what was put in beer to increase thirst. He said he was a marketman and took beer for his health, and he wished his business was china, instead. He was looking for board, and I told him there were signs of 'rooms to let' up 'on C—— Street. When I heard about Miss Kimball's marriage I wondered if I had been the means of sending her misfortune. He was a man that might have caught the eyes of one not a very close observer."

"Can you describe him? Do you remember him?"

"Yes. He was slender, of medium height, olive complexion, red cheeks, black curly hair, and dark eyes too near together; he had a selfish, cunning look. I beg your pardon, but I am not speaking of your father."

"No. You are describing Eugene Loring, whom it was my mother's misfortune to marry. My father died long ago, and was a man no one need regret claiming kin to. I think you did,

unwittingly, send a husband to Nancy—and if you asked her to-day I think she would not say that she regretted it, as it has put her in the way of doing more good in the world ; that is all that Nancy lives for. I know that I should never have gone to the Commercial College, or been put in a position to earn a comfortable living, if it were not for Nancy.”

“ Then I must be glad and not sorry that I met that festive marketman. But I should think the influence of such a good woman as you describe, and your influence, and your mother’s if she were like you, would have reformed this man.”

“ My method with Eugene has been quarrelling, and it has not done any good,” said Ellice. “ My mother was a great deal better than I am, but she was too forbearing and gentle to make Eugene behave. Perhaps he could not have been made good by any effort. Nancy has no influence over him at all, and I think she is hopeless of bettering him, and has courage only for the children. The trouble with Eugene is, that he will not see nor admit that he is harming himself in any way.”

“ I have noticed,” said Harry Waite, “ that some men, because they drink beer instead of brandy, will not class themselves as drunkards, nor admit the need of reform, although in morals, manners, health, and fortune the beer is doing them just as much damage as the brandy could. The Scotch song of three drunkards puts it clearly—

“ ‘ For tho’ they were na’ very fou, that wicked wee drap in
the ee,

Has done its turn ; untimely noo, the green grass waves
o’er a’ the three.’ ”

“ People say,” said Ellice, as they resumed their walk, “ that the city is a terribly dangerous place for boys, sure to ruin them, and that the country is a safe place ; but you seem to have come up with sound views, though you are a son of the city, and my eldest half-brother has been a terrible little scapegrace, and Eugene about as bad as they make them, although they were country born and bred.”

“ It is inheritance and training rather than environment,” said Harry Waite ; “ I was fortunate in both.”

“ But as for my half-brother, I am glad to

say that he has turned over a new leaf and become a real good boy. He has joined the church, and is on the way to making a good man."

"That might give you all courage for the one you call Eugene. Example and advice may bring him round."

"Example and advice have just about as much effect on him as pouring water on a duck's back," said Ellice, shrugging her shoulders, as she borrowed a simile from her country rearing.

"If cold water won't do, hot will fetch it!" laughed Harry.

"I'm setting all my hopes for the family on the youngest, a boy two and a half years old. Now that he has Nancy, and two good brothers to bring him up, I hope he will turn out something pretty good. He is a beautiful child, and real bright—and—I'll tell you what makes me feel so about him. One day a little before my mother died, as she lay in bed in her room, with Angelino near her, I went gently to the partly open door, to see if she were awake or needing anything. She was awake, and Angelino lying against her waving his little hands,

and she had her hand on his head, and was praying for him, that God would protect and bless him and make him a good man, and useful in the world. When I heard that prayer I made up my mind to do my part in answering it, and to love and train Angelino the very best that I could. Well, when Nancy came to our home, the first thing I thought of was about Angelino, for he was then only about seven months old. And at once I saw that Nancy had a tender, motherly heart for him, and really took to him and to poor little deformed Seraphina. So that made me resolve to be friends with Nancy, while if she had seemed to dislike those little ones, or be indifferent to them, I should have been her enemy. I am afraid I am rather a quarrelsome character, Mr. Waite, always ready to take the war-path! But, you see, I came up in a family where Eugene was imposing upon every one, and from the first I had my mother and the children to defend, not from cruelty, but from neglect and selfishness. Eugene's beer, which he says harms no one, harmed even me."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ALTRUIST.

"The skies spin like a mighty wheel,
I saw the trees like drunkards reel."

JABEZ LONG'S wife had brought Tomsey and her knitting to the Lorings to stay to tea. Lovinia and Nancy sat in the large room because it always seemed to Nancy so unkind to go off and leave Mrs. Peggy lying there alone. However, the windows and doors were open to the sweet, warm September air and sunshine, and they could see Seraph out by the flower-beds propped up in her new chair, with Tomsey sitting near her on a bench, or hopping about on his crutches ; while that staunch and handsome barque, the Angelino, cruised into many a forbidden port, and shamelessly pirated many a flower-set shore.

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“It beats all how our Tomsey has picked up of late,” said Mrs. Long to Nancy. “Ever since the night those boys came back to our house, and told how they had been praying for him, Tomsey seems to feel that he is obliged to be better for a long time to come. He eats better, sleeps better, plays more lively like, and though his real trouble isn’t of a kind to be cured, we all feel that our Tomsey will brisk up for several years. Jabez and I don’t care to see him live to be of man’s years, or to outlive us; but he is happy now he is a child, and makes us happy, and little weak, deformed fellow as he is, he does good and has a good influence; he seems to have something to do in the world, and our children are the better for him.”

“So are all the children in the neighborhood,” said Nancy. “Look how he stirs them up about his Temperance Society.”

Loud clamor of remonstrance from Seraph and Tomsey against Angelino, who was doing mischief among the dahlias and asters and marigolds, which were the pride and special care of Reuben and Nancy. Angelino was just at the

age when all infants are votaries of Shiva the Destroyer. Nancy went out and captured him, and brought him in.

“Now, little man, you will have to sit here with me a while, to see if you will learn to let those flowers alone.”

For reply, Angel, on his knees on her lap, flung his robust arms about her neck, held her fast and pulled all the hair-pins out of her little knot of hair.

“He! he! he!” cried Peggy, “what a little, skimpy, dry, gray bit of hair you have, Nancy! When I was your age my hair was as black as night, a coil as thick as my arm, and when the pins were out it hung a yard down my back, like a great snake.”

Nancy without reply placed Angelino before her on the table, as she stood in front of the little square glass, and did the despised hair up in the prim tight twist in which she always wore it. Angelino, diving at her pocket and pulling at her apron, made the affair rather difficult. Nancy seemed to glory in Angel’s misapplied vigor.

“Well, you are indulgent to that child, Nancy!” cried Lovinia; “there is many an own mother would slap his hands for tearing the flowers, and so make an end of it.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t want to do that!” exclaimed Nancy, “I am afraid he would grow not to like me if I slapped him.”

“He’ll grow not to like you, anyway,” shrilled Peggy; “so will they all. You may toady to them all as much as you like, and they will hate you, or scorn you, in the end, just the same.”

“No, they will not!” said Nancy, tears coming to her eyes.

“You are wasting all your pains if you expect to get anything by it,” insisted Peggy.

“I do not take pains just to get something by it. I like to do for them all, and help them, and I should do it even if I knew it would be just as you say, Mrs. Peggy. I know it will not, they are good children.”

“But they are not your children, and they’ll show it in their conduct. Look at it now. There is Ellice, she hates this place, and is handsome; she’ll marry well off in the city, and

drop a plain, homely, common woman like you. Liane hates you anyway, and she will marry rich, and not be on speaking terms. You coddle Reub, but wait till he marries, and he will think no more of you. Jason don't waste his feelings on anybody. When he's his own man he'll gather up the property you are helping him to get, and he'll skip out West, and never write a word to say if he is dead or alive. Violante by the time she is fifteen, will run away from home, and never be heard of more. Seraph will die, and Angelino will make his way in the world and be ashamed of a poor old thing like you."

"Never mind!" cried Nancy, fairly breaking into sobs; "it will not matter so long as they are all of them good and happy and fortunate; that will be all I ask."

"It will not be all that you will get, Nancy," spoke up Lovinia Long. "Nor would they be good and in favor of God if they dealt so with you. You know yourself that Ellice has a heart of gold, and she will love you and be true to you all her life. It is true that Seraph will die early;

she will be happier so, but she will love you and cling to you till she goes, and love you in heaven. I expect that sometime Liane will get sense enough to appreciate you, and if she don't it will be small loss. As for Reub and Jason, mark my words, as long as you live those two boys will be as true good sons to you as ever woman had ; and Violante will be a good girl and not discredit your raising of her. What other mother will Angel ever know but you, and to him you will be always beautiful, because you are a good mother. As for you, Mrs. Peggy, I've observed in my time that the world is the color of the spectacles we wear. If people are black-hearted and see all things black, then they believe everybody is as bad as themselves ; but the good believe good of other people. Because in all your life you have never been grateful nor done good turns to any one, you think every one is of your stripe."

"Never mind," said Nancy, "Mrs. Peggy don't mean half she says. Folks that are bed-ridden can't feel real cheerful. I often think if I was laid up as she is, I might be much more

cantankerous than she is. There's Eugene and Mr. Turner coming in the gate! I wonder what Mr. Turner wants? Good-day, Mr. Turner! Did you bring me some work from your wife? She spoke of a calico frock."

"She didn't send by me. I came over with Loring to look at some stock he wants to sell."

At this word Nancy's heart sank; holding Angel by the hand, she silently followed the two men to the barn-yard; she was not very combative, but she was persistent where her sense of justice was involved. Eugene scowled at her, but led the way straight to the pen where dwelt in state those goodly Berkshires.

"There!" he said. "There's two as handsome pigs as there are in the county, six months old, and best breed. They are worth five dollars apiece, if they're worth a cent—but you can have them for seven the pair."

Mr. Turner examined the pigs with a critic's eye.

"All right," he said, "I'll take them at that figure, but it's high."

"Eugene, they're not yours to sell," interposed Nancy.

"Why ain't they? Everything on this place is mine."

"Eugene, Ellice bought those pigs with her own money, and gave them to Jason, and he built the pen and has taken care of them; they are his; you can't sell them."

"Nancy, go into the house and 'tend to your sewing. Women don't know anything, anyway."

"I know it isn't right for you to sell what isn't yours."

"Jason is only a boy under age, his time is mine, all he has is mine, his work is due me, the stuff he fed to the pigs grew on my land. I can sell the beasts, and he can't say a word, nor help himself."

