On Picket Duty, and Other Tales eBook

On Picket Duty, and Other Tales by Louisa May Alcott

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ON PICKET DUTY, AND OTHER TALES.

By L. M. *Alcott*.

Boston:
New York:

1864

ON PICKET DUTY.

WHAT air you thinkin' of, Phil?

"My wife, Dick."

"So was I! Aint it odd how fellers fall to thinkin' of thar little women, when they get a quiet spell like this?"

"Fortunate for us that we do get it, and have such gentle bosom guests to keep us brave and honest through the trials and temptations of a life like ours."

October moonlight shone clearly on the solitary tree, draped with gray moss, scarred by lightning and warped by wind, looking like a venerable warrior, whose long campaign was nearly done; and underneath was posted the guard of four. Behind them twinkled many camp-fires on a distant plain, before them wound a road ploughed by the passage of an army, strewn with the relics of a rout. On the right, a sluggish river glided, like a

serpent, stealthy, sinuous, and dark, into a seemingly impervious jungle; on the left, a Southern swamp filled the air with malarial damps, swarms of noisome life, and discordant sounds that robbed the hour of its repose. The men were friends as well as comrades, for though gathered from the four quarters of the Union, and dissimilar in education, character, and tastes, the same spirit animated all; the routine of camp life threw them much together, and mutual esteem soon grew into a bond of mutual good fellowship.

Thorn was a Massachusetts volunteer; a man who seemed too early old, too early embittered by some cross, for though grim of countenance, rough of speech, cold of manner, a keen observer would have soon discovered traces of a deeper, warmer nature hidden, behind the repellent front he turned upon the world. A true New Englander, thoughtful, acute, reticent, and opinionated; yet earnest withal, intensely patriotic, and often humorous, despite a touch of Puritan austerity.

Phil, the “romantic chap,” as he was called, looked his character to the life. Slender, swarthy, melancholy eyed, and darkly bearded; with feminine features, mellow voice and, alternately languid or vivacious manners. A child of the South in nature as in aspect, ardent, impressible, and proud; fitfully aspiring and despairing; without the native energy which moulds character and ennobles life. Months of discipline and devotion had done much for him, and some deep experience was fast ripening the youth into a man.

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Flint, the long-limbed lumberman, from the wilds of Maine, was a conscript who, when government demanded his money or his life, calculated the cost, and decided that the cash would be a dead loss and the claim might be repeated, whereas the conscript would get both pay and plunder out of government, while taking excellent care that government got precious little out of him. A shrewd, slow-spoken, self-reliant specimen, was Flint; yet something of the fresh flavor of the backwoods lingered in him still, as if Nature were loath to give him up, and left the mark of her motherly hand upon him, as she leaves it in a dry, pale lichen, on the bosom of the roughest stone.

Dick “hailed” from Illinois, and was a comely young fellow, full of dash and daring; rough and rowdy, generous and jolly, overflowing with spirits and ready for a free fight with all the world.

Silence followed the last words, while the friendly moon climbed up the sky. Each man’s eye followed it, and each man’s heart was busy with remembrances of other eyes and hearts that might be watching and wishing as theirs watched and wished. In the silence, each shaped for himself that vision of home that brightens so many camp-fires, haunts so many dreamers under canvas roofs, and keeps so many turbulent natures tender by memories which often are both solace and salvation.

Thorn paced to and fro, his rifle on his shoulder, vigilant and soldierly, however soft his heart might be. Phil leaned against the tree, one hand in the breast of his blue jacket, on the painted presentment of the face his fancy was picturing in the golden circle of the moon. Flint lounged on the sward, whistling softly as he whittled at a fallen bough. Dick was flat on his back, heels in air, cigar in mouth, and some hilarious notion in his mind, for suddenly he broke into a laugh.

“What is it, lad?” asked Thorn, pausing in his tramp, as if willing to be drawn from the disturbing thought that made his black brows lower and his mouth look grim.

“Thinkin’ of my wife, and wishin’ she was here, bless her heart! set me rememberin’ how I see her fust, and so I roared, as I always do when it comes into my head.”

“How was it? Come, reel off a yarn and let’s hear houw yeou hitched teams,” said Flint, always glad to get information concerning his neighbors, if it could be cheaply done.

“Tellin’ how we found our wives wouldn’t be a bad game, would it, Phil?”

“I’m agreeable; but let us have your romance first.”

“Devilish little of that about me or any of my doin’s. I hate sentimental bosh as much as you hate slang, and should have been a bachelor to this day if I hadn’t seen Kitty jest as I did. You see, I’d been too busy larkin’ round to get time for marryin’, till a couple of

years ago, when I did up the job double-quick, as I'd like to do this thunderin' slow one, hang it all!"

"Halt a minute till I give a look, for this picket isn't going to be driven in or taken while I'm on guard."

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Down his beat went Thorn, reconnoitring river, road, and swamp, as thoroughly as one pair of keen eyes could do it, and came back satisfied, but still growling like a faithful mastiff on the watch; performances which he repeated at intervals till his own turn came.

“I didn’t have to go out of my own State for a wife, you’d better believe,” began Dick, with a boast, as usual; “for we raise as fine a crop of girls thar as any State in or out of the Union, and don’t mind raisin’ Cain with any man who denies it. I was out on a gunnin’ tramp with Joe Partridge, a cousin of mine,—poor old chap! he fired his last shot at Gettysburg, and died game in a way he didn’t dream of the day we popped off the birds together. It ain’t right to joke that way; I won’t if I can help it; but a feller gets awfully kind of heathenish these times, don’t he?”

“Settle up them scores byme-by; fightin’ Christians scurse raound here. Fire away, Dick.”

“Well, we got as hungry as hounds half a dozen mile from home, and when a farm-house hove in sight, Joe said he’d ask for a bite and leave some of the plunder for pay. I was visitin’ Joe, didn’t know folks round, and backed out of the beggin’ part of the job; so he went ahead alone. We’d come up the woods behind the house, and while Joe was foragin’, I took are connoissance. The view was fust-rate, for the main part of it was a girl airin’ beds on the roof of a stoop. Now, jest about that time, havin’ a leisure spell, I’d begun to think of marryin’, and took a look at all the girls I met, with an eye to business. I s’pose every man has some sort of an idee or pattern of the wife he wants; pretty and plucky, good and gay was mine, but I’d never found it till I see Kitty; and as she didn’t see me, I had the advantage and took an extra long stare.”

“What was her good pints, hey?”

“Oh, well, she had a wide-awake pair of eyes, a bright, jolly sort of a face, lots of curly hair tumblin’ out of her net, a trig little figger, and a pair of the neatest feet and ankles that ever stepped. ‘Pretty,’ thinks I; ‘so far so good.’ The way she whacked the pillers, shooked the blankets, and pitched into the beds was a caution; specially one blunderin’ old featherbed that wouldn’t do nothin’ but sag round in a pig-headed sort of way, that would have made most girls get mad and give up. Kitty didn’t, but just wrastled with it like a good one, till she got it turned, banged, and spread to suit her; then she plumped down in the middle of it, with a sarcy little nod and chuckle to herself, that tickled me mightily. ‘Plucky,’ thinks I, ’better ‘n’ better.’ Jest then an old woman came flyin’ out the back-door, callin’, ’Kitty! Kitty! Squire Partridge’s son’s here, ‘long with a friend; been gunnin’, want luncheon, and I’m all in the suds; do come down and see to ’em.’

“‘Where are they ?’ says Kitty, scrambling up her hair and settlin’ her gown in a jiffy, as women have a knack of doin’, you know.

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“’Mr. Joe’s in the front entry; the other man’s somewheres round, Billy says, waitin’ till I send word whether they can stop. I darsn’t till I’d seen you, for I can’t do nothin’, I’m in such a mess,’ says the old lady.

“’So am I, for I can’t get in except by the Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. entry window, and he’ll see me,’ says Kitty, gigglin’ at the thoughts of Joe.

“’Come down the ladder, there’s a dear. I’ll pull it round and keep it stiddy,’ says her mother.

“’Oh, ma, don’t ask me!’ says Kitty, with a shiver. ’I’m dreadfully scared of ladders since I broke my arm off this very one. It’s so high, it makes me dizzy jest to think of.’

“’Well, then, I’ll do the best I can; but I wish them boys was to Jericho!’ says the old lady, with a groan, for she was fat and hot, had her gown pinned up, and was in a fluster generally. She was goin’ off rather huffy, when Kitty called out,—

“’Stop, ma! I’ll come down and help you, only ketch me if I tumble.’

“She looked scared but stiddy, and I’ll bet it took as much grit for her to do it as for one of us to face a battery. It don’t seem much to tell of, but I wish I may be hit if it wasn’t a right down dutiful and clever thing to see done. When the old lady took her off at the bottom, with a good motherly hug, I found myself huggin’ my rifle like a fool, but whether I thought it was the ladder, or Kitty, I ain’t clear about. ‘Good,’ thinks I; ’what more do you want?’

“A snug little property wouldn’t a ben bad, I reckon. Well she had it, old skin-flint, though I didn’t know or care about it then. What a jolly row she’d make if she knew I was tellin’ the ladder part of the story! She always does when I get to it, and makes believe cry, with her head in my breast-pocket, or any such handy place, till I take it out and swear I’ll never do so ag’in. Poor little Kit, I wonder what she’s doin’ now. Thinkin’ of me, I’ll bet.”

Dick paused, pitched his cap lower over his eyes, and smoked a minute with more energy than enjoyment, for his cigar was out and he did not perceive it.

“That’s not all, is it?” asked Thorn, taking a fatherly interest in the younger man’s love passages.

“Not quite. ’Fore long, Joe whistled, and as I always take short cuts everywhar, I put in at the back-door, jest as Kitty come trottin’ out of the pantry with a big berry-pie in her hand. I startled her, she tripped over the sill and down she come; the dish flew one way, the pie flopped into her lap, the juice spatterin’ my boots and her clean gown. I thought she’d cry, scold, have hysterics, or some confounded thing or other; but she jest sat still a minute, then looked up at me with a great blue splosh on her face, and went off into

the good-naturedest gale of laughin' you ever heard in your life. That finished me. 'Gay,' thinks I; 'go in and win.' So I, did; made love hand over hand, while I stayed with Joe; pupposed a fortnight after, married her in three months, and there she is, a tip-top little woman, with a pair of stunnin' boys in her arms!"

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Out came a well-worn case, and Dick proudly displayed the likeness of a stout, much bejewelled young woman, with two staring infants on her knee. In his sight, the poor picture was a more perfect work of art than any of Sir Joshua's baby-beauties, or Raphael's Madonnas, and the little story needed no better sequel than the young father's praises of his twins, the covert kiss he gave their mother when he turned as if to get a clearer light upon the face. Ashamed to show the tenderness that filled his honest heart, he hummed "Kingdom Coming," while relighting his cigar, and presently began to talk again.

"Now, then, Flint, it's your turn to keep guard, and Thorn's to tell his romance. Come, don't try to shirk; it does a man good to talk of such things, and we're all mates here."

"In some cases it don't do any good to talk of such things; better let 'em alone," muttered Thorn, as he reluctantly sat down, while Flint as reluctantly departed.

With a glance and gesture of real affection, Phil laid his hand upon his comrade's knee, saying, in his persuasive voice, "Old fellow, it *will* do you good, because I know you often long to speak of something that weighs upon you. You've kept us steady many a time, and done us no end of kindnesses; why be too proud to let us give our sympathy in return, if nothing more?"

Thorn's big hand closed over the slender one upon his knee, and the mild expression, so rarely seen upon his face, passed over it as he replied,—

"I think I could tell you almost anything if you asked me that way, my boy. It isn't that I'm too proud,—and you're right about my sometimes wanting to free my mind,—but it's because a man of forty don't just like to open out to young fellows, if there is any danger of their laughing at him, though he may deserve it. I guess there isn't now, and I'll tell you how I found my wife."

Dick sat up, and Phil drew nearer, for the earnestness that was in the man dignified his plain speech, and inspired an interest in his history, even before it was begun. Looking gravely at the river and never at his hearers, as if still a little shy of confidants, yet grateful for the relief of words, Thorn began abruptly,—

"I never hear the number eighty-four without clapping my hand to my left breast and missing my badge. You know I was on the police in New York, before the war, and that's about all you do know yet. One bitter cold night, I was going my rounds for the last time, when, as I turned a corner, I saw there was a trifle of work to be done. It was a bad part of the city, full of dirt and deviltry; one of the streets led to a ferry, and at the corner an old woman had an apple-stall. The poor soul had dropped asleep, worn out with the cold, and there were her goods left, with no one to watch 'em. Somebody was watching 'em, however; a girl, with a ragged shawl over her head, stood at the mouth of an alley close by, waiting for a chance to grab something. I'd seen her there when I

went by before, and mistrusted she was up to some mischief; as I turned the corner, she put out her hand and cribbed an apple. She saw me the minute she did it, but neither dropped it nor ran, only stood stocks still with the apple in her hand till came up.

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“‘This won’t do, my girl,’ said I. I never could be harsh with ’em, poor things! She laid it back and looked up at me with a miserable sort of a smile, that made me put my hand in my pocket to fish for a ninepence before she spoke.

“‘I know it won’t,’ she says. ’I didn’t want to do it, it’s so mean, but I’m awful hungry, sir.’

“‘Better run home and get your supper then.’

“‘I’ve got no home.’

“‘Where do you live?’

“‘In the street.’

“‘Where do you sleep?’

“’Anywhere; last night in the lock-up, and I thought I’d get in there again, if I did that when you saw me. I like to go there, it’s warm and safe.’

“‘If I don’t take you there, what will you do?’

“’Don’t know. I want to go over there and dance again, as I used to; but being sick has made me ugly, so they won’t have me, and no one else will take me because I have been there once.’

“I looked where she pointed, and thanked the Lord that they wouldn’t take her. It was one of those low theatres that do so much damage to the like of her; there was a gambling den one side of it, an eating saloon the other, and at the door of it lounged a scamp I knew very well, looking like a big spider watching for a fly. I longed to fling my billy at him; but as I couldn’t, I held on to the girl. I was new to the thing then, but though I’d heard about hunger and homelessness often enough, I’d never had this sort of thing, nor seen that look on a girl’s face. A white, pinched face hers was, with frighted, tired-looking eyes, but so innocent; she wasn’t more than sixteen, had been pretty once I saw, looked sick and starved now, and seemed just the most helpless, hopeless little thing that ever was.

“’You’d better come to the Station for to-night, and we’ll see to you to-morrow,’ says I.