"But it will break his heart! The boy works so hard, and he is just trying now to make a little for himself. If he is discouraged, I'm afraid he'll go off, and never come back. Mr. Turner, don't buy those pigs; it is not right."

"It is not right that I should be in debt and

sued and disgraced on account of you and a boy," stormed Eugene. "Who gave you any rights to meddle in this family?"

"Tuts, Eugene, you don't rightly consider what you're saying," interposed Turner. "I say it would be a mean trick to buy away the pigs of a good, steady boy like Jason, and not a man in the township would do it, or uphold you in selling. Let Jason keep his pigs, I won't buy them."

"All right, if you want to be foolish," said Eugene. "You can buy the calf, she's here in the barn-lot, and a mighty pretty beast, too. Black Holstein, pure, and her mother a splendid milker; she's five months old, and uncommon big of her age. I ought to have twenty dollars for that calf, but you can have her, seeing it's you, for fifteen."

Turner examined the eyes, ears, and mouth of the little animal, felt of her shoulders and flanks, and ran his hand along her glossy back.

"She is a beauty, and worth the money," he said approvingly.

"But—she is Jason's!" cried Nancy.

“Who gave her to Jason? You?” said Eugene witheringly.

“But—Jason works all the time, and is trying to make a little money against he is twenty-one, like other boys; and he has reared that calf—and always called her his—and——”

“She’s mine, and I’ll sell her,” retorted Eugene.

Mr. Turner evidently did not consider Jason’s case for the ownership of the calf half so strong as for that of the pigs, and taking out his pocket-book counted out three five-dollar bills, which Eugene took with delight. Nancy had picked up Angelino, and was crying into his plump neck. Eugene having received the money seemed in a great hurry to leave.

“Find him a rope to lead her with, Nancy,” he said, and hurried off. When he was gone, Nancy lifted her tearful face to Mr. Turner.

“I never saw a boy love an animal as Jason does that calf,” she said; “he will be clear sick if he finds she is gone. Mr. Turner, if you please, I have some money in the house, that I earned. I’ll pay you back the money, if you’ll sell that calf to Jason; oh, please do.”

"Why, Mrs. Loring—if you're so pertic'lar about it—I do want the calf, but if you say so, I'll take the fifteen dollars and make out a bill of sale to Jason, and then no one can trouble her ever after."

"Oh, thank you!" cried Nancy, "I'll go get the money and a pen and paper. There's—company in the house, and—I—don't like them to know what Eugene—well—Eugene wasn't quite himself, Mr. Turner, or he wouldn't have done it."

"Eugene never is quite himself. It is always Eugene and beer," said Turner half aloud, as Nancy went for her money.

Nancy had found a new place for her money, and as she lived in fear of unusual calls, such as had happened now, she kept her treasure by her. She sighed as she took out a ten and a five from her store. As Ellice had paid the debt to Jabez Long, Nancy had now on hand of her earnings forty-five dollars, the result of her work since the middle of January. She meant to get ten dollars more, and then invest thirty dollars in that famous wheel-chair for Seraph, and twenty-five in a colt for Jason. Well—the chair must

be put off fifteen dollars longer, and—never mind, perhaps Seraph was not quite old enough to need it yet. She could wait until next spring. The colt must be bought soon, for that was a kind of property, said Nancy, ‘which grew while folks slept.’

That evening Nancy felt apprehensive about Eugene’s return. He was likely to quarrel with her and with Jason, and raise a storm about the calf. ‘Men,’ said poor Nancy to herself, ‘were such queer creatures, she wondered why they were not made to be like reasonable folks.’

Lovinia Long, driving slowly home with Tomsey, had no such fault to find with the masculine part of humanity. Probably the difference in view was occasioned by the Corners, and decoctions there distributed.

When Eugene had drunk a certain amount of beer he was peevish and irascible; another amount made him dull, aching, and sleepy; yet another amount had on his sensitive system an exhilarating effect: he became loquacious, jovial, boastful. It was in this latter mood that he happened to return that night.

“He! he! he!” he laughed, in Aunt Peggy’s style, “I have done a good stroke of business to-day. Nance! you won’t have to wear that old brown frock much longer; I’ll get you a silk one, and make you look like a lady! We’ll all be rich folks here before long. Yes, Nance, you wouldn’t let me have those Berkshires, thought I was selling them; instead of that I was buying them, buying them high. You stood in the way of Jason’s fortune; but never mind, Jason, I’d as soon give you a thousand, anyway. Violante, you shall go to dancing-school, and dress like a doll, and Angel shall be sent to college, and go to Congress—Honorable Angel Loring, that will sound well. I’m going to have a trip to Europe, and take Liane; and, Reub, you can choose what you want, and get it. I’m going to be a rich man!”

“What’s happened?” cried Peggy; “have you struck oil or coal on the place, Eugene?”

“Oil! Coal! Better than that, let me tell you. Oil and coal need dirt and din and toil to get them out, but all my fortune will need will

be just to open a neat little express-box and—there you have it.”

“But what is it, pop? What did you do for it?” cried Violante.

“Do? nothing, I don’t believe in work, I get things for nothing.”

“Then, I don’t reckon they are worth much,” said Jason.

“This is—fifty thousand! A clear, cool fifty thousand all for me.” And in the excess of his joy Eugene began dancing and shouting and clapping his hands wildly. But even alcoholic excitement could not last long with him; he was weak and wearied, soon he dropped upon the lounge with his hands under his head, and surveyed the family group with malice.

“Want to know all about it? Well, to-day I was standing at the door of the Corners, where you say I never get any good, and Evans came along and paid me ten dollars that he owed me for cattle-buying for him. Then a fellow standing near says, ‘If you use that ten for a quarter share in the Louisiana Lottery, you’ll get eight thousand dollars out of it in five

weeks.' 'Hillo,' says I, 'I've another five in my pocket, and how much will I get for that?' 'You might get as high as ten thousand, being a sensible man to see a good thing and know it. Can't you raise something more and get something handsome, an independent fortune like?' None of the fellows in the Corners had anything to lend, but one or two of them took shares of tickets, and the man stood treats all round, but he saw I was higher style than the rest of them, and he talked to me confidential. He said if I could raise thirty-five or forty dollars for a full-share ticket I'd get the Fifty Thousand Dollar Prize the twenty-fifth of next month, and hurrah for me! So I handed him the fifteen as earnest, and I came here to do the fair thing by the family, and sell the calf and the Berkshires——"

At these words Jason lifted a bitter cry and rushed from the room, and Reuben after him. But hardly had the boys run a few steps toward the barn, supposed to be desolated of their protégés, when the pigs lifted up loud, well-known squeals for their belated suppers, and as

they leaned over the pen, the black Holstein ran to them and put her cold, moist nose on Jason's cheek. Then Violante, who had learned the facts of the case from the talk of Nancy and Lovinia, arrived, and explained. Meanwhile Eugene was left with only Nancy and Peggy for audience. That nettled him.

"What fools I have for a family!" he cried. "Haven't a bit of sense to know when I've done a good thing for 'em! Well, Nance, I'll tell you that that fifteen I got for the calf made thirty dollars, and I made a bill of sale of the corn to Nelson for ten more, and with the forty I secured fifty thousand clear and clean; and it will be here in five weeks; what do you think of that?"

Nancy bowed her head in her work-worn hands, and groaned aloud. Peggy shrilly tittered he! he! he! The present fact of Nancy's despair, the future fact of Eugene's horrible disappointment, filled her with joy.

When Eugene had gone to bed, vowing that as soon as his money came he should have a gold watch and a silk-lined dressing-gown,

Nancy and the boys in the kitchen discussed the situation. Cousin Jabez must be called upon to interfere, and warn Eugene from these mad pranks in future. He had some hold over him. Cousin Jabez must take ten of Nancy's dollars and buy back that corn from Nelson, for the corn was thrown away at that money, and the family could not do without the corn for winter food for their stock.

"Whenever shall I buy that colt, Jason," sighed Nancy, "if things go on so? I will earn the five dollars I lack just as soon as I can!"

CHAPTER XV.

LIANE'S OPPORTUNITY.

“ And others' follies teach us not,
Nor much their wisdom teaches ;
Our most of sterling worth is what
Our own experience preaches.”

By the intervention of Cousin Jabez, Nancy bought back the crop of standing corn for the price given to Eugene, and the two boys set themselves to cut it, and then, aided by Violante out of school-hours, they husked the corn, until beside each pale yellow, wigwam-shaped shock lay a pile of golden ears. While at this work they kept Angelino out in the field with them, taking him and his lunch, a slice of bread and molasses, when they left the house early in the morning. They all realized now how needful it was that Nancy should have time for her sewing, and just at present she had an unusual amount of work. All the neighbor women

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seemed to want gowns, and Nancy's big table was piled with patterns of calico and gingham, while she worked with redoubled diligence in the big, sunny room, Mrs. Peggy lying in her bed in one corner, and Seraph propped in her rocking-chair, playing with her dolls. Eugene sometimes came in and surveyed with scorn this scene of humble quiet and industry.

"Jabez has been rowing me about selling things," he said. "I let him know that soon I'd be above needing to sell anything, I'll be independently rich. I'll let you know, Nance, that if you don't stop carrying tales to Jabez, I'll get a divorce from you. I wish I'd known how easy it is to get a fortune from the Lottery, and I wouldn't have tied myself up to you! You are so low-minded, Nancy, you have no ambition to be rich. However, I mean to do well by you all: I'll get you some presents, and leave a thousand dollars among you, and then I'll take Liane and go to Europe. Liane's good looks will do me credit, and I'll dress her up to kill. Perhaps we'll never come back. She may marry a title, and I'll stay there with her, and you can

grub along here the way you prefer. I don't believe you've got ambition to put into the Lottery yourself."

"I would not do it, I think it would be wrong."

"I'm completely sick of your talk of right and wrong, Nancy."

"And, besides that, Eugene, you are building your hopes on nothing, and you'll be disappointed. You will not draw your great prize, people never do. You will not get a dollar."

"The agent knows all about it; he said I was dead sure to get it, that I had a lucky hand, and my numbers were lucky; there's a secret in it, that he told me confidentially."

"Eugene, if you had been in your clear, right mind, he would not have been able to bamboozle you that way."

"Just you wait until that first drawing in November, and you'll believe in fifty thousand when you see it."