“‘Thank you, sir,’ says she, looking as grateful as if I’d asked her home. I suppose I did speaks kind of fatherly. I ain’t ashamed to say I felt so, seeing what a child she was; nor to own that when she put her little hand in mine, it hurt me to feel how thin and cold it was. We passed the eating-house where the red lights made her face as rosy as it ought to have been; there was meat and pies in the window, and the poor thing stopped to look. It was too much for her; off came her shawl, and she said in that coaxing way of hers,—

“’I wish you’d let me stop at the place close by and sell this; they’ll give a little for it, and I’ll get some supper. I’ve had nothing since yesterday morning, and maybe cold is easier to bear than hunger.’

“’Have you nothing better than that to sell?” I says, not quite sure that she wasn’t all a humbug, like so many of ’em. She seemed to see that, and looked up at me again with such innocent eyes, I couldn’t doubt her when she said, shivering with something beside the cold,—

“‘Nothing but myself.’ Then the tears came, and she laid her head down on my arm, sobbing,—’Keep me! oh, do keep me safe somewhere!’”

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Thorn choked here, steadied his voice with a resolute hem! but could only add one sentence more:

“That’s how I found my wife.”

“Come, don’t stop thar? I told the whole o’ mine, you do the same. Whar did you take her? how’d it all come round?”

“Please tell us, Thorn.”

The gentler request was answered presently, very steadily, very quietly.

“I was always a soft-hearted fellow, though you wouldn’t think it now, and when that little girl asked me to keep her safe, I just did it. I took her to a good woman whom I knew, for I hadn’t any women belonging to me, nor any place but that to put her in. She stayed there till spring working for her keep, growing brighter, prettier, every day, and fonder of me I thought. If I believed in witchcraft, I shouldn’t think myself such a cursed fool as I do now, but I don’t believe in it, and to this day I can’t understand how I came to do it. To be sure I was a lonely man, without kith or kin, had never had a sweetheart in my life, or been much with women since my mother died. Maybe that’s why I was so bewitched with Mary, for she had little ways with her that took your fancy and made you love her whether you would or no. I found her father was an honest fellow enough, a fiddler in the some theatre, that he’d taken good care of Mary till he died, leaving precious little but advice for her to live on. She’d tried to get work, failed, spent all she had, got sick, and was going to the devil, as the poor souls can hardly help doing with so many ready to give them a shove. It’s no use trying to make a bad job better; so the long and short of it was, I thought she loved me; God knows I loved her, and I married her before the year was out.”

“Show us her picture; I know you’ve got one; all the fellows have, though half of ’em won’t own up.”

“I’ve only got part of one. I once saved my little girl, and her picture once saved me.”

From an inner pocket Thorn produced a woman’s housewife, carefully untied it, though all its implements were missing but a little thimble and from one of its compartments took a flattened bullet and the remnants of a picture.

“I gave her that the first Christmas after I found her. She wasn’t as tidy about her clothes as I liked to see, and I thought if I gave her a handy thing like this, she’d be willing to sew. But she only made one shirt for me, and then got tired, so I keep it like an old fool, as I am. Yes, that’s the bit of lead that would have done for me, if Mary’s likeness hadn’t been just where it was.”

“You’ll like to show her this when you go home, won’t you?” said Dick, as he took up the bullet, while Phil examined the marred picture, and Thorn poised the little thimble on his big finger, with a sigh.

“How can I, when I don’t know where she is, and camp is all the home I’ve got?”

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The words broke from him like a sudden cry, when some old wound is rudely touched. Both of the young men started, both laid back the relics they had taken up, and turned their eyes from Thorn's face, across which swept a look of shame and sorrow, too significant to be misunderstood. Their silence assured him of their sympathy, and, as if that touch of friendlessness unlocked his heavy heart, he eased it by a full confession. When he spoke again, it was with the calmness of repressed emotion; and calmness more touching to his mates than the most passionate outbreak, the most pathetic lamentation; for the coarse camp-phrases seemed to drop from his vocabulary; more than once his softened voice grew tremulous, and to the words "my little girl," there went a tenderness that proved how dear a place she still retained in that deep heart of his.

"Boys, I've gone so far; I may as well finish; and you'll see I'm not without some cause for my stern looks and ways; you'll pity me, and from you I'll take the comfort of it. It's only the old story,—I married her, worked for her, lived for her, and kept my little girl like a lady. I should have known that I was too old, too sober, for a young thing like that; the life she led before the pinch came just suited her. She liked to be admired, to dress and dance and make herself pretty for all the world to see; not to keep house for a quiet man like me. Idleness wasn't good for her, it bred discontent; then some of her old friends, who'd left her in her trouble, found her out when better times came round, and tried to get her back again. I was away all day, I didn't know how things were going, and she wasn't open with me, afraid, she said; I was so grave, and hated theatres so. She got courage, finally, to tell me that she wasn't happy; that she wanted to dance again, and asked me if she mightn't. I'd rather have had her ask me to put her in a fire, for I *did* hate theatres, and was bred to; others think they're no harm. I do; and knew it was a bad life for a girl like mine. It pampers vanity, and vanity is the Devil's help with such; so I said No, kindly at first, sharp and stern when she kept on teasing. That roused her spirit. 'I will go!' she said, one day. 'Not while you're my wife,' I answered back; and neither said any more, but she gave me a look I didn't think she could, and I resolved to take her away from temptation before worse came of it.

"I didn't tell her my plan; but I resigned my place, spent a week or more finding and fixing a little home for her out in the wholesome country, where she'd be safe from theatres and disreputable friends, and maybe learn to love me better when she saw how much she was to me. It was coming summer, and I made things look as home-like and as pretty as I could. She liked flowers, and I fixed a garden for her; she was fond of pets, and I got her a bird, a kitten, and a dog to play with her; she fancied gay colors and tasty little matters, so I filled her rooms with all the handsome things I could afford, and when it was done, I was as pleased as any boy, thinking what happy times we'd have together and how pleased she'd be. Boys, when I went to tell her and to take her to her little home, she was gone."

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“Who with?”

“With those cursed friends of hers; a party of them left the city just then; she was wild to go; she had money now, and all her good looks back again. They teased and tempted her; I wasn’t there to keep her, and she went, leaving a line behind to tell me that she loved the old life more than the new; that my house was a prison, and she hoped I’d let her go in peace. That almost killed me; but I managed to bear it, for I knew most of the fault was mine; but it was awful bitter to think I hadn’t saved her, after all.”

“Oh, Thorn! what did you do?”

“Went straight after her; found her dancing in Philadelphia, with paint on her cheeks, trinkets on her neck and arms, looking prettier than ever; but the innocent eyes were gone, and I couldn’t see my little girl in the bold, handsome woman twirling there before the Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.. She saw me, looked scared at first, then smiled, and danced on with her eyes upon me, as if she said,—

“‘See! I’m happy now; go away and let me be.’

“I couldn’t stand that, and got out somehow. People thought me mad, or drunk; I didn’t care, I only wanted to see her once in quiet and try to get her home. I couldn’t do it then nor afterwards by fair means, and I wouldn’t try force. I wrote to her, promised to forgive her, begged her to come back, or let me keep her honestly somewhere away from me. But she never answered, never came, and I have never tried again.”

“She wasn’t worthy of you, Thorn; you jest forgit her.”

“I wish I could! I wish I could!” in his voice quivered an almost passionate regret, and a great sob heaved his chest, as he turned his face away to hide the love and longing, still so tender and so strong.

“Don’t say that, Dick; such fidelity should make us charitable for its own sake. There is always time for penitence, always a certainty of pardon. Take heart, Thorn, you may not wait in vain, and she may yet return to you.”

“I know she will! I’ve dreamed of it, I’ve prayed for it; every battle I come out of safe makes me surer that I was kept for that, and when I’ve borne enough to atone for my part of the fault, I’ll be repaid for all my patience, all my pain, by finding her again. She knows how well I love her still, and if there comes a time when she is sick and poor and all alone again, then she’ll remember her old John, then she’ll come home and let me take her in.”

Hope shone in Thorn’s melancholy eyes, and long-suffering all-forgiving love beautified the rough, brown face, as he folded his arms and bent his gray head on his breast, as if the wanderer were already come.

The emotion which Dick scorned to show on his own account was freely manifested for another, as he sniffed audibly, and, boy-like, drew his sleeve across his eyes. But Phil, with the delicate perception of a finer nature, felt that the truest kindness he could show his friend was to distract his thoughts from himself, to spare him any comments, and lessen the embarrassment which would surely follow such unwonted confidence.

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“Now I’ll relieve Flint, and he will give you a laugh. Come on Hiram and tell us about your Beulah.”

The gentleman addressed had performed his duty, by sitting on a fence and “righting up” his pockets, to beguile the tedium of his exile. Before his multitudinous possessions could be restored to their native sphere, Thorn was himself again, and on his feet.

“Stay where you are Phil; I like to tramp, it seems like old times, and I know you’re tired. Just forget all this I’ve been saying, and go on as before. Thank you, boys! thank you!” and with a grasp of the two hands extended to him, he strode away along the path already worn by his own restless feet.

“It’s done him good, and I’m glad of that; but I’d like to see the little baggage that bewitched the poor old boy, wouldn’t you, Phil?”

“Hush! here’s Flint.”

“What’s up naow? want me tew address the meetin’, hey? I’m willin’, only the laugh’s ruther ag’inst me, ef I tell that story; expect yeu’ll like it all the better fer that.” Flint coiled up his long limbs, put his hands in his pockets, chewed meditatively for a moment, and then began with his slowest drawl—

“Waal, sir, it’s pretty nigh ten year ago, I was damster daown tew Oldtaown, clos’t tew Banggore. My folks lived tew Bethel; there was only the old man, and Aunt Siloam, keepin’ house fer him, seein’ as I was the only chick he hed. I hedn’t heared from ’em fer a long spell, when there come a letter sayin’ the old man was breakin’ up. He’d said it every spring fer a number er years, and I didn’t mind it no more’n the breakin’ up er the river; not so much jest then; fer the gret spring drive was comin’ on, and my hands was tew full to quit work all tew oncet. I sent word I’d be ’long fore a gret while, and bymeby I went. I ought tew hev gone at fust; but they’d sung aout ‘Wolf!’ so often I wasn’t scared; an’ sure ’nuff the wolf did come at last. Father hed been dead an’ berried a week when I got there, and aunt was so mad she wouldn’t write, nor scurcely speak tew me fer a consider’ble spell. I didn’t blame her a mite, and felt jest the wust kind; so I give in every way, and fetched her raound. Yeou see I hed a cousin who’d kind er took my place tew hum while I was off, an’ the old man hed left him a good slice er his money, an’ me the farm, hopin’ to keep me there. He’d never liked the lumberin’ bizness, an’ hankered arfter me a sight, I faound. Waal, seein’ haow ’twas, I tried tew please him, late as it was; but ef there was ennything I did spleen ag’inst, it was farmin, ’specially arfter the smart times I’d ben hevin, up Oldtaown way. Yeou don’t know nothin’ abaout it; but ef yeou want tew see high dewin’s, jest hitch onto a timber-drive an’ go it daown along them lakes and rivers, say from Kaumchenungamooth tew Punnobscot Bay. Guess yeou’d see a thing or tew, an’ find livin’ on a log come as handy as ef yeou was born a turtle.

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“Waal, I stood it one summer; but it was the longest kind of a job. Come fall I turned contrary, darned the farm, and vaowed I’d go back tew loggin’. Aunt hed got fond er me by that time, and felt dreadful bad abaout my leavin’ on her. Cousin Siah, as we called Josiah, didn’t cotton tew the old woman, though he did tew her cash; but we hitched along fust-rate. She was ’tached tew the place, hated tew hev it let or sold, thought I’d go to everlastin’ rewin ef I took tew lumberin’ ag’in, an’ hevin’ a tidy little sum er money all her own, she took a notion tew buy me off. ‘Hiram,’ sez she, ’ef yeou’ll stay tew hum, merry some smart gal, an’ kerry on the farm, I’ll leave yeou the hull er my fortin. Ef yeou don’t, I’ll leave every cent on’t tew Siah, though he ain’t done as waal by me as yeou hev. Come,’ sez she, ‘I’m breakin’ up like brother; I shan’t wurry any one a gret while, and ’fore spring I dessay you’ll hev cause tew rejice that yeou done as Aunt Si counselled yeou.’

“Now, that idee kinder took me, seein’ I hedn’t no overpaourin’ love fer cousin; but I brewdid over it a spell ’fore I ’greed. Fin’lly, I said I’d dew it, as it warn’t a hard nor a bad trade; and begun to look raound fer Mis Flint, Jr. Aunt was dreadf’l pleased; but ’mazin pertickler as tew who was goan tew stan’ in her shoes, when she was fetched up ag’inst the etarnal boom. There was a sight er lovely women-folks raound taown; but aunt she set her foot daown that Mis Flint must be smart, pious, an’ good-natered; harnsome she didn’t say nothin’ abaout, bein’ the humliest woman in the State er Maine. I hed my own calk’lations on that pint, an’ went sparkin’ two or three er the pootiest gals, all that winter. I warn’t in no hurry, fer merryin’ is an awful resky bizness; an’ I warn’t goan to be took in by nobuddy. Some haouw I couldn’t make up my mind which I’d hev, and kept dodgin’, all ready to slew raound, an’ hitch on tew ary one that seemed likeliest. ’Long in March, aunt, she ketched cold, took tew her bed, got wuss, an’ told me tew hurry up, fer nary red should I hev, ef I warn’t safely merried ’fore she stepped out. I thought that was ruther craoudin’ a feller; but I see she was goan sure, an’ I’d got intew a way er considerin’ the cash mine, so that it come hard to hear abaout givin’ on’t up. Off I went that evenin’ an’ asked Almiry Nash ef she’d hev me. No, she wouldn’t; I’d shilly-shallyed so long, she’d got tired er waitin’ and took tew keepin’ company with a doctor daown tew Bang-gore, where she’d ben visitin’ a spell. I didn’t find that as hard a rub to swaller, as I’d a thought I would, though Almiry was the richest, pootiest, and good-naterest of the lot. Aunt larfed waal, an’ told me tew try agin; so a couple er nights arfter, I spruced up, an’ went over to Car’line Miles’s; she was as smart as old cheese, an’ waal off intew the barg’in. I was just as sure she’d hev me, as I be that I’m gittin’ the rewmatiz a settin’ in this ma’sh. But that minx, Almiry, hed ben and let on abaout her own sarsy way er servin’ on me, an’ Car’line jest up an’ said she warn’t goan to hev annybuddy’s leavin’s; so daown I come ag’in.