As the days passed on, Eugene was in such a state of excitement and exaltation that he could

neither eat nor sleep properly. He drank more than usual, and sat at the "Corners," bragging of what he would do as soon as he got money, spending imaginary millions out of his prospective fifty thousand, until he was the butt of the hour, and all the idlers about the bar found their best fun in starting him off on his plans, and pretending to believe in them. Whatever Eugene saw that he fancied, a fine buggy, a spirited horse, he offered to buy at once, at any figure, and pay when his money came in. He hired a conveyance, and went once or twice, accompanied by some of his cronies, to look at building sites for a possible mansion. He acted like a person bereft of reason.

As the time for the award arrived, he walked the floor all night allowing no one to sleep. On the day set for the drawing in Louisiana, his wild excitement alarmed his family, and he drank heavily. The next day he telegraphed explicit directions to New Orleans as to the sending of "his money." A few days later, he rushed home exultant. "Sam Andrews has got five hundred dollars from a little bit of a tenth of a

ticket he put in for! My fortune will be here to-morrow, sure!"

"If you had a fortune why did you not hear to-day?" said Jason.

"They'd have to send such a pile as mine, carefully; by a special messenger. I'll wait for it at the hotel; I don't want any one to think I live in a little mean house like this."

"See here, father," said Reuben, "don't go on like this, you will go crazy. No one ever draws those big prizes. The little sums are baits. The big prizes go to straw folks."

"All you know!" shouted Eugene. "Why, I'm as sure of it as I am of sunrise, as sure as if I had it in my pocket."

The next day he was still more positive. A washerwoman in Kane township "had bought a piece of a ticket for a dollar, and she got twenty-five dollars and bought a cow! Silly thing, why didn't she take the whole ticket, as I did, and get a fortune? But then I'm a real business man."

A day or two later Eugene was too weak from excitement, to walk so far as the Corners.

He lay about the house, waiting for his fortune. At noon one of his cronies came rushing up, waving a paper over his head. "Hillo, Loring, here's the news; the bartender sent for the paper and chalked it all up on the door, and we've been drinking your health."

"My money! my prize," screamed Eugene, white as a corpse, clutching at the paper. "I drew the great prize!"

"Much you didn't, my boy! Some man up in Dakota got that, a man that don't exist, living in a town that never has been located. Dished you are; you didn't get a rap," cried his bar-room crony.

Eugene's arms were waving wildly. "Hillo! he's going," cried the bringer of tidings, springing forward to catch him, and helping Reuben to take him to the bedroom.

Jason seized the man's shoulder. "Here's the friendship of you Corners loafers! Get off with you, and send up Doctor Bearse; don't you see my father's dying? Hurry, I say."

Alarmed, the boon companion grasped his paper and started off on a run. Nancy and the

boys undressed the unconscious Eugene. It was pitiable to see how thin and shrunken he was.

"I don't know what this is come on him," said Nancy, "but mustard draughts on his wrists and feet, and hot water bathing of his spine and back of his neck, can't hurt him, so get the hot water and mustard quick, Reuben; and, Jason, you clear away the dinner-table, and your Aunt Peggy's tray, and give the babies their playthings."

"This is not apoplexy, not paralysis," said Dr. Bearse, "it is coma from nervous exhaustion. Loring never was very strong, and he's worn out his nerves with drink, and you say he has not eaten nor slept of late. Probably we can pull him through. This is nature's revenge. Sleep, tonics, absolute quiet, and after a few weeks he may be about again. While he lies here he can harm nobody."

Yes, he could harm nobody. He was not the house-band, but the house-destroyer, and the house could do best for itself while he lay there helpless.

Brother Benedict came for three weeks, and

at the end of that time Eugene could lie bolstered up in bed, watching the play of the children, the flying of Nancy's needle, or the whirl of her machine wheels, and could eat the dainties which Nancy prepared for him. The door of his room being open he could look across to Peggy's bed, and talk with her now and then, but he was usually too listless to talk.

He seemed to have forgotten all about that lottery episode, all about Ellice, all about his first wife, and all about how Nancy came to be there; but he accepted Nancy as a good providence, quietly supplying his needs and making him comfortable.

Meanwhile once more Nancy had completed the sum of twenty-five dollars needed to buy a colt for Jason, and Jason had proudly led the graceful little black animal home. As among Laban's flocks Jacob claimed the ring-streaked, spotted and speckled for his share, that they might be known at a glance, so Jason had chosen to have all his stock black, and great was his pride when looking across the pasture land, or watching the little gathering in the barn-

yard, he saw the dark forms of his peculiar possessions.

The neighbors sometimes said to Nancy, "Well, Mrs. Loring, it beats all how your patience holds out, in the trouble you have in this family;—so much sickness! Mrs. Peggy and Seraph constant, and now one and now another of the others!"

Nancy, however, was finding herself more comfortable in the midst of what others regarded as disasters; Eugene, safe in bed, could neither injure himself nor the family substance; there was no lying awake at night, full of anxieties, waiting for him to come home; no rising in the morning overwhelmed by apprehensions as to what he might do during the day. The boys were kind and faithful, and work had never been so plenty, easy work and fairly well paid.

A lately deceased member of Mr. Hutton's church had left a large house and a legacy to establish a Home for ten incurables; this Home was now being set in order, and Mrs. Hutton had secured for Nancy the making up and

marking of sheets, pillow-cases, table-cloths, and towels, and the tacking of comfortables, and hemming of muslin curtains. Reuben, who was a good penman, marked the articles in the evenings. Reuben and Jason were both working for the farmers of the neighborhood, doing the home work in early mornings, and evenings; Reuben was also supplying the store with candy, and altogether affairs seemed to be prospering.

Once more seated by her machine, Nancy built air castles; next fall Seraph should have her wheel-chair; the big best room should be painted and papered, for it was very shabby; her own bedroom also should be papered and painted; and the fence of the front yard should be remade, for Nancy dearly loved and took great pride in a nice front yard.

"Nancy," said Eugene one day, waking up from a nap, "didn't I hear you and the boys talking about Christmas last evening?"

"Yes, to-morrow will be Christmas, and Ellice has sent us a little box of presents, and Liane is coming home for the day, and the boys

and I have made some presents for the children, and some candy."

"Christmas," sighed Eugene ; " I've been lying here a great while."

" Almost eight weeks," said Nancy, " but I think you can sit up in the big chair to-morrow, and I've made you a nice warm wrapper for a Christmas present."

" I meant to have more than a warm wrapper if I'd got my money," said Eugene, whose memory was returning with returning strength.

" Don't talk about that," said Nancy ; " that is all done with."

" Hand me a looking-glass," commanded Eugene. Then regarding himself in the little glass, which Nancy took down from the wall, he said, " How old I look ; my hair is getting gray, and I'm wrinkled. I look almost as old as you do, Nancy, and pretty near as homely. Nancy, once I heard some one read in the Bible about 'glorious beauty and a fading flower,' I wish you'd find it and read it."

Nancy was familiar with her Bible—the book was her greatest comfort ; she turned to Isaiah,

and read, "Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the head of the fat valleys of them which are overcome with wine. The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet: and the glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower, and as the hasty fruit before summer——"

"That's enough, that's me—my beauty is faded as a flower."

"From drink—you are not old yet, Eugene, and now you see the danger and the evil, you will turn away and be good."

"Don't you believe it," said Eugene; "I haven't any interest in being what you call good. I never found anything so dull in my life as lying here and seeing your work run through that machine, and the little wisp of loose hair on the top of your head wave to and fro, as you move the treadle, and Seraph's skinny hand turning over the leaves of that everlasting picture-book, and Peg looking more like a turkey-buzzard than ever in that corner bed! Is Peg

never going to die, Nancy? Just as soon as I can scramble to the Corners, to see some life and have a little fun, and talk politics, and tell what the Government ought to do if it had a bit of sense, there's where I'm going."

As for Nancy she went back to her work and sewed very fast, and felt teary about the eyes, and a weight about her heart, as if it would not beat properly.

By and by winter was over, and Eugene was well, and did a very little work in the garden and cornfield, and in buying cattle for the neighbors, and spent more time at the Corners than ever. His hands had a queer little quiver all the while, and his legs were neither as brisk nor as steady as they were when he first appeared in C—— Street looking for lodgings.

Meanwhile Nancy's hoard grew and grew ; it was so large now, full fifty dollars, that she entrusted it once more to Cousin Jabez, and she and the boys planned much about the improvements that were to be made with that money in the fall. Reuben built three seats in the garden, the one under the big willow having a little table

before it, 'and when the fence was repaired and painted, and a new hitching-post set up, and the rooms papered and painted, and the window-sash pointed up, how well the place would look,' they said to each other.

And now it was mid-summer, and Nancy had been more than three years in charge of her ready-made family.

One beautiful July morning, as Nancy sat under the willow sewing and watching the children, Liane came in at the gate, and walking straight to the willow, sat down by Nancy's side, saying :

" I want to talk to you."

Nancy felt very much flattered. Here was Liane at last won over, and coming to confide in her. Nancy, who loved so well to be loved, beamed, her pale eyes lit up, and a flush passed over her sallow cheeks.

" I'm going to be married," said Liane, abruptly.

" Married! Oh, Liane, you are so young," cried Nancy.

" So young? I'm past eighteen. Because

you waited to be an old maid, you needn't think every one else has to."

"That is true," said Nancy meekly, "only you look so young, I could not realize that you are eighteen. I hope you are going to do well, Liane."

"Do well? Of course I am. You don't think I am silly enough to throw myself away, do you? I'm going to marry Fred Opdyke; he's an only child, and his father is worth thirty thousand; he has the stock-farm over by Rawlins'. We are going to live with the Opdykes. At first they thought that Fred might have chosen some one richer; but as we were both firm, Mr. and Mrs. Opdyke came over to see me, and made friends, and we're all right now."

"And when are you to be married?"

"Seven weeks from to-morrow."

"And you'll be married here?" said Nancy joyfully.

"Here! Nancy, you must be crazy. What kind of a wedding would it be in that dingy room, with old Aunt Peggy in bed in one corner? Do you think I'd want the Opdykes

to come to such a mean, little, shabby, crowded house as this? We are going to be married at Fred's house. Mrs. Opdyke will give the wedding."

"Well—that seems a little—odd, but I reckon it is all right. They can do better for you than we could, and it is not more than six or seven miles, and we can all go."

"Nancy," protested Liane, with tears in her pretty eyes, "I just knew you would do all you could to make me miserable. You haven't any more sense. You know perfectly well that father and the boys haven't any clothes fit to go to a wedding, and you, Nancy, haven't a decent dress, nothing but your old wedding-dress and bonnet, that you've worn for three years. Do you think I could bear to have the Opdykes see such shabby people? For goodness sake don't make my marriage miserable by mortifying me to death. Will you have the goodness, all of you, to stay home? I'll send you the cards, and a box of cake, and that ought to satisfy you. If you have a particle of regard for me, do as I say."

"Oh, certainly," said Nancy, disappointed beyond measure; "if it would trouble you, Liane, we will not come. But what can I do for you? Isn't there anything? I want to help."

"Of course you can help," said Liane, beaming again; "I cannot be married without decent clothes, and I cannot ask my future mother-in-law to give them to me. I have been thinking and planning it all over, and I must have a hundred dollars. Mrs. West has promised to give me two nice hats, as I've been with her nearly three years and a half. I have hemstitched me a dozen handkerchiefs and worked my initial on them, and I have made a lot of trimming for white goods, and saved up six dollars. I think I have done pretty well for myself. I need gloves and boots, a jacket, a handsome travelling-dress to be married in—we're going to New York and Atlantic City. I need a pretty tea-gown, and a silk dress, and some cashmere to make up with a silk dress that my mother was married in—and a lot of fixings beside. I wrote to Ellice that I'd come down with Timothy this week Thursday, and she was to go

shopping with me, and give me twenty-five dollars; and I want you to give me seventy-five. That is little enough to ask, I think. I never have bothered you for anything."

"Seventy-five dollars!" gasped Nancy, as Seraph's chair, the paint and paper, the new fence, faded from out the foreground of her dreams. "Seventy-five, Liane?"

"Of course you have it! You are always working! Oh, I am so unfortunate to belong to such beggarly people! How much have you, Nancy? There can't be any backing out of it," and she gazed at Nancy with inquisitorial eyes.

"I have sixty dollars saved up," sighed Nancy.

"That all? Well, you can borrow the other fifteen from your cousin Jabez. He was some related to my mother, anyway. Get it tomorrow, so I can go Thursday."

"I will," sighed Nancy. Surely she ought to feel glad that this girl was doing well, and that her future comfort in a safe good home was secured. It was natural that she should want a decent outfit, such a pretty girl!

Liane brightened at the "I will,"—this de-

spised Nancy was a woman that could be trusted.

“And there’s something more I want,” she said. “I know the boys have earned something, and I want Reuben to get me a silk umbrella, and Jason must get me a real nice stylish waterproof. And tell father to buy me a linen telescope, as nice a one as he can find, and you see that that trunk of my mother’s that is up in Violante’s room is sent over to Mrs. West’s for me.”

“Yes, I will—and, Liane, I’ll make all your dresses.”

“Make my dresses!” screamed Liane, “do you suppose I want such old-fashioned prim duds as you make? I’m going to have Miss Lacy make them, and if I can’t save enough out of the money I have, to pay her, I’ll have her promise to wait, and I’ll pay her by degrees after I am married. But, Nancy, you can make up all my white goods, you sew lovely, and I want you to do your best, and put in plenty of tucks and ruffles. I’ll come over to-morrow evening to stay all night, so I can start with

Timothy, Thursday, and I'll bring you the trimming I have, and some patterns I got from Miss Lacy and Mrs. West. Be sure you have the things done in time, and all laundried nicely. I'm going to stay with Mrs. West, until the day before the wedding ; perhaps I can make enough that way to pay for one of the gowns being made. You'd better get the money to-day, for fear something might hinder you to-morrow."

And so Liane went cheerily back to Mrs. West's, leaving Nancy once more stripped of every penny, and her time fully pledged for at least six weeks.

"Never mind," she said to herself, "I must make things as nice as I can for Liane, now she is going to be married."

It was the evening of Liane's wedding day ; Nancy for once was resting by the window. A spring wagon stopped at the gate, and in it on a mattress lay Eugene.

"He fell over in a sort of fit," said the men who lifted him out ; "he has been singing, and bragging of his daughter's great match, and drinking healths to the couple all day."

This was paralysis.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SHULAMITE RETURNS.

She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,
And humble cares, and delicate fears,
A heart the fountain of sweet tears,
And love, and thought and joy."

WHEN at the end of a month Brother Benedict again left the Lorings, Dr. Bearse said that Eugene was 'as well as he ever would be.' In the mornings his sons dressed him and helped him to the big rocking-chair. Sometimes during the day, supported by crutch and cane, he would walk across the room, or slowly hobble into the garden, or as far as the front gate; usually this exertion was too much for him, and Nancy had to help him back and place him on the lounge. He spoke little and seemed to take little interest in anything. He never asked for anything but beer, and when Nancy instead prepared for him a glass of lemonade, or cur-

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rant shrub, or raspberry vinegar, he seemed quite contented.

Relieved from fears of any damaging interference with their plans, Reuben and Jason, now in their eighteenth and sixteenth years, took hold of the farm work with redoubled energy, while Nancy, aided by Violante, administered the house and sewed with that steady machine-like alacrity which came from long years of practice. The autumn drifted into winter and winter slipped by to its last week.

Nancy busy at her machine heard Angelino calling to Seraph, who was lying on the lounge taking her afternoon nap, "Wate up, Se'aph. Wate up an' see my big steeple!"

"Angel," said Nancy, "do not disturb little sister, let her have a nice sleep."

"Se's dot her eyes opin," said Angel.

Nancy went to Seraph's side. Quietly as twilight fades into night, or as one season melts into another across the arbitrary boundaries by which we measure time, Seraph had passed from this world into the next. The heart which always beat so feebly had reached the limit of

its power, and rested. Nancy listened at the shrunken chest, felt the cold fingers, and held the little looking-glass over the parted lips. Then she folded the small hands gently, closed the white lids, and kissing Angel's pretty hair spread a long towel over the motionless form.

Even Peggy and Eugene were awed as quietly she arranged the child in her last sleep. Angelino, his hands clasped behind him, shook his yellow head and slowly backed away to the window, where the sunshine fell over him and lit up his glowing life. Then Nancy called Jason and sent him to telegraph to Ellice to come that afternoon with Timothy ; and Jason was to go on from the telegraph office to tell Liane. Jason had just broken his black horse to the saddle and he rode away.

Liane told Jason that she felt very sorry to hear his news, yet no doubt it was far better so, as Seraph could never be like other people. As for herself, she was not feeling well ; she had a terrible cold and excitement and exposure might make it worse. She could not do any good if she went home. She would send some-

thing instead, and she gave Jason a paste-board box wherein were some yards of white mull, a piece of white satin ribbon, and some fresh white flowers.

"I didn't know I was raising those white azaleas for Seraph," she said, "but that is all I can do for her."

Next morning Nancy and Ellice sat sewing by the bed in Ellice's old room up-stairs. On the bed lay Seraph, the white flowers strewn over her.

"It was real kind of Liane to send this mull and ribbon and flowers, if she could not come," said Nancy. She and Ellice were fashioning Seraph's last robe.

"She could have come if she wished to," said Ellice, "the Opdykes never hindered her. But Liane all her life has cared for nobody but herself; she is embodied selfishness, just exactly like her father. But there is hope for Liane, for when she has children she will learn love and self-sacrifice. Children are good teachers. When a man is born selfish, children do not do him any good; they do not exorcise the demon of

selfishness in him. Eugene was never bettered by wife or children. But children seem to come nearer to the hearts of women than to men; they have a higher mission to them; there are very few selfish mothers, or step-mothers." And she affectionately patted Nancy's thin hand.

Nancy looked up through tears. "I was just thinking whether I had done all I could for poor little Seraph," she said. "She never got her wheel-chair."

"She never needed it," said Ellice.

"That is true. She seemed this fall to be too weak to wheel herself about, or I would have got the money for it from Jabez, or from you. She was most comfortable in that little rocking-chair that Reuben bought for her."

"I was looking at her little chair this morning," said Ellice, "so nicely padded, and her table with the deep drawer in it, and the box for her toys, all where she could help herself to them. And how many nice little toys she had; and there was a little pink box with some candy in it. Seraph has not had an unhappy life. Mother and I always did all we could for her,

she was so helpless ; Reuben was her slave from the day she was born ; you have been goodness itself ; she has had care and comforts, and even luxuries, and she has gone to the blessed land before she could realize how very different she was from other people."

A week after Seraph's burial, Eugene said one day to Nancy, "Where is that little girl who used to sit by that window, and play with those things?"

"She has gone to Heaven," said Nancy.

"Did she know anybody there?"

"Her Saviour and her mother are there to meet her."

Eugene meditated and shook his head. "I don't know either of them," he said presently.

"Wouldn't you like to go to Heaven, Eugene?" said Nancy.

"No," said Eugene, "I don't know that place. I want to go down to the Corners, and see the men, and have a good time talking. I want to tell them the Gov'ment is all wrong—it don't know anything. Men like us ought to be provided for, and not left poor. And the temper-

ance cranks ought all to be sent to prison. They want to defraud us of our liberty. They make bad laws—sumptuary laws, Nance, not fit for 'publicans an' sinners. Ain't those the names of the p'lical parties, Nance? I seem to get mixed up. I need some beer to clear my brains, and it isn't right for the Congressmen and President to be rolling in money, and men like me 'bliged to work, and be denied the free use of our earnin's. I'm agin it all at the Corners, Nance."

Eugene had not said so much since he was stricken. Perhaps he was getting well. But suppose he was, what good would it do anybody? Nancy's heart was heavy; how much more misery than happiness had come out of her marriage! But Angelino came and rested his sunny head on her arm, and through the window she saw "her boys" ploughing.

By the middle of March spring seemed to have returned, the boys had raked the grass and trimmed up the flower-beds in the front yard, and were busy in the garden, where brown squares of finely-smoothed earth indicated the

various vegetable-beds. They had made some glass coverings for hot-beds, and were resetting lettuce and cabbage-plants, and sowing radish seeds. Nancy was watching their work after tea, as she leaned on the fence, and Violante was cutting 'turnip-greens' for the next day's dinner.

"Boys," said Nancy, "I have saved money enough for the painting and papering, and the fence, and I don't know whether to use it or not."

"Be sure and use it right away, before anything turns up to cheat you out of it," said Jason. "You have to stay in the house at work most of the time, and it is very dingy and gloomy. It would be more cheerful, and I think more healthful, if it were all refitted; and you are so fond of a nice yard, and have planned so long for a good fence, by all means have one."