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“Things was gettin’ desper’t by that time; for aunt was failin’ rapid, an’ the story hed leaked aout some way, so the hull taown was gigglin’ over it. I thought I’d better quit them parts; but aunt she showed me her will all done complete, ‘sceptin’ the fust name er the legatee. ‘There,’ sez she, ’it all depends on yeou, whether that place is took by Hiram or Josiah. It’s easy done, an’ so it’s goan tew stan’ till the last minnit.’ That riled me consid’able, an’ I streaked off tew May Jane Simlin’s. She want very waal off, nor extra harnsome, but she was pious the wust kind, an’ dreadf’l clever to them she fancied. But I was daown on my luck agin; fer at the fust word I spoke of merryin’, she showed me the door, an’ give me to understan’ that she couldn’t think er hevin’ a man that warn’t a church-member, that hadn’t experienced religion, or even ben struck with conviction, an’ all the rest on’t. Ef anny one hed a wanted tew hev seen a walkin’ hornet’s nest, they could hev done it cheap that night, as I went hum. I jest stramed intew the kitchen, chucked my hat intew one corner, my coat intew ’nother, kicked the cat, cussed the fire, drawed up a chair, and set scaoulin’ like sixty, bein’ tew mad for talkin’. The young woman that was nussin’ aunt,—Bewlah Blish, by name,—was a cookin’ grewel on the coals, and ’peared tew understan’ the mess I was in; but she didn’t say nothin’, only blowed up the fire, fetched me a mug er cider, an’ went raound so kinder quiet, and sympathizin’, that I faound the wrinkles in my temper gettin’ smoothed aout ‘mazin’ quick; an’ ’fore long I made a clean breast er the hull thing. Bewlah larfed, but I didn’t mind her doin’ on’t, for she sez, sez she, real sort o’ cunnin’, —

“’Poor Hiram! they didn’t use yeou waal. Yeou ought to hev tried some er the poor an’ humly girls; they’d a’ been glad an’ grateful fer such a sweetheart as yeou be.’

“I was good-natered agin by that time, an’ I sez, larfin’ along with her, ’Waal I’ve got three mittens, but I guess I might’s waal hev ’nother, and that will make two pair complete. Say, Bewlah, will yeou hev me?’

“‘Yes, I will,’ sez she.

“‘Reelly?’ sez I.

“‘Solemn trew,’ sez she.

“Ef she’d up an’ slapped me in the face, I shouldn’t hev ben more throwed aback, fer I never mistrusted she cared two chips for me. I jest set an’ gawped; fer she was solemn trew, I see that with half an eye, an’ it kinder took my breath away. Bewlah drawed the grewel off the fire, wiped her hands, an’ stood lookin’ at me a minnet, then she sez, slow an’ quiet, but tremblin’ a little, as women hev a way er doin’, when they’ve consid’able steam aboard,—

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"'Hiram, other folks think lumberin' has spilt yeou; I don't; they call yeou rough an' rewd; I know you've got a real kind heart fer them as knows haow tew find it. Them girls give yeou up so easy, 'cause they never loved yeou, an' yeou give them up 'cause yeou only thought abaout their looks an' money. I'm humly, an' I'm poor; but I've loved yeou ever sence we went a-nuttin' years ago, an' yeou shook daown fer me, kerried my bag, and kissed me tew the gate, when all the others shunned me, 'cause my father drank an' I was shably dressed, ugly, an' shy. Yeou asked me in sport, I answered in airnest; but I don't expect nothin' unless yeou mean as I mean. Like me, Hiram, or leave me, it won't make no odds in my lovin' er yeou, nor helpin' er yeou, ef I kin.'

"'Tain't easy tew say haouw I felt, while she was goin' on that way; but my idees was tumblin' raound inside er me, as ef half a dozen dams was broke loose all tew oncet. One thing was ruther stiddier 'n the rest, an' that was that I liked Bewlah morn'n I knew. I begun tew see what kep me loopin' tew hum so much, sence aunt was took daown; why I want in no hurry tew git them other gals, an' haow I come tew pocket my mittens so easy arfter the fust rile was over. Bewlah was humly, poor in flesh, dreadful freckled, hed red hair, black eyes, an' a gret mold side er her nose. But I'd got wonted tew her; she knowed my ways, was a fust rate housekeeper, real good-tempered, and pious without flingin' on't in yer face. She was a lonely creeter,—her folks bein' all dead but one sister, who didn't use her waal, an' somehow I kinder yearned over her, as they say in Scripter. For all I set an' gawped, I was coming raound fast, though I felt as I used tew, when I was goin' to shoot the rapids, kinder breathless an' oncertin, whether Id come aout right side up or not. Queer, warn't it?"

"Love, Flint; that was a sure symptom of it."

"Waal, guess 'twas; anyway I jumped up all er a sudden, ketched Bewlah raound the neck, give her a hearty kiss, and sung aout, 'I'll dew it sure's my name's Hi Flint!' The words was scurcely aout er my maouth, 'fore daown come Dr. Parr. He'd ben up tew see aunt, an' said she wouldn't last the night threw, prob'ly. That give me a scarer the wust kind; an' when I told doctor haow things was, he sez, kinder jokin',—

"'Better git merried right away, then. Parson Dill is tew come an' see the old lady, an' he'll dew both jobs tew oncet.'

"'Will yeou, Bewlah?' sez I.

"'Yes, Hiram, to 'blige yeou,' sez she.

"With that, I put it fer the parson and the license; got 'em both, an' was back in less'n half an haour, most tuckered aout with the flurry er the hull concern. Quick as I'd been, Bewlah hed faound time tew whip on her best gaoun, fix up her hair, and put a couple er white chrissanthymums intew her hank'chif pin. Fer the fust time in her life, she looked harnsome,—leastways I thought so,—with a pretty color in her cheeks, somethin'

brighter’n a larf shinin’ in her eyes, an’ her lips smilin’ an’ tremblin’, as she come to me an’ whispered so’s’t none er the rest could hear,—

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"'Hiram, don't yeou dew it, ef yeou'd ruther not. I've stood it a gret while alone, an' I guess I can ag'in.'

"Never yeou mind what I said or done abaout that; but we was married ten minutes arfter, 'fore the kitchen fire, with Dr. Parr an' oaur hired man, fer witnesses; an' then we all went up tew aunt. She was goan fast, but she understood what I told her, hed strength tew fill up the hole in the will, an' to say, a-kissin' Bewlah, 'Yeou'll be a good wife, an' naouw yeou ain't a poor one.'

"I couldn't help givin' a peek tew the will, and there I see not Hiram Flint, nor Josiah Flint, but Bewlah Flint, wrote every which way, but as plain as the nose on yer face. 'It won't make no odds dear,' whispered my wife, peekin' over my shoulder. 'Guess it won't!' sez I, aout laoud; 'I'm glad on't, and it ain't a cent more'n yeou derserve.'

"That pleased aunt. 'Riz me, Hiram,' sez she; an' when I'd got her easy, she put her old arms raound my neck, an' tried to say, 'God bless you, dear—,' but died a doin' of it; an' I ain't ashamed tew say I boo-hooed real hearty, when I laid her daown, fer she was dreadf'l good tew me, an' I don't forgit her in a hurry."

"How's Bewlah?" asked Dick, after the little tribute of respect all paid to Aunt Siloam's memory, by a momentary silence.

"Fust-rate! that harum scarum venter er mine was the best I ever made. She's done waal by me, hes Bewlah; ben a grand good haousekeeper, kin kerry on the farm better'n me, any time, an' is as dutif'l an' lovin' a wife as,—waal as annything that *is* extra dutif'l and lovin'."

"Got any boys to brag of?"

"We don't think much o' boys daown aour way; they're 'mazin resky stock to fetch up,—-alluz breakin' baounds, gittin' intew the paound, and wurry your life aout somehaow 'nother. Gals naow doos waal; I got six o' the likeliest the is goin', every one on 'em is the very moral of Bewlah,—red hair, black eyes, quiet ways, an' a mold side the nose. Baby's ain't growed yet; but I expect tew see it in a consid'able state o' forrardness, when I git hum, an' wouldn't miss it fer the world."

The droll expressions of Flint's face, and the satisfied twang of his last words, were irresistable. Dick and Phil went off into a shout of laughter; and even Thorn's grave lips relapsed into a smile at the vision of six little Flints with their six little moles. As if the act were an established ceremony, the "paternal head" produced his pocket-book, selected a worn, black and white paper, which he spread in his broad palm, and displayed with the air of a connoisseur.

“There, thets Bewlah! we call it a cuttin’; but the proper name’s a silly-hoot I b’leeve. I’ve got a harnsome big degarrytype tew hum but the heft on’t makes it bad tew kerry raound, so I took this. I don’t tote it abaout inside my shirt as some dew,—it aint my way; but I keep it in my puss long with my other valleu’bles, and guess I set as much stoxe by it as ef it was all painted up, and done off to keell.”

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The “silly-hoot” was examined with interest, and carefully stowed away again in the old brown wallet which was settled in its place with a satisfied slap, then Flint said briskly,—

“Naouw, Phil, yeou close this interestin’ and instructive meeting; and be spry, fer time’s most up.”

“I haven’t much to tell, but must begin with a confession which I have often longed but never dared to make before, because I am a coward.”

“Sho! who’s goan to b’leeve that o’ a man who fit like a wild cat, wuz offered fer permotion on the field, and wuz reported tew headquarters arfter his fust scrimmage. Try ag’in, Phil.”

“Physical courage is as plentiful as brass buttons, nowadays, but moral courage is a rarer virtue; and I’m lacking in it, as I’ll prove. You think me a Virginian; I’m an Alabamian by birth, and was a reb three months ago.”

This confession startled his hearers, as he knew it would, for he had kept his secret well. Thorn laid his hand involuntarily upon his rifle, Dick drew off a little, and Flint illustrated one of his own expressions, for he “gawped.” Phil laughed that musical laugh of his, and looked up at them with his dark face waking into sudden life as he went on:—

“There’s no treason in the camp, for I’m as fierce a Federalist as any of you now, and you may thank a woman for it. When Lee made his raid into Pennsylvania, I was a lieutenant in the—well, never mind what regiment, it hasn’t signalized itself since, and I’d rather not hit my old neighbors when they are down. In one of the skirmishes during our retreat, I got a wound and was left for dead. A kind old Quaker found and took me home; but though I was too weak to talk, I had my senses by that time, and knew what went on about me. Everything was in confusion, even in that well-ordered place; no surgeon could be got at first, and a flock of frightened women thee’d and thou’d one another over me, but hadn’t wit enough to see that I was bleeding to death. Among the faces that danced before my dizzy eyes was one that seemed familiar, probably because no cap surrounded it. I was glad to have it bending over me, to hear a steady voice say, ‘Give me a bandage, quick!’ and when none was instantly forthcoming to me, the young lady stripped up a little white apron she wore, and stanched the wound in my shoulder. I was not as badly hurt as I supposed, but so worn-out, and faint from loss of blood, they believed me to be dying, and so did I, when the old man took off his hat and said,—

“’Friend, if thee has anything to say, thee had better say it, for thee probably has not long to live.’

“I thought of my little sister, far away in Alabama, fancied she came to me, and muttered, ‘Amy, kiss me, good-by.’ The women sobbed at that; but the girl bent her sweet compassionate face to mine, and kissed me on the forehead. That was my wife.”

“So you seceded from Secession right away, to pay for that lip-service, hey?”

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“No, Thorn, not right away,—to my shame be it spoken. I’ll tell you how it came about. Margaret was not old Bent’s daughter, but a Virginia girl on a visit, and a long one it proved, for she couldn’t go till things were quieter. While she waited, she helped take care of me; for the good souls petted me like a baby when they found that a Rebel could be a gentleman. I held my tongue, and behaved my best to prove my gratitude, you know. Of course, I loved Margaret very soon. How could I help it? She was the sweetest woman I had ever seen, tender, frank, and spirited; all I had ever dreamed of and longed for. I did not speak of this, nor hope for a return, because I knew she was a hearty Unionist, and thought she only tended me from pity. But suddenly she decided to go home, and when I ventured to wish she would stay longer, she would not listen, and said, “I must not stay; I should have gone before.”

“The words were nothing, but as she uttered them the color came up beautifully over all her face, and her eyes filled as they looked away from mine. Then I knew that she loved me, and my secret broke out half against my will. Margaret was forced to listen, for I would not let her go, but she seemed to harden herself against me, growing colder, stiller, statelier, as I went on, and when I said in my desperate way,—

“‘You should love me, for we are bid to love our enemies,’ she flashed an indignant look at me and said,—

“’I will not love what I cannot respect! Come to me a loyal man, and see what answer I shall give you.’

“Then she went away. It was the wisest thing she could have done, for absence did more to change me than an ocean of tears, a year of exhortations. Lying there, I missed her every hour of the day, recalled every gentle act, kind word, and fair example she had given me. I contrasted my own belief with hers, and found a new significance in the words honesty and honor, and, remembering her fidelity to principle, was ashamed of my own treason to God and to herself. Education, prejudice, and interest, are difficult things to overcome, and that was the hottest fight I ever passed through, for, as I tell you, I was a coward. But love and loyalty won the day, and, asking no quarter, the Rebel surrendered.”

“Phil Beaufort, you’re a brick!” cried Dick, with a sounding slap on his comrade’s shoulder.

“A brand snatched from the burnin’. Hallelujah!” chanted Flint, seesawing with excitement.

“Then you went to find your wife? How? Where?” asked Thorn, forgetting vigilance in interest.

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“Friend Bent hated war so heartily that he would have nothing to do with paroles, exchanges, or any martial process whatever, but bade me go when and where I liked, remembering to do by others as I had been done by. Before I was well enough to go, however, I managed, by means of Copperhead influence and returned prisoners, to send a letter to my father and receive an answer. You can imagine what both contained; and so I found myself penniless, but not poor, an outcast, but not alone. Old Bent treated me like a prodigal son, and put money in my purse; his pretty daughters loved me for Margaret’s sake, and gave me a patriotic salute all round when I left them, the humblest, happiest man in Pennsylvania. Margaret once said to me that this was the time for deeds, not words; that no man should stand idle, but serve the good cause with head, heart, and hand, no matter in what rank; for in her eyes a private fighting for liberty was nobler than a dozen generals defending slavery. I remembered that, and, not having influential friends to get me a commission, enlisted in one of her own Virginia regiments, knowing that no act of mine would prove my sincerity like that. You should have seen her face when I walked in upon her, as she sat alone, busied with the army work, as I’d so often seen her sitting by my bed; it showed me all she had been suffering in silence, all I should have lost had I chosen darkness instead of light. She hoped and feared so much she could not speak, neither could I, but dropped my cloak, and showed her that, through love of her, I had become a soldier of the Flag. How I love the coarse blue uniform! for when she saw it, she came to me without a word and kept her promise in a month.”