"I'll tell you what to do," said Reuben, brushing the brown mould from his fingers. "Tomorrow will be Saturday, and Violante can take care of things. You go to town with Timothy,

and buy the paint and paper and pickets. You will be there early enough to see Ellice before she goes to the store. Be sure to save enough of your money to buy yourself a dress and a bonnet, and Jason and I will give you enough to buy some good shoes and gloves ; we want you to look nice when you go to church with us. And I will give you the money to get dinner for you and Ellice at a restaurant. You never have an outing ; go and have a good time, for once."

"I'm having a good time now, watching you boys," said Nancy. "But I will go to-morrow, and do as you say," and she privately concluded to trade so judiciously that she would have money to buy each of the boys a necktie and a bordered pocket-handkerchief, a hair-ribbon for Violante, and a pair of Sunday shoes for Angelino.

Next evening when Nancy returned, great was the joy. The paper was held up against the wall, to try its effect ; it was laid out on the floor with the bordering and ceiling-pattern beside it ; the paint was placed beside the paper. It was pronounced fine.

“We can do the fence and the painting here inside,” said Reuben; “can’t we, Jason?”

“I can hang paper first-rate, if you boys will help me,” said Nancy. “We can hire a man to do the ceilings, and we can do the rest.”

“Let us give next week to a great house-cleaning and repairing,” said Reuben, “and to ornamenting the yard. We’ll build a rockery. And early in the mornings and in the evenings we will finish the garden.”

After tea the boys carried the tea-things on trays to the kitchen. They generally did this for Nancy, and then sat there chatting while she washed the dishes and made preparations for breakfast.

“Boys,” said Nancy, when she had poured the hot water into the dish-pan, “I have great news of Ellice.”

“Has her salary been raised?” asked Jason.

“No. She is coming home for a visit.”

“When? For how long?”

“To spend all of June. She is coming to get ready to be married. And she is going to be married here, too!”

“Yes, she’s not too proud to be married at home if Liane was,” said Jason.

“Now don’t blame Liane. Ellice is to marry Harry Waite, and he hasn’t any folks, and can do as he pleases, but Liane had to consider the Opdykes.”

“It’s mighty well we have the paint and paper so that we can make the house look nice before she comes,” said Jason. “And we’ll have the yard in prime style too.”

“The firm gives two weeks’ vacation each year, and as Ellice has not taken any for over two years, she is to have the month. After she is married she is going back to the store. They are to live in a house five miles out, in a new suburb on the street-car line. Mr. Waite has belonged to a Building Association for five years, and he owns the house. Ellice says it is all paid for, is real pretty, has five rooms, a bow-window, and a piazza, and the lot is all sodded and has rose and lilac bushes, and maple trees. She has asked me to go to town for the first and second of June, and go to see the house, and help her do her shopping,”

added Nancy with pride. "She says I can help her ever so much about what to get, and I'm going, if I can get my new dress and hat done, and can leave the house."

"Be sure you go," said Reuben; "I'll see to the house, and I'll have it in apple-pie order when you and Ellice get home. I'll shampoo and shave dad, and put a clean shirt and his best clothes on him. Violante and I can see to things, can't we, Violante?"

This to Violante, who had just come to the kitchen from putting Angel to bed.

"What?" said Violante, "do what?"

Reuben explained the situation.

Violante clapped her hands and pirouetted about the kitchen. "Goody! goody! goody! Ellice going to be married! Kitty Hunt had a wedding at her house, and she's always bragging of it. Now I'll have one! Do you suppose Ellice will let me be bridesmaid? Dolly Evans had a cousin who was a bridesmaid, and Dolly's always telling about it. If I can be bridesmaid I guess I can make Dolly keep still! If Ellice won't have any bridesmaid I'm going

to stand right up beside her, and say I was bridesmaid, anyhow."

Reuben, who was sitting astride a chair, his chin resting on his hands folded on the chair back, laughed. "I say, Violante hasn't had a big lot of fun in this world, and to be a bridesmaid would be great glory for her. We'll get Ellice to have her. Hasn't she a white frock? And she can keep that new pink hair ribbon; and our best roses will be in bloom, so she can have a bunch of them. Keep up courage, Violante; you have weeded miles of garden in your time, and now you shall be a bridesmaid to pay for it."

Great was the hurry and bustle in the Loring home for the next two weeks. Painting and papering were done, the carpets cleaned and turned, curtains and counterpanes, and the old-fashioned white valence of Peggy's bed were laundered. Eugene seemed to be much interested in what was going on, and ceased for the nonce to pine for the Corners. Peggy found great delight in prophesying that the bride would die before her marriage, or the prospect-

ive bridegroom would run away, marry some one else, or be killed by accident. The boys planned for extra earnings wherewith to buy Ellice a chair and a table for her sitting-room; Violante hemmed towels, and Nancy sewed early and late on carters' frocks for the store, so that she might buy some table-cloths and napkins for Ellice.

Finally the trip to town had been made, and Ellice came home and seemed to fill all the house with light and cheer. Her life in the city, her observations of humanity there, her new experiences, the wider education which she had obtained in libraries and evening classes, the acquaintances she had formed with people of culture and philanthropy, had developed, enriched, and broadened the character of Ellice. She now had higher ideals, yet was more tolerant; her sympathies were deeper, her speech more gracious; the ties to her brothers seemed to have been strengthened by absence, and to Violante she was more tender and helpful. That month which Ellice spent at home was full of sunshine for Nancy; it was heart food in the

strength of which she could go for many months to come.

All day Nancy and Ellice were busy in the house and with the sewing. The evenings Ellice gave to the boys.

"What do you boys want to do in life?" she asked one evening, when they were all perched like a row of birds on the top rail of the barn-yard fence.

"I'd ask nothing better than to stay and farm this place," said Jason. "If ever I was able to turn it all into a market garden I could make lots of money, and might some day buy out the shares of the others."

"And you, Reuben, do you like the farm best?"

"No, I don't," said Reuben. "I'm getting on with it first-rate, and I don't see a chance to do anything else. After all the worry and trouble I made, it seems as if it is my duty to stand by mother here. She has a hard row to hoe. If I could do just what I wanted, I'd like to go to the city and be a confectioner. I reckon I could take to that business and make a lot of money at it."

"I thought that was it," said Ellice; "that was Nancy's idea for you, and she don't need you here, now that Jason is so well grown, and your father is past making trouble. Harry has a cousin who is a confectioner, and we have planned that he can take you in to learn the business, and you can live with us. The cousin, Mr. Morse, says he will take you; he'd like a young fellow with some energy, and interest, and new ideas for inventions, to help him build up his trade. He has a very good establishment, and it is improving. You can begin at the end of August. I believe you will do splendidly there."

"We'll see," said Reuben, his face radiant; "that is a chance. I'll try and show you what I can do,—I will indeed, Ellice. It is very good of you and Mr. Waite."

"And don't fret about this place," said Jason, "I'll stand by mother. Violante is coming on real well, and that Angelino is growing like a weed; it won't be long before he'll be of some account in work."

The last day of June, the wedding day of Ellice came.

Mr. and Mrs. Hutton and two or three of the neighbors were there. The carriage which had brought Mr. Waite and the Huttons was at the gate. Ellice was married—and there was only to say good-bye. When all the others had shaken hands and kissed her, moved by some sudden pity she went to Mrs. Peggy. Bending over her, and taking her hand, she said :

“ Good-bye, Aunt Peggy. If ever I seemed hard and sharp and not patient enough with you, I want you to forgive me. I often forgot how very hard your lot was.”

“ If you say that,” chuckled Mrs. Peggy, “ to make me give you my money, you won’t get it. I’ve fixed the money.”

“ But I don’t, Aunt Peggy ; I never thought of that. Of course Eugene will have that.”

“ Will he ? Sakes-a-mercy, Eugene has got so dumb he couldn’t hurt himself a hair with it. I’ll leave it where folks will make mistakes with it, and grind their hearts out wishing they hadn’t. He ! he ! he !”

“ Do you suppose,” said Ellice, as she and Harry sat that evening in their own pretty sit-

ting-room, by the open windows, "do you suppose, Harry, that people are ever born without souls? I wish I could think that Peggy has no more responsibility than a bird or a cat. As she is now, so I have always known her to be, and the people who have known her longest say she was always so, bitter, selfish, hating every one, seeming to have no moral sense, no thought but of herself."

"The soul in us ought to be cultivated," said Harry. "If we keep the soul in subjection to the animal part of us, all that is best in us will wither and waste and atrophy, like an unused hand. You can make an eye blind by merely tying it up in darkness and disuse, and some people so ignore conscience and neglect their spiritual powers, live so entirely in the present, and for the indulgence of self, that all moral sense seems finally lost. It appears to me to be a terrible form of suicide. Such a life is full of bitterness and misery, that writes itself on the face, as it is written on Mrs. Peggy's. She is terrible to look at."

"The true attitude of the heart for growth in

grace and moral power," said Ellice, "was written long ago. 'Behold, Lord God, I am Thy servant, prepared for all things : for I desire not to live unto myself, but unto Thee ; and oh, that I could do it worthily and perfectly !'"

As Ellice and Harry sat thus in their new home, Nancy was alone on the doorstep of her house, the air sweet with June odors, and the moon making the land bright as with a milder day. She had settled Peggy and Eugene for the night ; Violante and Angel were sound asleep after the glories of the wedding ; Jason and Reuben were at their temperance society. It seemed very lonely without Ellice.

That happy month had renewed all the habit of seeking cheer and counsel and comfort from Ellice. How restless Nancy felt now that the strong-souled girl was gone. Then she thought of a verse that Ellice had once written out and sent to her for her encouragement. "Thou art the true peace of the heart ; out of thee all things are full of trouble and unrest. In this peace that is in thee, the one chiefest and eternal Good, I will lay me down and sleep."

CHAPTER XVII.

"IT IS MY TURN NOW."

"Gold! gold! gold! gold!
Good or bad a thousand-fold!
How widely its agencies vary—
To save, to ruin, to curse, to bless."

"WELL, it's been a long siege, but it's over at last, and I reckon nobody is sorry. Poor Mrs. Loring! She has done her duty for sure, and it's been a hard line."

Thus Mrs. Evans, leaning on her front gate, and speaking to Mrs. Hunt. The two were watching a hearse which slowly left the Loring gate, followed by Mr. Hutton's buggy, a carry-all wherein were Nancy and the children, and then came the three-seated spring wagon of Jabez Long, filled with his numerous family. This little cortège passed up the road to the graveyard.

"They say Mrs. Peggy was the oldest in-

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habitant of this township since Jabez Long's grandmother died."

"And for all the world what a difference between the two!" cried Mrs. Hunt. "Old Grandma Long was so sweet and kind and cheerful! We all miss her. And the example she was to old and young! No wonder Mr. Hutton called her a 'true mother in Israel.' But poor Mrs. Peggy, she only seemed to find pleasure in hurting somebody, or making trouble. She acted like a real child of the evil one, and may I be forgiven for saying it now she is dead!"

"Yes, I've always known her like that. Seemed to me I could not have lived in the house with her. One thing can be said for Eugene Loring, he kept the bargain he made with her, like a man, and never seemed to begrudge her anything as long as he was himself. And since he's been weak-minded, his sons have stood up to the bargain just the same. I've heard folks that knew Mrs. Peggy when she was middle-aged, say she was just that cantankerous, full of gossip, quarrelling, selfish, and they said that their grandmothers knew her to be the same

from a girl. Not that I want to slander the dead, but we ought to take it as a warning not to cherish evil feelings, Mrs. Hunt, feelings that will grow harder and uglier as we grow older. For it do seem right bitter that here the oldest inhabitant dies, and not only nobody is sorry, but everybody feels it a relief, and there's none to follow her to her grave but them that has to."

Yes, at last Mrs. Peggy was gone. This was the sixth anniversary of Nancy's forlorn home-coming to her Ready-Made family, and now, when tea-time arrived, and the table was spread as usual in the big front room, it seemed as if every possible effort had been made to banish reminders of the old woman. The doors and windows were all open to the breath and beauty of roses and honeysuckles, the bed was gone from the corner, and across the corner stood a pretty little maple table, with a set of bookshelves upon it, a gift from Reuben to Jason, and on the shelves were all the books that had been gathered up by the family during several past years. The tea-table looked inviting, with cottage-cheese, radishes, lettuce, ginger-bread,

cold meat, and bread and butter. Jason, as the man of the house, sat opposite to Nancy ; Eugene was given a whole side of the table, where, with many slow and uncertain motions, he managed to feed himself ; the opposite side was occupied by Violante, a slim, pretty, dark girl of thirteen, and the fat, smiling, blonde Angelino, now "half-past six."

As the family were thus gathered, Nancy remembered that this was her wedding-day, when six years ago she had suddenly presented to her a family of eight. How that family had lessened ! Ellice and Liane had gone to homes of their own ; little Seraph had found her way to the skies ; Reuben was busy at his trade in the city ; and Peggy's place was empty. Only three of the big, ready-made family left ; but oh, how in the short six years Eugene had failed. Six years ago how active and loquacious and self-asserting he had been, and Nancy had thought him very handsome. Now he was lean, pale, helpless, sitting there making five or six futile moves before he could get a piece of bread and butter safely into his mouth ! And

Jason had to cut his meat for him ! Tears came into Nancy's eyes. But her attention was called to the click of the gate-latch ; Dr. Bearse and lawyer Fink were coming in. Jason rose to offer them chairs, and—"Wouldn't they have some supper with them ?"

"No," said the lawyer, "we only came to bring you Mrs. Peggy's will. You remember when she made it, Mrs. Loring ?"

"Oh, yes," Nancy said indifferently, 'she remembered it.'

"It's short and to the point," said Mr. Fink, "and made when she was entirely competent to devise what she possessed. There is just one thousand dollars, and she left it all to you, Mrs. Loring."

"To me !" cried Nancy, "you must be mistaken. I'm no kin to her, I had no right ; why did she leave it to me ?"

"As far as I could understand her, she thought that you were not likely to get any good out of it for yourself, but would give it away and then regret it."

"I never regret what I give away," said the amazed Nancy.

“Peggy could not understand that attitude of mind,” said the doctor; “besides, I think she hoped by the bequest to make trouble between you and the Lorings.”

“I oughtn’t to take it at all, it is not mine,” said Nancy.

“It is yours and you ought to take it,” spoke up Jason. “She had a perfect right to give it as she chose, and as it is given to you it is yours entirely. I’m glad you have it; for you have had a lot of trouble with her, and with all of us, for that matter; and besides, when you married six years ago, you had six hundred dollars, and you have spent every penny of it, and three or four hundred more of your earnings, on us all here.”

“That’s spoken like a man, Jason,” said the doctor; “there is not much of Aunt Peggy in you, my lad.”

Violantè had disappeared. Their business concluded, the two gentlemen departed. Jason left the room. Nancy had Eugene to remove from the table and brush off, the dishes to gather up, the food to set by in the buttery, and then

Angelino, who had been whittling with a table-knife, cut his finger, and as he was somewhat of a spoiled infant, he roared lustily, and there was needed much washing, binding up, and comforting to restore his equanimity. This was all fortunate, for Nancy was kept in the front room for half an hour thereby.

As soon as Jason saw the lawyer and doctor leave, he hastened out after his sister. Violante had flung herself on her face on the porch, and was sobbing loudly.

"What is all this about?" asked Jason, picking her up.

"She has no right to the money; it is mine! It is mine!"

"And how did it come to be yours?" asked Jason, placing Violante on the step, and seating himself with his arm around her.

"It is mine," reiterated Violante, "Aunt Peggy always promised me that I should have it all. She said, 'not to mind what other people expected, all would be for me.' Last Christmas she said, 'Never mind if you don't get much presents. By and by you'll have all my

money, and can get what you want, an organ or a piano, and feathers for your hat.' And only two weeks ago, when I wanted a new lawn and couldn't have it, Aunt Peggy said, 'Wait till I die, and you can have silk gowns all you choose. You'll have all my money.'"

"Violante," said Jason, "it is awful to think it, but I am very sure Peggy said these things just to give you a bitter disappointment, and to make you angry and quarrelsome after her death. She wanted to stir you up to quarrel with mother about that money. For, you see, during four years that she has been promising you this, she knew that she had left mother all the money."

"She hasn't any right to it! She's no kin!"

"Property need not be willed to kin. The owner has absolute right to give it away as he pleases. And the one to whom it is willed has absolute right to hold it. What would you do with it if you had it, Violante?"

"Lots of things! I'd have a handsome hat, and a lot of new dresses, and I'd take dancing-lessons and music-lessons; I'd be a lady!"

"Being a lady does not come in that way. And if the money had been left to you, you could not spend it in that fashion. Little girls are not allowed to take and use a bequest so. A guardian, probably Jabez Long, would have been appointed, and he would have taken care of all the money for five years, until you were of age. And by that time you would have had more sense than to spend it on dancing and feathers and silk frocks."

"All the same," said Violante, "it would have been mine to use for myself, and not another girl around here has a thousand dollars coming to her."

"If the giving you that thousand dollars, Violante, had made you vain and selfish, and drawn you away from the only people who love you and are kin to you, it would have been a curse. You see now, anger at not getting it makes you unhappy and cross, and fills you with ingratitude and rage against a mother who has done her very best to make you good and happy."

"If she had not come here, the money would have come to me!" stormed Violante.

“I think it would not. Aunt Peggy did not care for any of us, and would not give her money to any one who wanted it, or would have rejoiced to get it. I know mother is thinking how she can use it to help every one. Money does not harm the unselfish. Think how terrible it would be for you to grow like Aunt Peggy, to live and die with no one to love or regret you! We don't want another Aunt Peggy in our family. No doubt she began by thinking only of herself, and if you give way to bad, selfish feelings, you might grow to be just like her. You would not wish to be that. All her miseries came from selfishness and unlovingness.”

As Jason continued talking to Violante, Nancy passed behind them with her tray of dishes. After being busy for a while in the kitchen, she returned to the front room, and sat down in her rocking-chair by the window. As Jason had gone to milk, Violante came in and seated herself by the other window.

“Violante,” said Nancy, who was luxuriating in the unwonted peace, “what have you been crying about? Are you sick?”

"I'm miserable," burst forth Violante; "Aunt Peggy promised me all her money, and I ought to have it, and she cheated me!"

"Dear me, did she do that?" said Nancy. "But what would you do with so much money, child? You have all you want."

"No, I don't," said Violante, "I want patent-leather slippers, and an embroidered handkerchief, and a red silk parasol, and to learn dancing, and have some curling-tongs for my bangs, and to go to Niagara Falls."

As the child filed this large order for No. 1, Nancy began to see that money in abundance might not be an unmixed benediction. "I hate to have you unhappy," she said, "but such things would only put you away from your family and friends here; they wouldn't suit anything we have. Friends, and love, and a chance to help others, are better than parasols and patent-leather shoes."

"I want a feather fan, and a plume for my hat too," said Violante, with a sniff. "Every one here has had a chance but me. It is my turn now. Ellice has a nice house in the city;

and Jason's got a barnyard full of chickens and pigs and calves; and Liane lives with the rich Opdykes; and Reuben is in a big store in the city. I am left out!"

"What's that girl crying about?" asked Eugene suddenly, pointing his shaking finger at Violante.

"She is unhappy, she has been disappointed," said Nancy.

"What used to be in that corner?"—he pointed again.

"A bed—your Aunt Peggy's bed."

"Where is it gone?"

"Jason," replied the practical Nancy, "allowed that a bed used so long wasn't healthy any more, and he meant to burn the straw bed and the feather bed, and saw up the bedstead for fire-wood."

"There was somebody in the bed?" urged Eugene.

"Your Aunt Peggy. She is buried."

"Oh, buried? I'm glad. I didn't like her looks. She looked ugly. I thought she wanted to bite me."

"Isn't that dreadful, Violante," said Nancy, "to leave only such remembrances as that behind. Who would want to be like that poor old woman?"

This little episode, following Jason's words, impressed Violante. Was it possible for her to yield to evil until she became like Aunt Peggy? She began to wipe her eyes.

"Violante," said Nancy, "I believe it is real dull here for you; you work pretty steady, and I'm not lively company. You need a vacation. How would you like to go to the city and stay a week or two with Ellice, and see the stores and the parks, and the pictures and museums, and churches, and ride round in the street cars?"

"Oh!" cried Violante, who had been but once, and that only for a day, to the city. "Wouldn't I like that!"

"I'll tell you what," said Nancy, "if you'll take care of the house and your father, I'll go on Saturday with Timothy and stay over Sunday with Ellice, and I will see when you can go, and how long to stay."

"All right! I'll keep house!" Then sud-

denly relapsing into misery—"It's no use. I can't go; see how thick my shoes are, and I won't wear this calico dress in the city."