“Thunder! what a harnsome woman!” exclaimed Flint, as Phil, opening the golden case that held his talisman, showed them the beautiful, beloved face of which be spoke.

“Yes! and a right noble woman too. I don’t deserve her, but I will. We parted on our wedding-day, for orders to be off came suddenly, and she would not let me go until I had given her my name to keep. We were married in the morning, and at noon I had to go. Other women wept as we marched through the town, but my brave Margaret kept her tears till we were gone, smiling, and waving her hand to me,—the hand that wore the wedding-ring,—till I was out of sight. That image of her is before me day and night, and day and night her last words are ringing in my ears,—

“’I give you freely, do your best. Better a true man’s widow than a traitor’s wife.’

“Boys, I’ve only stood on the right side for a month; I’ve only fought one battle, earned one honor; but I believe these poor achievements are an earnest of the long atonement I desire to make for five and twenty years of blind transgression. You say I fight well. Have I not cause to dare much?—for in owning many slaves, I too became a slave; in helping to make many freemen, I liberate myself. You wonder why I refused promotion. Have I any right to it yet? Are there not men who never sinned as I have done, and beside whose sacrifices mine look pitifully small? You tell me I have no ambition. I have the highest, for I desire to become God’s noblest work,—an honest man,—living,

to make Margaret happy, in a love that every hour grows worthier of her own,—dying, to make death proud to take me."

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Phil had risen while he spoke, as if the enthusiasm of his mood lifted him into the truer manhood he aspired to attain. Straight and strong he stood up in the moonlight, his voice deepened by unwonted energy, his eye clear and steadfast, his whole face ennobled by the regenerating power of this late loyalty to country, wife, and self, and bright against the dark blue of his jacket shone the pictured face, the only medal he was proud to wear.

Ah, brave, brief moment, cancelling years of wrong! Ah, fair and fatal decoration, serving as a mark for a hidden foe! The sharp crack of a rifle broke the stillness of the night, and with those hopeful words upon his lips, the young man sealed his purpose with his life.

THE KING OF CLUBS AND THE QUEEN OF HEARTS.

A *story for young America*.

FIVE and twenty ladies, all in a row, sat on one side of the hall, looking very much as if they felt like the little old woman who fell asleep on the king's highway and awoke with abbreviated drapery, for they were all arrayed in gray tunics and Turkish continuations, profusely adorned with many-colored trimmings. Five and twenty gentleman, all in a row, sat on the opposite side of the hall, looking somewhat subdued, as men are apt to do when they fancy they are in danger of making fools of themselves. They, also, were *en* costume, for all the dark ones had grown piratical in red shirts, the light ones nautical in blue; and a few boldly appeared in white, making up in starch and studs what they lost in color, while all were more or less Byronic as to collar.

On the platform appeared a pile of dumb-bells, a regiment of clubs, and a pyramid of bean-bags, and stirring nervously among them a foreign-looking gentleman, the new leader of a class lately formed by Dr. Thor Turner, whose mission it was to strengthen the world's spine, and convert it to a belief in air and exercise, by setting it to balancing its poles and spinning merrily, while enjoying the "Sun-cure" on a large scale. His advent formed an epoch in the history of the town; for it was a quiet old village, guiltless of bustle, fashion, or parade, where each man stood for what he was; and, being a sagacious set, every one's true value was pretty accurately known. It was a neighborly town, with gossip enough to stir the social atmosphere with small gusts of interest or wonder, yet do no harm. A sensible, free-and-easy town, for the wisest man in it wore the worst boots, and no one thought the less of his understanding; the belle of the village went shopping with a big sun-bonnet and tin pail, and no one found her beauty lessened; oddities of all sorts ambled peacefully about on their various hobbies, and no one suggested the expediency of a trip on the wooden horse upon which the chivalrous South is always eager to mount an irrepressible abolitionist. Restless people were soothed by the lullaby the river sang

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in its slow journey to the sea, old people found here a pleasant place to make ready to die in, young people to survey the world from, before taking their first flight, and strangers looked back upon it, as a quiet nook full of ancient legends and modern lights, which would keep its memory green when many a gayer spot was quite forgotten. Anything based upon common sense found favor with the inhabitants, and Dr. Turner's theories, being eminently so, were accepted at once and energetically carried out. A sort of heathen revival took place, for even the ministers and deacons turned Musclemen; old ladies tossed bean-bags till their caps were awry, and winter roses blossomed on their cheeks; school-children proved the worth of the old proverb, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," by getting their backs ready before the burdens came; pale girls grew blithe and strong swinging their dumb namesakes; and jolly lads marched to and fro embracing clubs as if longevity were corked up in those wooden bottles, and they all took "modest quenchers" by the way.

August Bopp, the new leader of the class, was a German possessing but a small stock of English, though a fine gynmast; and, being also a bashful man, the appointed moment had no sooner arrived than he found his carefully prepared sentences slipping away from his memory as the ice appears to do from under unhappy souls first mounted upon skates. An awful silence reigned; Mr. Bopp glanced nervously over his shoulder at the staring rows, more appalling in their stillness than if they had risen up and hooted at him, then piling up the bags for the seventh time, he gave himself a mental shake, and, with a crimson visage, was about to launch his first "Ladees und gentlemen," when the door opened, and a small, merry-faced figure appeared, looking quite at ease in the novel dress, as, with a comprehensive nod, it marched straight across the hall to its place among the weaker vessels.

A general glance of approbation followed from the gentlemen's side, a welcoming murmur ran along the ladies', and the fifty pairs of eyes changed their focus for a moment. Taking advantage of which, Mr. Bopp righted himself, and burst out with a decided,—

"Ladees und gentlemen: the time have arrived that we shall begin. Will the gentlemen serve the ladees to a wand, each one, then spread theirselves about the hall, and follow the motions I will make as I shall count."

Five minutes of chaos, then all fell into order, and nothing was heard but the leader's voice and the stir of many bodies moving simultaneously. An uninitiated observer would have thought himself in Bedlam; for as the evening wore on, the laws of society seemed given to the winds, and humanity gone mad. Bags flew in all directions, clubs hurtled through the air, and dumb-bells played a castinet accompaniment to peals of laughter that made better music than any band. Old and young gave themselves up to the universal merriment, and, setting dignity

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aside, played like happy-hearted children for an hour. Stout Dr. Quackenboss gasped twice round the hall on one toe; stately Mrs. Primmins ran like a girl of fifteen to get her pins home before her competitor; Tommy Inches, four feet three, trotted away with Deacon Stone on his shoulder, while Mr. Steepleton and Miss Maypole hopped together like a pair of lively young ostriches, and Ned Amandine, the village beau, blew arrows through a pop-gun, like a modern Cupid in pegtops instead of pinions.

The sprightly young lady whose entrance had been so opportune seemed a universal favorite, and was overwhelmed with invitations to “bag,” “hop,” and “blow” from the gentlemen who hovered about her, cheerfully distorting themselves to the verge of dislocation in order to win a glance of approbation from the merry black eyes which were the tapers where all these muscular moths singed their wings. Mr. Bopp had never seen such a little piece of earnestness before, and began to think the young lady must be training for a boat-race or the ring. Her dumb-bells flew about till a pair of white arms looked like the sails of a windmill; she hit out from the shoulder with a vigor that would have done execution had there been anything but empty air to “punish;” and the “one, two, three!” of the Zouave movement went off with a snap; while the color deepened from pink to scarlet in her cheeks, the black braids tumbled down upon her shoulders, and the clasp of her belt flew asunder; but her eye seldom left the leader’s face, and she followed every motion with an agility and precision quite inspiring. Mr. Bopp’s courage rose as he watched her, and a burning desire to excel took possession of him, till he felt as if his muscles were made of India-rubber, and his nerves of iron. He went into his work heart and soul, shaking a brown mane out of his eyes, issuing commands like general at the head of his troops, and keeping both interest and fun in full blast till people laughed who had not laughed heartily for years; lungs got their fill for once, unsuspected muscles were suddenly developed, and, when the clock struck ten, all were bubbling over with that innocent jollity which makes youth worth possessing, and its memory the sunshine of old age.

The last exercise was drawing to a close, and a large ring of respectable members of society were violently sitting down and rising up in a manner which would have scandalized Miss Wilhelmina Carolina Amelia S. Keggs to the last degree, when Mr. Bopp was seen to grow very pale, and drop in a manner which it was evident his pupils were not expected to follow.

At this unexpected performance, the gentlemen took advantage of their newly-acquired agility to fly over all obstacles and swarm on to the platform, while the ladies successfully lessened their unusual bloom by staring wildly at one another and suggesting awful impossibilities. The bustle subsided, as suddenly as it arose; and Mr. Bopp, rather damp about the head and dizzy about the eye, but quite composed, appeared, saying, with the broken English and appealing manner which caused all the ladies to pronounce him “a dear” on the spot,—

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“I hope you will excoose me for making this lesson to be more short than it should; but I have exercise nine hours this day, and being just got well from a illness, I have not recover the strength I have lost. Next week I shall be able to take time by the hair, so that I will not have so much engagements in one day. I thank you for your kindness, and say good-efening.”

After a round of applause, as a last vent for their spirits, the class dispersed, and Mr. Bopp was wrestling with a vicious pin as he put on his collar ("a sure sign he has no ma to see to his buttons, poor lamb!” thought Mrs. Fairbairn, watching him from afar); when the sprightly young lady, accompanied by a lad the masculine image of herself, appeared upon the platform, saying, with an aspect as cordial as her words,—

“Good-evening, Professor. Allow me to introduce my brother and myself, Dick and Dolly Ward, and ask you in my mother’s name, to come home with us; for the tavern is not a cosy place, and after all this exertion you should be made comfortable. Please come, for Dr. Turner always stayed with us, and we promised to do the honors of the town to any gentleman he might send to supply his place.”

“Of course we did; and mother is probably freezing her blessed nose off watching for us; so don’t disappoint her, Bopp. It’s all settled, the sleigh’s at the door, and here’s your coat; so, come on!”

Dick was a fine sample of young America in its best aspect, and would have said “How are you?” to Louis Napoleon if he had been at hand, and have done it so heartily that the great Frenchman would have found it hard to resist giving as frank an answer. Therefore no wonder that Mr. Bopp surrendered at once; for the young gentleman took possession of him bodily, and shook him into his coat with an amiable impetuosity which developed a sudden rent in the well-worn sleeve thereof, and caused an expression of dismay, to dawn upon the owner’s countenance.

“Beg pardon; never mind; mother’ll sew you up in two seconds, and your overcoat will hide the damage. Where is it? I’ll get it, and then we’ll be off.”

Mr. Bopp colored distressfully, looked up, looked down, and then straight into the lad’s face, saying simply,—

“Thank you; I haf no coat but one.”

Dick opened his eyes, and was about opening his mouth also, for the exit of some blunderingly good-natured reply, when a warning poke from his sister restrained him, while Dolly, with the innocent hypocrisy which is as natural to some women as the art of tying bows, said, as she led the way out,—

“You see the worth of gymnastics, Dick, in this delightful indifference to cold. I sincerely hope we may reach a like enviable state of health, and look upon great-coats as effeminate, and mufflers a weakness of the flesh. Do you think we shall, Mr. Bopp?”

He shook his head with a perceptible shiver as the keen north wind smote him in the face, but answered, with a look half merry, half sad,—

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“It is not choice, but what you call necessitee, with me; and I truly hope you may never haf to exercise to keep life in you when you haf sold your coat to pay a doctor’s bill, or teach the art of laughing while your heart is heavy as one stone. You would not like that, I think, yet it is good, too; for small things make much happiness for me, and a kind word is often better than a rix dollar.”

There was something in the young man’s tone and manner which touched and won his hearers at once. Dolly secretly resolved to put an extra blanket on his bed, and shower kind words upon him, while Dick tucked him up in buffalo robes where he sat helplessly beaming down upon the red hood at his side.

A roaring fire shone out hospitably as they came, and glorified the pleasant room, dancing on ancient furniture and pictured walls till the jolly old portraits seemed to wink a visible welcome. A cheery-faced little woman, like an elder Dolly, in a widow’s cap, stood on the threshold, with a friendly greeting for the stranger, which warmed him as no fine could have done.

If August Bopp had been an Englishman, he would have felt much, but said less on that account; if he had been an American, he would have tried to conceal his poverty, and impress the family with his past grandeur, present importance, or future prospects; being a German, he showed exactly what he was, with the childlike frankness of his race. Having had no dinner, he ate heartily of what was offered him; being cold, he basked in the generous warmth; being homesick and solitary, he enjoyed the genial influences that surrounded him, and told his story, sure of sympathy; for even in prosaic Yankeedom he had found it, as travellers find Alpine flowers among the snow.

It was a simple story of a laborious boyhood, being early left an orphan, with a little sister dependent on him, till an opening in America tempted him to leave her and come to try and earn a home for her and for himself. Sickness, misfortune, and disappointment had been his companions for a year; but he still worked, still hoped, and waited for the happy hour when little Ulla should come to him across the sea. This was all; yet as he told it, with the magical accompaniments of gesture, look, and tone, it seemed full of pathos and romance to his listeners, whose faces proved their interest more flatteringly than their words.

Mrs. Ward mended the torn coat with motherly zeal, and gave it many of those timely stitches which thrifty women love to sew. The twins devoted themselves to their guest, each in a characteristic manner. Dick, as host, offered every article of refreshment the house afforded, goaded the fire to a perpetual roar, and discussed gymnastics, with bursts of boyish admiration for the grace and skill of his new leader, whom he christened King of Clubs on the spot. Dolly made the stranger one of them at once by talking bad German, as an offset to his bad English, called him Professor in spite of all denials, and unconsciously symbolized his future bondage by giving him a tangled skein to hold for the furtherance of her mother’s somewhat lengthened job.

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The Cupid of the present day was undoubtedly “raised” in Connecticut; for the ingenuity and shrewdness of that small personage could have sprung from no other soil. In former times his stratagems were of the romantic order. Colin bleated forth his passion in rhyme, and cast sheep’s eyes from among his flock, while Phyllis coquetted with her crook and stuck posies in his hat; royal Ferdinand and Miranda played at chess; Ivanhoe upset his fellow-men like ninepins for love of lackadaisical Rowena; and “sweet Moll” turned the pages while her lover, Milton, sang. But in our day the jolly little god, though still a heathen in the severe simplicity of his attire, has become modernized in his arts, and invented huskings, apple-bees, sleigh-rides, “drop-ins,” gymnastics, and, among his finer snares, the putting on of skates, drawing of patterns, and holding skeins,—the last-named having superior advantages over the others, as all will testify who have enjoyed one of those hand-to-hand skirmishes.