"But you need not," said Nancy. "When you go you can wear your Sunday shoes all the time, and I will buy you a new dress, a green sateen with a sprig in it, and that pink seer-sucker I fixed over for you from last summer, looks first-rate."

"Yes, maybe that will do," responded Violante, brightening.

"And I'll ask Ellice if you need anything else," said Nancy, feeling that Violante's rising ambitions and discontents, and her own sudden affluence, must be placed before the practical eyes of Ellice.

Jason came in and seated himself on the door-step, fanning himself with his hat.

"There! everything of Aunt Peggy's is disposed of, except those quilts on the line, and the two trunks that were kept under her bed; they are on the back porch."

"The little trunk," said Nancy, "had in it only her caps, gowns, stockings, and changes for

the bed, and her towels. I thought we might as well give those and the quilts to the colored woman who waited on her."

"Yes, do," said Jason, "we don't want them."

"I don't know what is in the other trunk," said Nancy; "Mrs. Peggy always kept the key hung to a little chain about her neck, and after she died they put it on the nail by the clock."

"I've heard my own mother tell," said Jason, "that about two weeks after Aunt Peggy was told that she could never leave her bed again, she made mother bring that trunk and pack into it all her good things, and then when it was locked, she took the key and said no one should open the trunk so long as she lived."

"Dear me!" said Nancy. Then joyfully, "But it can be opened now! I'll tell you, Jason, let us give that trunk and all that is in it to Violante. Ellice and I are no kin to Mrs. Peggy, and Liane is rich."

"Oh, goody!" screamed Violante, "I'll open it as soon as the work is done up, to-morrow morning."

"It has been shut sixteen years; you stand

a fine chance of nothing but moths and dust," said Jason.

Next morning Nancy told Violante that she might go to her trunk as soon as she ate breakfast. But Violante had risen in a very virtuous mood, and insisted on doing her usual share of work. Finally all was done, and she unlocked the famous trunk, and bent over its contents. Such an odor of camphor, tobacco, and red pepper arose that she sneezed until tears ran down her cheeks, and her nose was as red as a cherry.

"Turn the trunk so that the breeze will go past you and carry the scent away," said Nancy, "and set up the clothes-horse behind the trunk to hang the clothes on."

As Violante kept calling on her to 'look,' 'look,' Nancy sat down on the end of the water bench to give her whole attention to the girl's pleasure. Here was a new experience for Nancy; she was taking a vacation right in the middle of the day! Angel was abroad in the field with Jason; Eugene was in his big chair under the lilacs in the front yard, smoking. He would smoke and doze, and let his pipe go out,

and nod and dream, by the hour. This morning the world seemed particularly lovely in its fresh summer green, the sky so blue with the fluffy white clouds slowly sailing east, the air mild and full of fragrance, bees droning, birds chirping, and Nancy on the porch of the silent house, her hands in her lap, watching Violante !

Violante went into bursts of laughter over two ancient bonnets, one of velvet, one of straw.

"But the ribbon is real nice, if it is ironed," said Nancy, "and there's velvet enough in that bonnet to trim you a winter dress ! Dear me, what a fine skirt, all ruffles and tatting ; you'll need to bleach that, Violante."

There was a Paisley shawl, which Violante did not esteem highly, but she found a fan with down on the edge, and a couple of worked handkerchiefs, which she thought lovely. There was a green parasol, the silk cracked from long folding, but, joy of joys, two silk frocks, a black one and a brown one, and a plaid silk apron, and a brown mull with white polka dots, and a white apron trimmed with crochet lace ! Then there was a bottle of perfumery that had never

been opened, and a cake of fancy soap, and a little velvet box wherein were some rings, big hoop earrings, a cameo brooch, and a gold pencil, spoils of two generations. Out came a cloth coat, which Nancy avowed that she could make over fine for Violante, and two queer little capes of nice material, for which Nancy begged, to make a pair of Sunday vests for Jason.

"You can have the capes, and the Paisley shawl, and the black silk apron," said Violante liberally, really happy to have something to give. "Here are some no-account gloves, and such a funny pair of shoes; and here is a worked skirt and a shiny black frock."

"That's alpaca, and will make up nice for you some time," said Nancy, surveying the goods hung out on the clothes-frame. "Violante, what do you want to do when you are grown up—teach?"

"Yes, if I could get education enough," said Violante.

"I was thinking of you last night, and planning for you. You'll get through the course in this school when you are fifteen, and then you

might go two years to the Normal. I could pay for you out of your Aunt Peggy's money. By the end of your first year in the Normal, the money would have made one hundred and eighty-eight dollars interest, and that would pay for one year, and the next year the money could come out of the principal, and then—you could get a school at forty dollars a month."

"That would be splendid," said Violante, clasping her arms about her knees, and rocking to and fro as she sat on the porch floor.

"If you mean to do that," said Nancy, "you'd better save up those two silks and the al'pac, and those fancy skirts to do over for you when you start to the Normal. But I'll make over that brown mull for you next week, if you say so."

"I say so," cried Violante gaily, "and I say you're real nice, and now I must hurry up the rest of this trunk before it's time for dinner."

That evening after tea, Jason invited Violante to go milking with him. "I don't want you to forget how," he said.

"You want something besides milking done,"

said Violante, as they walked toward the pasture.

“Yes, I want to talk. I want to tell you how glad I am that you have made up your mind to be pleasant, and not sulk about Aunt Peggy’s money.”

“I reckon I’ll get my share, first and last,” laughed Violante.

“No doubt you will. The best you can get out of it, though, will be to learn how to govern yourself. You and I, Violante, have to take more pains about being good than other folks do. Because we have a very bad inheritance from our father.”

“But some folks have less money than we do.”

“I did not mean the money inheritance. The bad inheritance is the weak body, and weak minds, and weak morals we are likely to heir from a poor man, who, being naturally weak, never strengthened himself by self-control, but indulged every selfish desire. Selfish indulgence has made our poor father an idler, and caused him to ruin himself by beer-drinking.

We have to be exceedingly temperate, Violante, if we are to be strong in spite of our inheritance."

"Bah," said Violante, "we don't want to drink beer, surely."

"When I say temperance, I mean more than abstaining from drinking. I mean we should control all our selfish desires. Aunt Peggy's intemperance came out in eating opium and morphine; I heard that an uncle we had was a great glutton. We can be intemperate in desiring pleasures, or riches, or luxuries for ourselves. If we think first of the good of other people, we are not likely to be intemperate in anything. They talk about 'whole-souled, genial, honest, big-hearted fellows, whose only fault is drinking.' Violante, that's all bosh! Drinking is all selfishness, and people who consider others, and try to do good to others, and live for others, never are drunkards, never are intemperate in anything. I've talked with Brother Benedict about it. Intemperance of any kind is just outrageous selfishness."

"Pooh, Jason!" said Violante, swinging her

little milking-stool about her in an arc of half a circle, "aren't you wise and old-fashioned ! I never could think of all that stuff ! However, you needn't think I care very much, now, about that money, since I'm to get some good out of it anyway, and am to go for two weeks to the city, and wear my best clothes, and have a good time ! None of the other girls here, get a chance for two weeks in the city !"

"You are nothing but a child, Violante, if you are thirteen," said Jason ; "you don't seem able to put your mind on anything important."

"Oh, don't I ? Isn't it important to go to town, and see the world ; to have new gowns and a trunk full of duds, if they do smell of camphor and red pepper ? I'd rather be a child at thirteen, than an old man at less than twenty, like you !"

"I have need to be an old man," said Jason, setting himself at milking. "It seems my dad has gone into second childhood at middle age, and I have, in general, to be his father."

"Ain't we a mixed-up family !" cried Violante, decorating with tufts of grass the Holstein's

horns. "Maybe we're more of a circus than the whole city!"

"You think only of the city, but I hate it," said Jason.

'City! City! City!' It was to this tune that Violante set her life, until the famous visit had come and passed, and she had calmed down again in the autumn, to work vigorously in school, with her hopes fixed on two years at the Normal, and a teacher's place for Miss Violante Loring, at forty dollars a month! Jason felt inclined to quarrel with her for this constant self-centering.

"Never mind," said Nancy, "we don't care, so long as she is happy!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

“THOU SHALT REST AND STAND IN THY LOT.”

“Now, traveller in this vale of tears
To realms of everlasting light,
Through time's dark wilderness of years
Pursue thy flight.”

ANGELINO, who had been a toothless, bald-headed, pink and white, dimpled, delightful baby, captivating to the heart of Nancy when she came to her married home, was now a big boy, head of his class in the district school, and commander-in-chief of the poultry-yard.

Christmas and his eighth birthday would arrive very near together, and in honor of the double event, Reuben, now chief clerk of the factory where he had learned the candy business, had promised to send a fine red sled. Angelino no longer must be rocked and sung to, no longer in his fat neck could Nancy hide her tears, but fortunately, now Nancy had no tears to hide, she was calmly happy.

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Always taking in sewing; she was now not so pressed with work that she dared not take a restful moment. Although Angelino did not need to be rocked and sung to, he yet enjoyed nothing so much as a talk with Nancy. Drawing up the rocking-chair which Reuben had bought for Seraph, he would discuss many weighty matters. "Was it any credit to win when you spelled down if you did not spell fair, but read it, the word, you know, straight off somebody's slate? Was it likely Ellice's baby would call him 'uncle' when it got big enough to talk? Would it be a good plan, some Saturday, to get Jason to let him ride one of the horses, and if he blacked his shoes to shine and wore his best clothes, and went over to stay until Monday at Mr. Opdyke's? For Mr. Opdyke had seen him at the store, and told him to come over and visit them, sure."

'Then there were graver themes. Angelino had joined the Temperance Society; it numbered thirty-five now, many of them young men of twenty and twenty-one, like Jason. And now, indeed, Tomsey, the little President, was fading

away. Tomsey was in his eighteenth year, and he did not want to attain manly age on earth, he said; he wanted to 'be only a boy in this world, and a man in heaven, when he would be like other men, the men in heaven.' The members of the society had for a year or more had a great scheme on hand. Mr. Long had contributed land on the main road, and money had been collected, and the foundation laid of a small brick building for a free library, reading-room, and meeting-room for the society. The building was to have three rooms in it, each with a fireplace; Tomsey chose the plan and selected the wood for the finishing inside, and the colors for the glass door. This building was to be named the THOMAS LONG HALL, and was to be Tomsey's memorial where he had lived and been happy, although not like other boys. The society members contributed money and material and labor, and solicited funds, and the work went on heartily.