August Bopp was three and twenty, imaginative, grateful, and heart-whole; therefore, when he found himself sitting opposite a blooming little damsel, with a head, bound by a pretty red snood, bent down before him, and very close to his own a pair of distracting hands, every finger of which had a hit to make, and made it, it is not to be denied that he felt himself entering upon a new and very agreeable experience. Where could he look but in the face opposite, sometimes so girlishly merry and sometimes so beautifully shy? It was a winning face, full of smooth curves, fresh colors, and sunshiny twinkles, —a face every one liked, for it was as changeful as an April day, and always pleasant, whether mischievous, mournful, or demure.

Like one watching a new picture, Mr. Bopp inspected every feature of the countenance so near his own; and, as his admiration “grew by what it fed on,” he fell into a chronic state of stammer and blush; for the frank eyes were very kind, the smooth cheeks reflected a pretty shade of his own crimson, and the smiling lips seemed constantly suggesting, with mute eloquence, that they were made for kissing, while the expressive hands picked at the knots till the Professor felt like a very resigned fly in the web of a most enticing young spider.

If the King of Clubs saw a comely face, the Queen of Hearts saw what observing girls call a “good face;” and with a womanly respect for strength, the manliest attribute of man, she admired the broad shoulders and six feet one of her new master. This face was not handsome, for, true to his fatherland, the Professor had an eminent nose, a blonde beard, and a crop of “bonny brown hair” long enough to have been gathered into a ribbon, as in the days of Schiller and Jean Paul; but Dolly liked it, for its strength was tempered with gentleness; patience and courage gave it dignity, and the glance that met her own was both keen and kind.

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The silk was wound at last, the coat repaired. Dick with difficulty concealed the growing stiffness of his shoulders, while Dolly turned up the lamp, which bluntly hinted bedtime, and Mrs. Ward successfully devoured six gapes behind her hand, but was detected in the seventh by Mr. Bopp, who glanced at the clock, stopped in the middle of a sentence, and, with a hurried "goot-night," made for the door without the least idea whither he was going. Piloted by Dick, he was installed in the "best chamber," where his waking dreams were enlivened by a great fire, and his sleeping ones by an endless succession of skeins, each rapturously concluded in the style of Sam Weller when folding carpets with the pretty maid.

"I tell you, Dolly, it won't do, and I'm not going to have it."

"Oh, indeed; and how will you help it, you absurd boy?"

"Why, if you don't stop it, I'll just say to Bopp,—'Look here, my dear fellow; this sister of mine is a capital girl, but she will flirt and'"—

"And it's a family failing, Dick," cut in Dolly.

"Not a bit of it. I shall say, 'Take care of your heart, Bopp, for she has a bad habit of playing battle-door and shuttle-cock with these articles; and, though it may be very good fun for a time, it makes them ache when they get a last knock and are left to lie in a corner.'"

"What eloquence! But you'd never dare to try it on Mr. Bopp; and I shouldn't like to predict what would happen to you if you did."

"If you say 'dare,' I'll do it the first minute I see him. As for consequences, I don't care that for 'em;" and Dick snapped his fingers with an aspect of much disdain. But something in his sister's face suggested the wisdom of moderation, and moved him to say, less like a lord of creation, and more like a brother who privately adored his sister, but of course was not going to acknowledge such a weakness,—

"Well, but soberly, now, I wish you wouldn't plague Bopp; for it's evident to me that he is hit; and from the way you've gone on these two months, what else was to be expected? Now, as the head of the family,—you needn't laugh, for I am,—I think I ought to interfere; and so I put it to you,—do you like him, and will you have him? or are you merely amusing yourself, as you have done ever since you were out of pinafores? If you like him, all serene. I'd rather have him for a brother than any one I know, for he's a regular trump though he *is* poor; but if you don't, I won't have the dear old fellow floored just because you like to see it done."

It may here be remarked that Dolly quite glowed to hear her brother praise Mr. Bopp, and that she indorsed every word with mental additions of double warmth; but Dick had

begun all wrong, and, manlike, demanded her confidence before she had made up her mind to own she had any to bestow; therefore nothing came of it but vexation of spirit; for it is a well-known fact that, on some subjects, if boys will tease, girls will fib, and both maintain that it is right. So Dolly whetted her feminine weapon, and assumed a lofty superiority.

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“Dear me! what a sudden spasm of virtue; and why, if it is such a sin, has not the ‘head of the house’ taken his sister to task before, instead of indulging in a like degeneracy, and causing several interesting persons to tear their hair, and bewail his forgetfulness, when they ought to have blessed their stars he was out of the way?”

Dick snowballed a dozing crow and looked nettled; for he had attained that age when “Tom Brown at Oxford” was the book of books, the twelfth chapter being the favorite, and five young ladies having already been endowed with the significant heliotrope flower; all of which facts Dolly had skilfully brought to mind, as a return-shot for his somewhat personal remarks.

“Bah! they were only girls, and it don’t amount to anything among us young folks; but Bopp is a grown man, and you ought to respect him too much to play such pranks with him. Besides, he’s a German, and more tender-hearted than we rough Yankees, as any one can see by the way he acts when you snub him. He is proud, too, for all his meekness, and waits till he’s sure you like him before he says anything; and he’ll need the patience of a family of Jobs at the rate you’re going on,—a honey-pot one day and a pickle-jar the next. Do make up your mind, and say yes or no, right off, Dolly.”

“Would you have me meet him at the door with a meek courtesy, and say, ’Oh, if you please, I’m ready to say Yes, thank you, if you’ll be good enough to say, Will you’?”

“Don’t be a goose, child; you know I mean nothing of the kind; only you girls never will do anything straight ahead if you can dodge and fuss and make a mess of it. Just tell me one thing: Do you, or don’t you, like old Bopp?”

“What an elegant way to put it! Of course I like him well enough as a leader; he is clever, and sort of cunning, and I enjoy his funny ways; but what in the world should I do with a great yellow-haired laddie who could put me in his pocket, and yet is so meek that I should never find the heart to henpeck him? You are welcome to him; and since you love him so much, there’s no need of my troubling myself on his account; for with you for a friend, be can have no earthly wish ungratified.”

“Don’t try to be cutting, Dolly, because you look homely when you do, and it’s a woman’s business to be pretty, always. All I’ve got to say is, you will be in a nice state of mind if you damage Bopp; for every one likes him, and will be down upon you for a heartless little wretch; and I shan’t blame them, I promise you.”

“I wish the town wouldn’t put its fingers in other people’s pies, and you may tell it so, with my compliments; and all *I* have to say is, that you men have more liberty than you know what to do with, and we women haven’t enough; so it’s perfectly fair that we should show you the worth of the thing by taking it away now and then. I shall do exactly as I please; dance, walk, ride, and flirt, whenever and with whomever I see fit; and the whole town, with Mr. Dick Ward at their head, can’t stop me if I choose to go

on. Now, then, what next?" After which declaration of independence, Dolly folded her arms, wheeled about and faced her brother, a spirited statuette of Self Will, in a red hood and mittens.

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Dick sternly asked,—

“Is that your firm decision, ma’am?”

“Yes.”

“And you will not give up your nonsense?”

“No.”

“You are quite sure you don’t care for Bopp?”

“I could slap him with all my heart.”

“Very good. I shall see that you don’t get a chance.”

“I wouldn’t try a skirmish, for you’ll get beaten, Dick.”

“We’ll prove that, ma’am.”

“We will, sir.”

And the belligerents loftily paced up the lawn, with their purpose so well expressed by outward signs, that Mrs. Ward knew, by the cock of Dick’s hat and the decided tap of Dolly’s heels, that a storm was brewing, before they entered the door.

This fraternal conversation took place some two months from the evening of Mr. Bopp’s advent, as the twins were strolling home from school, which school must be briefly alluded to in order to explain the foregoing remarks. It was an excellent institution in all respects; for its presiding genius stood high in the townfolks’ esteem, and might have served as an example to Dr. Watts’ “busy bee,” in the zeal with which he improved his “shining hours,” and laid up honey against the winter, which many hoped would be long in coming. All manner of aids were provided for sprouting souls and bodies, diversions innumerable, and society, some members of which might have polished off Alcibiades *a la* Socrates, or entertained Plato with “æsthetic tea.” But, sad to relate, in spite of all these blessings, the students who resorted to this academy possessed an Adam-and-Eve-like proclivity for exactly what they hadn’t got and didn’t need; and, not contented with the pleasures provided, must needs play truant with that young scamp Eros, and turn the ancient town topsy-turvy with modern innovations, till scandalized spinsters predicted that the very babies would catch the fever, refuse their panada in jealous gloom, send billet-doux in their rattles, elope in wicker-carriages, and set up housekeeping in dolls’ houses, after the latest fashion.

Certain inflammable Southerners introduced the new game, and left such romantic legends of their loves behind them that their successors were fired with an ambition to do the like, and excel in all things, from cricket to captivation.

This state of things is not to be wondered at; for America, being renowned as a “fast” nation, has become a sort of hotbed, and seems to force humanity into early bloom. Therefore, past generations must not groan over the sprightly present, but sit in the chimney-corner and see boys and girls play the game which is too apt to end in a checkmate for one of the players. To many of the lookers-on, the new order of things was as good as a puppet-show; for, with the enthusiasm of youth, the actors performed their parts heartily, forgetting the audience in their own earnestness. Bless us! what revolutions went on under the round jackets, and what love-tokens lay

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in the pockets thereof. What plots and counterplots occupied the heads that wore the innocent-looking snoods, and what captives were taken in the many-colored nets that would come off and have to be taken care of. What romances blossomed like dandelions along the road to school, and what tales the river might have told if any one could have learned its musical speech. How certain gates were glorified by daily lingerings thereat, and what tender memories hung about dingy desks, old pens, and books illustrated with all manner of symbolical designs.

Let those laugh who will; older and wiser men and women might have taken lessons of these budding heroes and heroines; for here all was honest, sincere, and fresh; the old world had not taught them falsehood, self-interest, or mean ambitions. When they lost or won, they frankly grieved or rejoiced, and wore no masks except in play, and then got them off as soon as possible. If blue-eyed Lizzie frowned, or went home with Joe, Ned, with a wisdom older lovers would do well to imitate, went in for another game of foot-ball, gave the rejected apple to little Sally, and whistled “Glory Hallelujah,” instead of “Annie Laurie,” which was better than blowing a rival’s brains out, or glowering at woman-kind forever after. Or, when Tom put on Clara’s skates three successive days, and danced with her three successive evenings, leaving Kitty to freeze her feet in the one instance and fold her hands in the other, she just had a “good cry,” gave her mother an extra kiss, and waited till the recreant Tom returned to his allegiance, finding his little friend a sweetheart in nature as in name.

Dick and Dolly were foremost in the ranks, and expert in all the new amusements. Dick worshipped at many shrines, but most faithfully at that of a meek divinity, who returned charming answers to the ardent epistles which he left in her father’s garden wall, where, Pyramus and Thisbe-like, they often chatted through a chink; and Dolly was seldom seen without a staff of aids who would have “fought, bled, and died” for her as cheerfully as the Little Corporal’s Old Guard, though she paid them only in words; for her Waterloo had not yet come.

With the charming, perversity of her sex in such matters, no sooner had Dolly declared that she didn’t like Mr. Bopp, than she began to discover that she did; and so far from desiring “to slap him,” a tendency to regard him with peculiar good-will and tenderness developed itself, much to her own surprise; for with all her coquetry and seeming coldness, Dolly had a right womanly heart of her own, though she had never acknowledged the fact till August Bopp looked at her with so much love and longing in his honest eyes. Then she found a little fear mingling with her regard, felt a strong desire to be respected by him, discovered a certain something which she called conscience, restraining a reckless use of her power, and, soon after her lofty denial to Dick, was forced

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to own that Mr. Bopp had become her master in the finer species of gymnastics that came in with Adam and Eve, and have kept all creation turning somersets ever since. Of course these discoveries were unconfessed, even to that best bosom friend which any of us can have; yet her mother suspected them, and, with much anxiety, saw all, yet held her peace, knowing that her little daughter would, sooner or later, give her a fuller confidence than could be demanded; and remembering the happiest moments of her own happy past, when an older Dick wooed another Dolly, she left that flower, which never can be forced, to open at its own sweet will.

Meanwhile, Mr. Bopp, though carrying his heart upon his sleeve, believed his secret buried in the deepest gloom, and enjoyed all the delightful miseries lovers insist upon making for themselves. When Dolly was quiet and absent, he became pensive, the lesson dragged, and people fancied they were getting tired of the humbug; when Dolly was blithe and bland, he grew radiant, exercised within an inch of his life as a vent for his emotions, and people went home declaring gymnastics to be the crowning triumph of the age; and when Dolly was capricious, Mr. Bopp, became a bewildered weathercock, changing as the wind changed, and dire was the confusion occasioned thereby.

Like the sage fowl in the story, Dick said nothing, but “kept up a terrible thinking,” and, not having had experience enough to know that when a woman says No she is very apt to mean Yes, he took Dolly at her word. Believing it to be his duty to warn “Old Bopp,” he resolved to do it like a Roman brother, regardless of his own feelings or his sister’s wrath, quite unconscious that the motive power in the affair was a boyish love of ruling the young person who ruled every one else.

Matters stood thus, when the town was electrified by a general invitation to the annual jubilee at Jollyboys Hall, which this spring flowered into a masquerade, and filled the souls of old and young with visions of splendor, frolic, and fun. Being an amiable old town, it gave itself up, like a kind grandma, to the wishes of its children, let them put its knitting away, disturb its naps, keep its hands busy with vanities of the flesh, and its mind in a state of chaos for three mortal weeks. Young ladies were obscured by tarletan fogs, behind which they concocted angels’ wings, newspaper gowns, Minnehaha’s wampum, and Cinderella’s slippers. Inspired but incapable boys undertook designs that would have daunted a costumer of the first water, fell into sloughs of despond, and, emerging, settled down from peers and paladins into jovial tars, friar waterproofs, and officers in miscellaneous uniforms. Fathers laughed or grumbled at the whole thing and advanced pecuniary loans with good or ill grace, as the case might be; but the mothers, whose interest in their children’s pleasure is a sort of evergreen that no snows of time can kill, sewed spangles by the bushel, made wildernesses of tissue-paper blossom as the rose, kept tempers sweet, stomachs full,

and domestic machinery working smoothly through it all, by that maternal magic which makes them the human providences of this naughty world.

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“What shall I go as?” was the universal cry. Garrets were taken by storm, cherished relics were teased out of old ladies’ lavendered chests (happy she who saw them again!), hats were made into boots, gowns into doublets, cloaks into hose, Sunday bonnets despoiled of their plumage, silken cauliflowers sown broadcast over the land, and cocked-up caps erected in every style of architecture, while “Tag, Rag, and Bobtail” drove a smashing business, and everybody knew what everybody else was going to be, and solemnly vowed they didn’t—which transparent falsehood was the best joke of the whole.