It was finished at last, and Tomsey with a beaming face stood beside Mr. Hutton in the central room while he made the dedicatory

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prayer. That was Tomsey's last going out ; shortly after that he quietly 'fell on asleep,' and the boys of his society "carried him to his burial and made great lamentation over him."

"We must not lament for him, Lovinia," said Jabez to his wife. "The Lord spared him for a good many years ; he lived long enough to be happy and to do good in the world. I'm very thankful that the Lord sent us Tomsey, just exactly as he was ; I wouldn't have had him different, and my name is Jabez Long."

Jabez said as much to Nancy, one evening when he went over to the Lorings to overcome Jason's hesitation at accepting Tomsey's place as President of that famous Band.

Nancy heard and sighed. She would have had her weakly one very different if she could have chosen ; she was looking at Eugene, who as he sat in his chair with a vacant look shook constantly with palsy. But she reflected that here was an Ephraim who had destroyed himself ; he had been born to a better heritage. Angelino the infant had grown into the big boy, but Eugene the man had grown backward

to Eugene the feeble child. It was well that Seraph was gone, and Angelino was growing, for this child by administration of the Evil One, needed a deal of care-taking.

“Look at him, Jabez,” said Nancy, “he gets worse and worse all the time, and his mind is feebler than his body, he don’t seem to sense anything. You can teach little children about Heaven and Christ and our Father, they take hold of it right off, but he don’t. I try so hard to fix his mind on something good, but I can’t, there isn’t any mind to fix.”

“He will not last much longer, Nancy,” said Jabez. “It is only your good nursing that has kept him alive until now. You’ve done a deal for him.”

“It appears to me, Jabez, sometimes, as if I’d ruined him,” said Nancy. “When I think how chirk and lively he was when I first saw him about nine years ago, and how fast he went down after that, seems like I must be the one to blame. If I’d been a more likeable person, perhaps I could have got him to do better. Why, there in the city, when he came to board

with me, he wasn't very vigorous, but he seemed cheery and able to do work, and though he held loose ideas about beer and so on, he didn't seem to care for drink, said he didn't. And then as soon as I came out here, he took to it so hard! Must be my fault."

Jabez shook his head. "It's no use taking blame, Nancy, that don't belong to you. Boy and man I've known Eugene since we were little shavers. We went to school together. The main trouble with Eugene all his life has been that he cared only for himself; to want a thing was reason for having it, whether it was right or not. His father and mother were nice people, but they counted Eugene a wonder; all their other children died babies, and they spoiled Eugene according. If he didn't want to do a thing, then he didn't do it; if he chose not to go to school, he stayed away; if he wanted a thing he got it, by fair means or foul. He was great on games, and crazy to go to all kinds of shows; he liked to hang about stores and street corners, and listen to the men talking, and in his early days folks drank freely at grocery

stores. He was bright and quick to learn, and if a prize was offered for anything in school, or a speaking was to come off, he stayed and took the first place. I used to envy him learning so easy. I was always dull; when I spelled, the wrong letters were sure to get in; and when I was in geography I always bounded wrong; and in history the dates and the people's names laid me right out. Grandmother used to say, 'Jabez was only good at figures, and common sense, and keeping the ten commandments,' and she was about right there. Eugene never held back from any trickery that would help him on; he thought it a good joke to cheat the teacher any way he could, and he wanted credit without working for it. He was a master hand at staying out late nights, and lying abed late in the mornings. He was always rather nervous and weakly, and the smoking and drinking he did made him weaklier. He never could stand rum or gin or brandy, they nearly killed him on the spot, but by degrees he learned to drink ale and beer and porter. He didn't crave the taste, but he drank because other men did, and he

liked to sit and brag and gossip, and these drinks stirred him up. His father and mother died near together, and that seemed to scare him and steady him up for a little. His Aunt Peggy was a stingy housekeeper, and hard to live with, and in a few months he married the mother of Ellice. It was a great mistake on her part. She was a very pretty woman, sweet, gentle, a good housekeeper, and I think Eugene really cared for her more than he ever did for any one else. As long as she could go about walking or driving, or making visits with him, and amuse him, it was well enough; but the children came close together, and Eugene was too selfish to care for children, and he began to neglect everything at home and spend nearly all his time gossiping and drinking beer. Now and then a fit of sickness would scare him into being sober and working steadily; then he laid the sickness to any other cause than his habits, and fell back again.

"The death of his wife, and the care he could not help feeling for the support of such a helpless family, kept him straight for three or four

months, and just as he was beginning to be restless, Stitt broke his leg, and Eugene, being a good marketman and professing to have entirely reformed, was hired to take care of the stall. For a time it seemed as if Stitt would not live, and Eugene hoped to have charge of the stall permanently ; so, as he liked living in the city, he kept pretty steady. He went to your house, got probably a large idea of the amount of your money, and when he really knew it, I reckon he thought six hundred, a good housekeeper and seamstress, and a lot of furniture, was worth making a fair show for. But when he came back here, you see, he had no more expectations to make him restrain himself, and he felt the reaction and temptation stronger than ever, and it all happened just as Doctor Bearse had warned him : if he took to his cups again he would break down the last bit of bodily and moral force he had. It was not you, Nancy ; nothing you could have been or done, would have saved him. Self-indulgence was the only rule he had ever known. Nothing would convince him, nothing would

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warn him, nothing persuade him. Being naturally weakly he couldn't stand as much as most men can, and here's the end of it. No one but himself to blame, unless his parents were to blame for the way they brought him up, or for the lack of moral backing they gave him to begin with. I tell you, Nancy, when you begin to reckon where blame lies in such cases, you may go a long way back before you get to the root of it, and my name is Jabez Long."

Perhaps this history of her husband consoled Nancy a little, and perhaps not. She may have lost the sense of comfort in her own exculpability, in the deep sense of sorrow for this immortal thing that had seemed doomed from the beginning by weakness and danger. A helpless wreck with no conscious being aboard to answer to a hail, or shout for help, or make an effort, or seize a life line,—this sad-hearted watcher on the stormy coast where his fates had driven him, had only to see him sweep in silence down into an unutterable darkness.

When the big chair was empty and this grown-up infant was beyond her tendance, it was

many months before Nancy in that quiet house could return to any thought of cheer or hopefulness, or interest in daily living. Yet for the sake of Jason and Violante, and Angelino, she must simulate these, for home must not be made forbidding or unhomelike, and youth-time must not be clouded, lest evil follow to "her children."

"Don't think about what you can't help," said one.

"Keep busy," advised another.

"Amuse yourself a bit," said a third.

"Leave all with God, and live day by day on what He gives you, and near to Him," said Mrs. Hutton, and that indeed was Nancy's path of peace.

The footprints of a great sorrow are sometimes smoothed away by the inflow of a great joy, just as when one huge wave has scored and channelled the beach, and another roller following, leaves the sand level, scintillant, shell-strewn. It was thus in the life of Nancy in that summer which was marked by the homecoming of Violante from her first year at the

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Normal School. The neighbors eyed Violante carefully, and finally pronounced upon her, that she was "as bright as a dollar, and a right comfortable girl to live with."

Now to be called 'comfortable to live with' is indeed high praise for a young girl.

Violante brought a new atmosphere into the quiet house. Jason was silent and Nancy was sad; Violante made Jason talk, and Nancy laugh.

What tales she told of school-life! She described the teachers and the students; the classroom blunders and triumphs; the chapel exercises and the exhibitions, and examinations: she told of recreation hours, of serenades and feasts, and of hours of study late into the small hours. Nancy listened as if to the Arabian Nights; her needle moved slowly, or rested in the seam as she leaned back in her chair and enjoyed in the rehearsal what had given Violante so much pleasure in the performance.

How well-spent had been that year of schooling! Violante should have had another year even if it had exhausted all of Aunt Peggy's legacy. But there was no need of that, for

Nancy's hands had not been idle, and there were now no extra demands on her earnings, and the money for Violante's second year was ready.

The Sabbath in July when Jason, Violante, and Angelino, with a band of other young converts, united with the church was surely a white day in Nancy's life. If she had helped these three in anywise toward their high inheritance, how bright seemed now every step of her tortuous way. She looked back to herself as she was when she came to Eugene's home, and she realized that she was herself greatly changed; how much wider seemed her life, how much deeper her sympathies, and above all how much greater her spiritual experiences and insights. These are harvests worth the gathering, even if the toil be long and hard.

"Perhaps your mother knows of this day and is glad," she said to Jason as they walked homeward from church.

"If she does not know now, she will know by and by, and she will know about you and of all you have done for us," said Jason.

"I think you ought to put it 'all you have

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done for me,' " said Nancy. "What should I do without you?"

"Promise me that you will never try to do without me," said Jason, "but that as long as I live you will live with me."

It was the day after this, that the affairs of the little Loring property were settled. Jason came in about noon. "The appraisers are gone," he said. "They estimate the place at three thousand. One third of that is yours, and the two thirds divided between us five, gives four hundred each. Liane says she wants her share as soon as it can be had. Reuben says I can take my time settling with him, and I've concluded to buy out them all, and have a two thirds interest here myself. I'll pay Liane off first, and then be ready to pay Violante when she comes of age: then Reub's turn will come, and it will be some years before I have to reach Angelino. I shall turn the whole place into a market garden, and I'm sure I shall do well."

"I don't see," said Nancy, "why I should have a third, or why I should ever have had your Aunt Peggy's money."

"You have the best kind of a right," said Jason. "There is Scripture for that—'The meek shall inherit the earth.'"

"There's another Scripture which says, 'Lay not up for yourself treasures on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt and thieves break through and steal.' So the best thing I can do is to share with the rest of you. And that's what I will do."

"You always were like the early Christians, that had all things in common," laughed Jason.

"I don't know what any one could want more than I have," said Nancy, watching Violante stepping here and there as she prepared dinner. "I have a nice home, good children, all the comforts of life. Once I was very lonesome, and there were times when I was very unhappy and afraid. Now I am none of these things. I am safe and content."

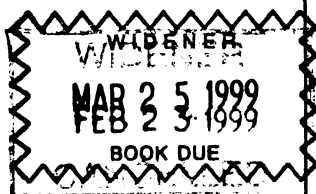
"Thou shalt rest and stand in thy lot at the end of the days," said Jason, bowing his head.

THE END.

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