Dolly allowed her mates to believe she was to be the Queen of Hearts, but privately laid hold of certain brocades worn by a trim grandmother half a century ago, and one evening burst upon her brother in a charming “Little Bo-Peep” costume, which, for the benefit of future distressed damsels, may be described as a “white silk skirt, scarlet overdress neatly bundled up behind,” as ancient ladies expressed it, blue hose with red clocks, high-heeled shoes with silver buckles, a nosegay in the tucker, and a fly-way hat perched in this case on the top of black curls, which gave additional archness to Dolly’s face as she entered, singing that famous ditty.

Dick surveyed her with approval, turning her about like a lay figure, and expressing his fraternal opinion that she was “the sauciest little turn-out he ever saw,” and then wet-blanketed the remarks by adding, “Of course you don’t call it a disguise, do you? and don’t flatter yourself that you won’t be known; for Dolly Ward is as plainly written in every curl, bow, and gimcrack, as if you wore a label on your back.”

“Then I shan’t wear it;” and off went the hat at one fell blow, as Dolly threw her crook in one corner, her posy in another, and sat down an image of despair.

“Now don’t be a goose, and rip everything to bits; just wear a domino over all, as Fan is going to, and then, when you’ve had fun enough, take it off and do the pretty. It will make two rigs, you see, and bother the boys to your heart’s content.”

“Dick, I insist upon kissing you for that brilliant suggestion; and then you may run and get me eight yards of cambric, just the color of Fan’s; but if you tell any one, I’ll keep her from dancing with you the whole evening;” with which bribe and threat Dolly embraced her brother, and shut the door in his face, while he, putting himself in good humor by imagining she was somebody else, departed on his muddy mission.

If the ghosts of the first settlers had taken their walks abroad on the eventful Friday night, they would have held up their shadowy hands at the scenes going on under their venerable noses; for strange figures flitted through the quiet streets, and instead of decorous slumber, there was decidedly,—“A sound of revelry by night”

Spurs clanked and swords rattled over the frosty ground, as if the British were about to make another flying call; hooded monks and nuns paced along, on carnal thoughts

intent; ancient ladies and bewigged gentlemen seemed hurrying to enjoy a social cup of tea, and groan over the tax; barrels staggered and stuck through narrow ways, as if temperance were still among the lost arts, while bears, apes, imps, and elves pattered or sparkled by, as if a second Walpurgis Night had come, and all were bound for Blocksberg.

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“Hooray for the Rooster!” shouted young Ireland, encamped on the sidewalk to see the show, as Mephistopheles’ red cock’s feather skimmed up the stairs, and he left a pink domino at the ladies’ dressing-room door, with the brief warning, “Now cut your own capers and leave me to mine,” adding, as he paused a moment at the great door,—

“By Jove! isn’t it a jolly sight, though?”

And so it was; for a mammoth boot stood sentinel at the entrance; a Bedouin Arab leaned on his spear in one corner, looking as if ready to say,—

“Fly to the desert, fly with me,”

to the pretty Jewess on his arm; a stately Hamlet, with irreproachable legs, settled his plumage in another, still undecided to which Ophelia he would first address “The honey of his music vows.”

Bluff King Hal’s representative was waltzing in a way that would have filled that stout potentate with respectful admiration, while Queen Katherine flirted with a Fire Zouave. Alcipades whisked Mother Goose about the room till the old lady’s conical hat tottered on her head, and the Union held fast to a very little Mac. Flocks of friars, black, white, and gray, pervaded the hall, with flocks of ballet girls, intended to represent peasants, but failing for lack of drapery; morning and evening stars rose or set, as partners willed; lively red demons harassed meek nuns, and knights of the Leopard, the Lion or Griffin, flashed by, looking heroically uncomfortable, in their gilded cages; court ladies promenaded with Jack tars, and dukes danced with dairy-maids, while Brother Jonathan whittled, Aunt Dinah jabbered, Ingomar flourished his club, and every one felt warmly enthusiastic and vigorously jolly.

“Ach himmel! Das ist wunder schon!” murmured a tall, gray monk, looking in, and quite unconscious that he spoke aloud.

“Hullo, Bopp! I thought you weren’t coming,” cried Mephistopheles in an emphatic whisper.

“Ah, I guess you! yes, you are well done. I should like to be a Faust for you, but I haf no time, no purse for a dress, so I throw this on, and run up for a hour or two. Where is—-who is all these people? Do you know them?”

The one with the Pope, Fra Diavolo; the telegraph, and two knights asking her to dance, is Dolly, if that’s what you want to know. Go in and keep it up, Bopp, while you can; I am off for Fan;” and Mephistopheles departed over the banisters with a weird agility that delighted the beholders; while the gray friar stole into a corner and watched the pink domino for half an hour, at the end of which time his regards were somewhat confused

by discovering that there were two pink damsels so like that he could not tell which was the one pointed out by Dick and which the new-comer.

“She thinks I will not know her, but I shall go now and find out for myself;” and, starting into sudden activity, the gray brother strode up to the nearest pink lady, bowed, and offered his arm. With a haughty little gesture of denial to several others, she accepted it, and they joined the circle of many-colored promenaders that eddied round the hall. As they went, Mr. Bopp scrutinized his companion, but saw only a slender figure shrouded from head to foot, and the tip of a white glove resting on his arm.

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“I will speak; then her voice will betray her,” he thought, forgetting that his own was undisguisable.

“Madame, permit me that I fan you, it is so greatly warm.”

A fan was surrendered with a bow, and the masked face turned fully toward his own, while the hood trembled as if its wearer laughed silently.

“Ah, it is you,—I know the eyes, the step, the laugh. Miss Dolly, did you think you could hide from me?”

“I did not wish to,” was the whispered answer.

“Did you think I would come?”

“I hoped so.”

“Then you are not displease with me?”

“No; I am very glad; I wanted you.”

The pink head drooped a little nearer, and another white glove went to meet its mate upon his arm with a pretty, confiding gesture. Mr. Bopp instantly fell into a state of bliss, —the lights, music, gay surroundings, and, more than all, this unwonted demonstration, put the crowning glory to the moment; and, fired with the hopeful omen, he allowed his love to silence his prudence, and lead him to do, then and there, the very thing he had often resolved never to do at all.

“Ah, Miss Dolly, if you knew how much, how very much you haf enlarged my happiness, and made this efening shine for me, you would more often be a little friendly, for this winter has been all summer to me, since I knew you and your kind home, and now I haf no sorrow but that after the next lesson I come no more unless you gif me leaf. See now I must say this even here, when so much people are about us, because I cannot stop it; and you will forgif me that I cannot wait any longer.”

“Mr. Bopp, please don’t, please stop!” began the pink domino in a hurried whisper. But Mr. Bopp was not to be stopped. He had dammed up the stream so long, that now it rushed on fast, full, and uncontrollable; for, leading her into one of the curtained recesses near by, he sat down beside her, and, still plying the fan, went on impetuously, —

“I feel to say that I lofe you, and tho’ I try to kill it, my love will not die, because it is more strong than my will, more dear than my pride, for I haf much, and I do not ask you to be meine Frau till I can gif you more than my heart and my poor name. But hear now; I will work, and save, and wait a many years if at the end you will take all I haf and say,

‘August, I lofe you.’ Do not laugh at me because I say this in such poor words; you are my heart’s dearest, and I must tell it or never come again. Speak to me one kind yes, and I will thank Gott in himmel for so much joy.”

The pink domino had listened to this rapid speech with averted head, and, when it ended, started up, saying eagerly, “You are mistaken, sir, I am not Dolly;” but as she spoke her words were belied, for the hasty movement displaced her mask, and Mr. Bopp saw Dolly’s eyes, a lock of dark hair, and a pair of burning cheeks, before the screen was readjusted. With redoubled earnestness he held her back, whispering,—

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“Do not go mitout the little word, Yes, or No; it is not much to say.”

“Well then, No!”

“You mean it? Dolly! truly mean it?”

“Yes, let me go at once, sir.”

Mr. Bopp stood up, saying slowly,—“Yes, go now; they told me you had no heart; I beliefe it, and thank you for that No;” then bowed, and walked straight out of the hall, while the pink domino broke into a fit of laughter, saying to herself,—

“I’ve done it! I’ve done it! but what a piece of work there’ll be to-morrow.”

“Dick, who was that tall creature Fan was parading with last night? No one knew, and he vanished before the masks were taken off,” asked Dolly, as she and her brother lounged in opposite corners of the sofa the morning after the masquerade, “talking it over.”

“That was old Bopp, Mrs. Peep.”

“Gracious me! why, he said he wasn’t coming.”

“People sometimes say what they don’t mean, as you may have discovered.”

“But why didn’t he come and speak to a body, Dick?”

“Better employed, I suppose.”

“Now don’t be cross, dear, but tell me all about it, for I don’t understand how you allowed him to monopolize Fan so.”

“Oh, don’t bother, I’m sleepy.”

“No you’re not; you look wicked; I know you’ve been in mischief, and I insist upon hearing all about it, so come and ‘fess’ this instant.”

Dolly proceeded to enforce her command by pulling away his pillow and dragging her brother into a sitting posture in spite of his laughing resistance and evident desire to exhaust her patience; for Dick excelled in teasing, and kept his sister in a fidget from morning till night, with occasional fits of penitence and petting which lasted till next time. Therefore, though dying to ‘fess,’ he was undecided as to the best method of executing that task in the manner most aggravating to his listener and most agreeable to himself, and sat regarding her with twinkling eyes, and his curly pate in a high state of rumple, trying to appear innocently meek, but failing signally.

“Now, then, up and tell,” commanded Dolly.

“Well, if you won’t take my head off till I’m done, I’ll tell you the best joke of the season. Are you sure the pink domino with Bopp wasn’t yourself,—for she looked and acted very like you?”

“Of course I am. I didn’t even know he was there, and think it very rude and ungentlemanly in him not to come and speak to me. You know it was Fan, so do go on.”

“But it wasn’t, for she changed her mind and wore a black domino; I saw her put it on myself. Her Cousin Jack came unexpectedly, and she thought if she altered her dress and went with him, you wouldn’t know her.”

“Who could it have been, Dick?”

“That’s the mystery, for, do you know, Bopp proposed to her.”

“He didn’t!” and Dolly flew up with a startled look that, to adopt a phrase from his own vocabulary, was “nuts” to her brother.

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“Yes he did; I heard him.”

“When, where, and how?”

“In one of these flirtation boxes; they dropped the curtain, but I heard him do it, on my honor I did.”

“Persons of honor don’t listen at curtains and key-holes. What did they say?”

“Oh, if it wasn’t honorable to listen, it isn’t to hear; so I won’t tell, though I could not help knowing it.”

“Mercy! don’t stop now, or I shall die with curiosity. I dare say I should have done the same; no one minds at such a place, you know. But I don’t see the joke yet,” said Dolly dismally.

“I do,” and Dick went off into a shout.

“You idiotic boy, take that pillow out of your mouth, and tell me the whole thing,—what he said, what she said, and what they both did. It was all fun of course, but I’d like to hear about it.”

“It may have been fun on her part, but it was solemn earnest on his, for he went it strong I assure you. I’d no idea the old fellow was so sly, for he appeared smashed with you, you know, and there he was finishing up with this unknown lady. I wish you could have heard him go on, with tears in his eyes”—

“How do you know if you didn’t see him?”

“Oh, well, that’s only a figure of speech; I thought so from his voice. He was ever so tender, and took to Dutch when English was too cool for him. It was really touching, for I never heard a fellow do it before; and, upon my word, I should think it was rather a tough job to say that sort of thing to a pretty woman, mask or no mask.”

“What did she say?” asked Dolly, with her hands pressed tight together, and a curious little quiver of the lips.

“She said, No, as short as pie-crust; and when he rushed out with his heart broken all to bits apparently, she just burst out laughing, and went and polked at a two-forty pace for half an hour.”

Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. unclasped her hands, took a long breath, and cried out,—

“She was a wicked, heartless hussy! and if I know her, I’ll never speak to her again; for if he was really in earnest, she ought to be killed for laughing at him.”

“So ought you, then, for making fun of poor Fisher when he went down on his knees behind the huckleberry bushes last summer. He was earnest enough, for he looked as black-and-blue as his berries when he got home. Your theory is all right, ma’am, but your practice is all bosh.”

“Hold your tongue about that silly thing. Boys in college think they know everything, can do everything, have everything, and only need beckon, and all womankind will come and adore. It made a man of him, and he’ll thank me for taking the sentimental nonsense and conceit out of him. You will need just such a lesson at the rate you go on, and I hope Fan will give it to you.”

“When the lecture is over, I’ll go on with the joke, if you want to know it.”

“Isn’t this enough?”

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“Oh, bless you, no! the cream of it is to come. What would you give to know who the lady was?”

“Five dollars, down, this minute.”

“Very good, hand ’em over, and I’ll tell you.”

“Truly, Dick?”

“Yes, and prove it.”

Dolly produced her purse, and, bill in hand, sat waiting for the disclosure. Dick rose with a melo-dramatic bow,—

“Lo, it was I.”

“That’s a great fib, for I saw you flying about the whole evening.”

“You saw my dress, but I was not in it.”

“Oh! oh! who *did* I keep going to, then? and what *did* I do to make a fool of myself, I wonder?”

Purse and bill dropped out of Dolly’s hand, and she looked at her brother with a distracted expression of countenance. Dick rubbed his hands and chuckled.

“Here’s a jolly state of things. Now I’ll tell you the whole story. I never thought of doing it till I saw Bopp and told him who you were; but on my way for Fan I wondered if he’d get puzzled between you two; and then a grand idea popped into my head to puzzle him myself, for I can take you off to the life. Fan didn’t want me to, but I made her, so she lent me hoops and gown and the pink domino, and if ever I thanked my stars I wasn’t tall, I did then, for the things fitted capitally as to length, tho’ I kept splitting something down the back, and scattering hooks and eyes in all directions. I wish you could have heard Jack roar while they rigged me. He had no dress, so I lent him mine, till just before the masks were taken off, when we cut home and changed. He told me how you kept running to him to tie up your slippers, find your fan, and tell him funny things, thinking it was me. I never enjoyed anything so much in my life.”

“Go on,” said Dolly in a breathless sort of voice, and the deluded boy obeyed.

“I knew Bopp, and hovered near till he came to find out who I was. I took you off in style, and it deceived him, for I’m only an inch or two taller than you, and kept my head down in the lackadaisical way you girls do; I whispered, so my voice didn’t betray me; and was very clinging, and sweet, and fluttery, and that blessed old goose was sure it was you. I thought it was all over once, for when he came the heavy in the recess, I got

a bit flustered, he was so serious about it, my mask slipped, but I caught it, so he only saw my eyes and forehead, which are just like yours, and that finished him, for I've no doubt I looked as red and silly as you would have done in a like fix."

"Why did you say No?" and Dolly looked as stern as fate.

"What else should I say? You told me you wouldn't have him, and I thought it would save you the bother of saying it, and him the pain of asking twice. I told him some time ago that you were a born flirt; he said he knew it; so I was surprised to hear him go on at such a rate, but supposed that I was too amiable, and that misled him. Poor old Bopp, I kept thinking of him all night, as he looked when he said, 'They told me you had no heart, now I believe it, and I thank you for that No.' It was rather a hard joke for him, but it's over now, and he won't have to do it again. You said I wouldn't dare tell him about you; didn't I? and haven't I won the"—

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The rest of the sentence went spinning dizzily through Dick's head, as a sudden tingling sensation pervaded his left ear, followed by a similar smart in the right; and, for a moment, chaos seemed to have come again. Whatever Dolly did was thoroughly done: when she danced, the soles of her shoes attested the fact; when she flirted, it was warm work while it lasted; and when she was angry, it thundered, lightened, and blew great guns till the shower came, and the whole affair ended in a rainbow. Therefore, being outwitted, disappointed, mortified, and hurt, her first impulse was to find a vent for these conflicting emotions, and possessing skillful hands, she left them to avenge the wrong done her heart, which they did so faithfully, that if ever a young gentleman's ears were vigorously and completely boxed, Dick was that young individual. As the thunder-clap ceased, the gale began and blew steadily for several minutes.

"You think it a joke, do you? I tell you, it's a wicked, cruel thing; you've told a lie; you've broken August's heart, and made me so angry that I'll never forgive you as long as I live. What do you know about my feelings? and how dare you take it upon yourself to answer for me? You think because we are the same age that I am no older than you, but you're mistaken, for a boy of eighteen *is* a boy, a girl is often a woman, with a woman's hopes and plans; you don't understand this any more than you do August's love for me, which you listened to and laughed at. I said I didn't like him, and I didn't find out till afterward that I did; then I was afraid to tell you lest you'd twit me with it. But now I care for no one, and I say I do like him,—yes, I love him with all my heart and soul and might and I'd die this minute if I could undo the harm you've done, and see him happy. I know I've been selfish, vain, and thoughtless, but I am not now; I hoped he'd love me, hoped he'd see I cared for him, that I'd done trifling, and didn't mind if he *was* poor, for I'd enough for both; that I longed to make his life pleasant after all his troubles; that I'd send for the little sister he loves so well, and never let him suffer any more; for he is so good, so patient, so generous, and dear to me, I cannot do enough for him. Now it's all spoilt; now I can never tell him this, never comfort him in any way, never be happy again all my life, and you have done it."

As Dolly stood before her brother, pouring out her words with glittering eyes, impetuous voice, and face pale with passionate emotion, he was scared; for as his scattered wits returned to him, he felt that he had been playing with edge tools, and had cut and slashed in rather a promiscuous manner. Dazed and dizzy, he sat staring at the excited figure before him, forgetting the indignity he had received, the mistake he had made, the damage he had done, in simple wonder at the revolutions going on under his astonished eyes. When Dolly stopped for breath, he muttered with a contrite look,—

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“I’m very sorry,—it was only fun; and I thought it would help you both, for how the deuce should I know you liked the man when you said you hated him?”

“I never said that, and if I’d wanted advice I should have gone to mother. You men go blundering off with half an idea in your heads, and never see your stupidity till you have made a mess that can’t be mended; we women don’t work so, but save people’s feelings, and are called hypocrites for our pains. I never meant to tell you, but I will now, to show you how I’ve been serving you, while you’ve been harming me: every one of those notes from Fan which you admire so much, answer so carefully, and wear out in your pocket, though copied by her, were written by me.”

“The devil they were!” Up flew Dick, and clapping his hand on the left breast-pocket, out came a dozen pink notes tied up with a blue ribbon, and much the worse for wear. He hastily turned them over as Dolly went on.

“Yes, I did it, for she didn’t know how to answer your notes, and came to me. I didn’t laugh at them, or make fun of her, but helped her silly little wits, and made you a happy boy for three months, though you teased me day and night, for I loved you, and hadn’t the heart to spoil your pleasure.”

“You’ve done it now with a vengeance, and you’re a pair of deceitful minxes. I’ve *paid* you off. I’ll give Fan one more note that will keep her eyes red for a month; and I’ll never love or trust a girl again as long as I live,—never! never!”

Red with wrath, Dick flung the treasured packet into the fire, punched it well down among the coals, flung away the poker, and turned about with a look and gesture which would have been comically tragic if they had not been decidedly pathetic, for, in spite of his years, a very tender heart beat under the blue jacket, and it was grievously wounded at the perfidy of the gentle little divinity whom he worshipped with daily increasing ardor. His eyes filled, but he winked resolutely; his lips trembled, but he bit them hard; his hands doubled themselves up, but he remembered his adversary was a woman; and, as a last effort to preserve his masculine dignity, he began to whistle.

As if the inconsistencies of womankind were to be shown him as rapidly as possible, at this moment the shower came on, for, taking him tenderly about the neck, Dolly fell to weeping so infectiously, that, after standing rigidly erect till a great tear dropped off the end of his nose, ignominiously announcing that it was no go, Dick gave in, and laying his head on Dolly’s shoulder, the twins quenched their anger, washed away their malice, and soothed their sorrow by one of those natural processes, so kindly provided for poor humanity, and so often despised as a weakness when it might prove a better strength than any pride.

Dick cleared up first, with no sign of the tempest but a slight mist through which his native sunshine glimmered pensively.

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“Don’t dear, don’t cry so; it will make you sick, and won’t do any good, for things will come right, or I’ll make ’em, and we’ll be comfortable all round.”

“No, we never can be as we were, and it’s all my fault. I’ve betrayed Fan’s confidence, I’ve spoiled your little romance, I’ve been a thoughtless, wicked girl, I’ve lost August; and, oh, dear me, I wish I was dead!” with which funereal climax Dolly cried so despairingly that, like the youngest Miss Pecksniff, she was indeed “a gushing creature.”

“Oh, come now, don’t be dismal, and blame yourself for every trouble under the sun. Sit down and talk it over, and see what can be done. Poor old girl, I forgave you the notes, and say I *was* wrong to meddle with Bopp. I got you into the scrape, and I’ll get you out if the sky don’t fall, or Bopp blow his brains out, like a second Werther, before to-morrow.”

Dick drew the animated fountain to the wide chair, where they had sat together since they were born, wiped her eyes, laid her wet cheek against his own, and patted her back, with an idea that it was soothing to babies, and why not to girls?

“I wish mother was at home,” sighed Dolly, longing for that port which was always a haven of refuge in domestic squalls like this.

“Write, and tell her not to stay till Saturday.”

“No; it would spoil her visit, and you know she deferred it to help us through this dreadful masquerade. But I don’t know what to do.”

“Why, bless your heart, it’s simple enough. I’ll tell Bopp, beg his pardon, say ‘Dolly’s willing,’ and there you are all taut and ship-shape again.”

“I wouldn’t for the world, Dick. It would be very hard for you, very awkward for me, and do no good in the end; for August is so proud he’d never forgive you for such a trick, would never believe that I ‘had a heart’ after all you’ve said and I’ve done; and I should only hear with my own ears that he thanked me for that No. Oh, why can’t people know when they are in love, and not go heels over head before they are ready!”

“Well, if that don’t suit, I’ll let it alone, for that is all I can suggest; and if you like your woman’s way better, try it, only you’ll have to fly round, because to-morrow is the last night, you know.”

“I shan’t go, Dick.”

“Why not? we are going to give him the rose-wood set of things, have speeches, cheers for the King of Clubs, and no end of fun.”

“I can’t help it; there would be no fun for me, and I couldn’t look him in the face after all this.”

“Oh, pooh! yes, you could, or it will be the first time you dared not do damage with those wicked eyes of yours.”

“It is the first time I ever loved any one.” Dolly’s voice was so low, and her head drooped so much, that this brief confession was apparently put away in Dick’s pocket, and being an exceedingly novel one, filled that inflammable youth with a desire to deposit a similar one in the other pocket, which, being emptied of its accustomed contents, left a somewhat aching void in itself and the heart underneath. After a moment’s silence, he said,—

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“Well, if you won’t go, you can settle it when he comes here, though I think we should all do better to confess coming home in the dark.”

“He won’t come here again, Dick.”

“Won’t he! that shows you don’t know Bopp as well as I. He’ll come to say good-by, to thank mother for her kindness, and you and me for the little things we’ve done for him (I wish I’d left the last undone!), and go away like a gentleman, as he is,—see if he don’t.”

“Do you think so? Then I must see him.”

“I’m sure he will, for we men don’t bear malice and sulk and bawl when we come to grief this way, but stand up and take it without winking, like the young Spartan brick when the fox was digging into him, you know.”

“Then, of course, you’ll forgive Fan.”

“I’ll be hanged if I do,” growled Dick.

“Ah ha! your theory is very good, sir, but your practice is bosh,” quoted Dolly, with a gleam of the old mischief in her face.

Dick took a sudden turn through the room, burst out laughing, and came back, saying heartily,—

“I’ll own up; it is mean to feel so, and I’ll think about forgiving you both; but she may stop up the hole in the wall, for she won’t get any more letters just yet; and you may devote your epistolary powers to A. Bopp in future. Well, what is it? free your mind, and have done with it; but don’t make your nose red, or take the starch out of my collar with any more salt water, if you please.”

“No, I won’t; and I only want to say that, as you owe the explanation to us both, perhaps it would be best for you to tell August your part of the thing as you come home to-morrow, and then leave the rest to fate. I can’t let him go away thinking me such a heartless creature, and once gone it will be too late to mend the matter. Can you do this without getting me into another scrape, do you think?”

“I haven’t a doubt of it, and I call that sensible. I’ll fix it capitally,—go down on my knees in the mud, if it is necessary; treat you like eggs for fear of another smash-up; and bring him home in such a tip-top state, you’ll only have to nod and find yourself Mrs. B. any day you like. Now let’s kiss and be friends, and then go pitch into that pie for luncheon.”

So they did, and an hour afterward were rioting in the garret under pretence of putting grandma’s things away; for at eighteen, in spite of love and mischief, boys and girls

have a spell to exorcise blue devils, and a happy faculty of forgetting that “the world is hollow, and their dolls stuffed with saw-dust.”

Dick was right, for on the following evening, after the lesson, Mr. Bopp did go home with him, “to say good-by, like a gentleman as he was.” Dolly got over the first greeting in the dusky hall, and as her guest passed on to the parlor, she popped her head out to ask anxiously,—

“Did you say anything, Dick?”

“I couldn’t; something has happened to him; he’ll tell you about it. I’m going to see to the horse, so take your time, and do what you like,” with which vague information Dick vanished, and Dolly wished herself anywhere but where she was.

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Mr. Bopp sat before the fire, looking so haggard and worn out that the girl's conscience pricked her sorely for her part in the change, but plucking up her courage, she stirred briskly among the tea-cups, asking,—

"What shall I give you, sir?"

"Thank you, I haf no care to eat."

Something in his spiritless mien and sorrowful voice made Dolly's eyes fill; but knowing she must depend upon herself now, and make the best of her position, she said kindly, yet nervously,—

"You look tired; let me do something for you if I can; shall I sing for you a little? you once said music rested you."

"You are kind; I could like that I think. Excoose me if I am dull, I haf—yes, a little air if you please."

More and more disturbed by his absent, troubled manner, Dolly began a German song he had taught her, but before the first line was sung he stopped her with an imploring—

"For Gott sake not that! I cannot hear it this night; it was the last I sung her in the Vaterland."

"Mr. Bopp, what is it? Dick says you have a trouble; tell me, and let us help you if we can. Are you ill, in want, or has any one wronged or injured you in any way? Oh, let me help you!"

Tears had been streaming down Mr. Bopp's cheeks, but as she spoke he checked them, and tried to answer steadily,—

"No, I am not ill; I haf no wants now, and no one has hurt me but in kindness; yet I haf so great a grief, I could not bear it all alone, and so I came to ask a little sympathy from your good Mutter, who has been kind to me as if I was a son. She is not here, and I thought I would stop back my grief; but that moosic was too much; you pity me, and so I tell you. See, now! when I find things go bright with me, and haf a hope of much work, I take the little store I saved, I send it to my friend Carl Hoffman, who is coming from my home, and say, 'Bring Ulla to me now, for I can make life go well to her, and I am hungry till I haf her in my arms again.' I tell no one, for I am bold to think that one day I come here with her in my hand, to let her thank you in her so sweet way for all you haf done for me. Well, I watch the wind, I count the days, I haf no rest for joy; and when Carl comes, I fly to him. He gifs me back my store, he falls upon my neck and does not speak, then I know my little Kind will never come, for she has gone to Himmel before I could make a home for her on earth. Oh, my Ulla! it is hard to bear;" and, with a rain of

bitter tears, poor Mr. Bopp covered up his face and laid it down on his empty plate, as if he never cared to lift it up again.

Then Dolly forgot herself in her great sympathy, and, going to him, she touched the bent head with a soothing hand; let her tears flow to comfort his; and whispered in her tenderest voice,—

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“Dear Mr. Bopp, I wish I could heal this sorrow, but as I cannot, let me bear it with you; let me tell you how we loved the little child, and longed to see her; how we should have rejoiced to know you had so dear a friend to make your life happy in this strange land; how we shall grieve for your great loss, and long to prove our respect and love for you. I cannot say this as I ought, but, oh, be comforted, for you will see the child again, and, remembering that she waits for you, you will be glad to go when God calls you to meet your Ulla in that other Fatherland.”

“Ah, I will go now! I haf no wish to stay, for all my life is black to me. If I had found that other little friend to fill her place, I should not grieve so much, because she is weller there above than I could make her here; but no; I wait for that other one; I save all my heart for her; I send it, but it comes back to me; then I know my hope is dead, and I am all alone in the strange land.”

There was neither bitterness nor reproach in these broken words, only a patient sorrow, a regretful pain, as if he saw the two lost loves before him and uttered over them an irrepressible lament. It was too much for Dolly and with sudden resolution she spoke out fast and low,—

“Mr. Bopp, that was a mistake. It was not I you saw at the masque; it was Dick. He played a cruel trick; he insulted you and wronged me by that deceit, and I find it very hard to pardon him.”

“What! what is that!” and Mr. Bopp looked up with tears still shining in his beard, and intense surprise in every feature of his face.

Dolly turned scarlet, and her heart beat fast as she repeated with an unsteady voice,—

“It was Dick, not I.”

A cloud swept over Mr. Bopp’s face, and he knit his brows a moment as if Dolly had not been far from right when she said “he never would forgive the joke.” Presently, he spoke in a tone she had never heard before,—cold and quiet,—and in his eye she thought she read contempt for her brother and herself,—

“I see now, and I say no more but this; it was not kind when I so trusted you. Yet it is well, for you and Richart are so one, I haf no doubt he spoke your wish.”

Here was a desperate state of things. Dolly had done her best, yet he did not, or would not, understand, and, before she could restrain them, the words slipped over her tongue,—

“No! Dick and I never agree.”

Mr. Bopp started, swept three spoons and a tea-cup off the table as he turned, for something in the hasty whisper reassured him. The color sprang up to his cheek, the old warmth to his eye, the old erectness to his figure, and the eager accent to his voice. He rose, drew Dolly nearer, took her face between his hands, and bending, fixed on her a look tender yet masterful, as he said with an earnestness that stirred her as words had never done before,—

“Dollee, *he* said No! do *you* say, Yes?”

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She could not speak, but her heart stood up in her eyes and answered him so eloquently that he was satisfied.

“Thank the Lord, it’s all right!” thought Dick, as, peeping in at the window ten minutes later, be saw Dolly enthroned upon Mr. Bopp’s knee, both her hands in his, and an expression in her April countenance which proved that she found it natural and pleasant to be sitting there, with her head on the kind heart that loved her; to hear herself called “*meine* _Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.__;_” to know that she alone could comfort him for little Ulla’s loss, and fill her empty place.

“They make a very pretty landscape, but too much honey isn’t good for ’em, so I’ll go in, and we’ll eat, drink, and be merry, in honor of the night.”

He rattled the latch and tramped on the mat to warn them of his approach, and appeared just as Dolly was skimming into a chair, and Mr. Bopp picking up the spoons, which he dropped again to meet Dick, with a face “clear shining after rain;” and kissing him on both cheeks after the fashion of his country, he said, pointing to Dolly,—

“See, it is all fine again. I forgif you, and leave all blame to that bad spirit, Mephistopheles, who has much pranks like that, but never pays one for their pain, as you haf me. Heart’s dearest, come and say a friendly word to Richart, then we will haf a little health,—Long life and happiness to the King of Clubs and the Queen of Hearts.”

“Yes, August, and as he’s to be a farmer, we’ll add another,—’Wiser wits and better manners to the Knave of Spades.’”

THE CROSS ON THE OLD CHURCH TOWER.

UP the dark stairs that led to his poor home strode a gloomy-faced young man with despair in his heart and these words on his lips:—

“I will struggle and suffer no longer; my last hope has failed, and life, become a burden, I will rid myself of at once.”

As he muttered his stern purpose, he flung wide the door and was about to enter, but paused upon the threshold; for a glance told him that he had unconsciously passed his own apartment and come up higher, till he found himself in a room poorer but more cheerful than his own.

Sunshine streamed in through the one small window, where a caged bird was blithely singing, and a few flowers blossomed in the light. But blither than the bird’s song, sweeter than the flowers, was the little voice and wan face of a child, who lay upon a bed placed where the warmest sunbeams fell.

The face turned smiling on the pillow, and the voice said pleasantly,—

“Come in, sir, Bess will soon be back if you will wait.”

“I want nothing of Bess. Who is she and who are you?” asked the intruder pausing as he was about to go.

“She is my sister, sir, and I’m ‘poor Jamie’ as they call me. But indeed, I am not to be pitied, for I am a happy child, though it may not seem so.”

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“Why do you lie there? are you sick?”

“No, I am not sick, though I shall never leave my bed again. See, this is why;” and, folding back the covering, the child showed his little withered limbs.

“How long have you lain here, my poor boy?” asked the stranger, touched and interested in spite of himself.

“Three years, sir.”

“And yet you are happy! What in Heaven’s name have you to render you contented, child?”

“Come sit beside me, and I’ll tell you, sir; that is, if you please I should love to talk with you, for it’s lonely here when Bess is gone.”

Something in the child’s winning voice, and the influence of the cheerful room, calmed the young man’s troubled spirit and seemed to lighten his despair. He sat down at the bedside looking gloomily upon the child, who lay smiling placidly as with skilful hands he carved small figures from the bits of wood scattered round him on the coverlid.

“What have you to make you happy, Jamie? Tell me your secret, for I need the knowledge very much,” said his new friend earnestly.

“First of all I have dear Bess,” and the child’s voice lingered lovingly upon the name; “she is so good, so very good to me, no one can tell how much we love each other. All day, she sits beside my bed singing to ease my pain, or reading while I work; she gives me flowers and birds, and all the sunshine that comes in to us, and sits there in the shadow that I may be warm and glad. She waits on me all day; but when I wake at night, I always see her sewing busily, and know it is for me,—my good kind Bess!

“Then I have my work, sir, to amuse me; and it helps a little too, for kind children always buy my toys, when Bess tells them of the little boy who carved them lying here at home while they play out among the grass and flowers where he can never be.”

“What else, Jamie?” and the listener’s face grew softer as the cheerful voice went on.

“I have my bird, sir, and my roses, I have books, and best of all, I have the cross on the old church tower. I can see it from my pillow and it shines there all day long, so bright and beautiful, while the white doves coo upon the roof below. I love it dearly.”

The young man looked out through the narrow window and saw, rising high above the house-tops, like a finger pointing heavenward, the old gray tower and the gleaming cross. The city’s din was far below, and through the summer air the faint coo of the doves and the flutter of their wings came down, like peaceful country sounds.

“Why do you love it, Jamie?” he asked, looking at the thoughtful face that lit up eagerly as the boy replied,—

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“Because it does me so much good, sir. Bess told me long ago about the blessed Jesus who bore so much for us, and I longed to be as like him as a little child could grow. So when my pain was very sharp, I looked up there, and, thinking of the things he suffered, tried so hard to bear it that I often could; but sometimes when it was too bad, instead of fretting Bess, I’d cry softly, looking up there all the time and asking him to help me be a patient child. I think he did; and now it seems so like a friend to me, I love it better every day. I watch the sun climb up along the roofs in the morning, creeping higher and higher till it shines upon the cross and turns it into gold. Then through the day I watch the sunshine fade away till all the red goes from the sky, and for a little while I cannot see it through the dark. But the moon comes, and I love it better then; for lying awake through the long nights, I see the cross so high and bright with stars all shining round it, and I feel still and happy in my heart as when Bess sings to me in the twilight.”

“But when there is no moon, or clouds hide it from you, what then, Jamie?” asked the young man, wondering if there were no cloud to darken the cheerful child’s content.

“I wait till it is clear again, and feel that it is there, although I cannot see it, sir. I hope it never will be taken down, for the light upon the cross seems like that I see in dear Bessie’s eyes when she holds me in her arms and calls me her ‘patient Jamie.’ She never knows I try to bear my troubles for her sake, as she bears hunger and cold for mine. So you see, sir, how many things I have to make me a happy child.”

“I would gladly lie down on your pillow to be half as light of heart as you are, little Jamie, for I have lost my faith in everything and with it all my happiness;” and the heavy shadow which had lifted for a while fell back darker than before upon the anxious face beside the bed.

“If I were well and strong like you, sir, I think I should be so thankful nothing could trouble me;” and with a sigh the boy glanced at the vigorous frame and energetic countenance of his new friend, wondering at the despondent look he wore.

“If you were poor, so poor you had no means wherewith to get a crust of bread, nor a shelter for the night; if you were worn-out with suffering and labor, soured by disappointment and haunted by ambitious hopes never to be realized, what would you do, Jamie?” suddenly asked the young man, prompted by the desire that every human heart has felt for sympathy and counsel, even from the little creature before him ignorant and inexperienced as he was.

But the child, wiser in his innocence than many an older counsellor, pointed upward, saying with a look of perfect trust,—

“I should look up to the cross upon the tower and think of what Bess told me about God, who feeds the birds and clothes the flowers, and I should wait patiently, feeling sure he would remember me.”

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The young man leaned his head upon his folded arms and nothing stirred in the room, but the wind that stole in through the roses to fan the placid face upon the pillow.

“Are you weary waiting for me, Jamie dear? I could not come before;” and as her eager voice broke the silence, Sister Bess came hastening in.

The stranger, looking up, saw a young girl regarding him from Jamie’s close embrace, with a face whose only beauty was the light her brother spoke of, that beamed warm and bright from her mild countenance and made the poor room fairer for its presence.

“This is Bess, my Bess, sir,” cried the boy, “and she will thank you for your kindness in sitting here so long with me.”

“I am the person who lodges just below you; I mistook this room for my own; pardon me, and let me come again, for Jamie has already done me good,” replied the stranger as he rose to go.

“Bess, dear, will you bring me a cup of water?” Jamie said; and as she hastened away, he beckoned his friend nearer, saying with a timid wistful look,—

“Forgive me, if it’s wrong, but I wish you would let me give you this; it’s very little, but it may help some; and I think you’ll take it to please ‘poor Jamie.’ Won’t you, sir?” and as he spoke, the child offered a bright coin, the proceeds of his work.

Tears sprung into the proud man’s eyes; he held the little wasted hand fast in his own a moment, saying seriously,—

“I *will* take it, Jamie, as a loan wherewith to begin anew the life I was about to fling away as readily as I do this;” and with a quick motion he sent a vial whirling down into the street. “I’ll try the world once more in a humbler spirit, and have faith in *you,* at least, my little Providence.”

With an altered purpose in his heart, and a brave smile on his lips, the young man went away, leaving the child with another happy memory, to watch the cross upon the old church tower.

It was mid-winter; and in the gloomy house reigned suffering and want. Sister Bess worked steadily to earn the dear daily bread so many pray for and so many need. Jamie lay upon his bed, carving with feeble hands the toys which would have found far readier purchasers, could they have told the touching story of the frail boy lying meekly in the shadow of the solemn change which daily drew more near.

Cheerful and patient always, poverty and pain seemed to have no power to darken his bright spirit; for God’s blessed charity had gifted him with that inward strength and peace it so often brings to those who seem to human eyes most heavily afflicted.

Secret tears fell sometimes on his pillow, and whispered prayers went up; but Bess never knew it, and like a ray of sunshine, the boy's tranquil presence lit up that poor home; and amid the darkest hours of their adversity, the little rushlight of his childish faith never wavered nor went out.

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Below them lived the young man, no stranger now, but a true friend, whose generous pity would not let them suffer any want he could supply. Hunger and cold were hard teachers, but he learned their lessons bravely, and though his frame grew gaunt and his eye hollow, yet, at heart, he felt a better, happier man for the stern discipline that taught him the beauty of self-denial and the blessedness of loving his neighbor *better* than himself.

The child's influence remained unchanged, and when anxiety or disappointment burdened him, the young man sat at Jamie's bedside listening to the boy's unconscious teaching, and receiving fresh hope and courage from the childish words and the wan face, always cheerful and serene.

With this example constantly before him, he struggled on, feeling that if the world were cold and dark, he had within himself one true affection to warm and brighten his hard life.

"Give me joy, Jamie! Give me joy, Bess! the book sells well, and we shall yet be rich and famous," cried the young author as he burst into the quiet room one wintry night with snow-flakes glittering in his hair, and his face aglow with the keen air which had no chill in it to him now.

Bess looked up to smile a welcome, and Jamie tried to cry "Hurrah;" but the feeble voice faltered and failed, and he could only wave his hand and cling fast to his friend, whispering, brokenly,—

"I'm glad, oh, very glad; for now you need not rob yourself for us. I know you have, Walter; I have seen it in your poor thin face and these old clothes. It never would have been so, but for Bess and me."

"Hush, Jamie, and lie here upon my arm and rest; for you are very tired with your work, —I know by this hot hand and shortened breath. Are you easy now? Then listen; for I've brave news to tell you, and never say again I do too much for you,—the cause of my success."

"I, Walter," cried the boy; "what do you mean?"

Looking down upon the wondering face uplifted to his own, the young man answered with deep feeling,—

"Six months ago I came into this room a desperate and despairing man, weary of life, because I knew not how to use it, and eager to quit the struggle because I had not learned to conquer fortune by energy and patience. You kept me, Jamie, till the reckless mood was passed, and by the beauty of your life showed me what mine should be. Your courage shamed my cowardice; your faith rebuked my fears; your lot made my

own seem bright again. I, a man with youth, health, and the world before me, was about to fling away the life which you, a helpless little child, made useful, good, and happy, by the power of your own brave will. I felt how weak, how wicked I had been, and was not ashamed to learn of you the lesson you so unconsciously were teaching. God bless you, Jamie, for the work you did that day."

"Did I do so much?" asked the boy with innocent wonder; "I never knew it, and always thought you had grown happier and kinder because I had learned to love you more. I'm very glad if I did anything for you, who do so much for us. But tell me of the book; you never would before."

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With a kindling eye Walter replied,—

“I would not tell you till all was sure; now, listen. I wrote a story, Jamie,—a story of our lives, weaving in few fancies of my own and leaving you unchanged,—the little counsellor and good angel of the ambitious man’s hard life. I painted no fictitious sorrows. What I had seen and keenly felt I could truly tell,—your cheerful patience, Bess’s faithful love, my struggles, hopes, and fears. This book, unlike the others, was not rejected; for the simple truth, told by an earnest pen, touched and interested. It was accepted, and has been kindly welcomed, thanks to you, Jamie; for many buy it to learn more of you, to weep and smile over artless words of yours, and forget their pity in their reverence and love for the child who taught the man to be, not what he is, but what, with God’s help, he will yet become.”

“They are very kind, and so are you, Walter, and I shall be proud to have you rich and great, though I may not be here to see it.”

“You will, Jamie, you must; for it will be nothing without you;” and as he spoke, the young man held the thin hand closer in his own and looked more tenderly into the face upon his arm.

The boy’s eyes shone with a feverish light, a scarlet flush burned on his hollow cheek, and the breath came slowly from his parted lips, but over his whole countenance there lay a beautiful serenity which filled his friend with hope and fear.

“Walter bid Bess put away that tiresome work; she has sat at it all day long, never stirring but to wait on me;” and as he spoke, a troubled look flitted across the boy’s calm face.

“I shall soon be done, Jamie, and I must not think of rest till then, for there is neither food nor fuel for the morrow. Sleep, yourself, dear, and dream of pleasant things; I am not very tired.”

And Bess bent closer to her work, trying to sing a little song, that they might not guess how near the tears were to her aching eyes.

From beneath his pillow Jamie drew a bit of bread, whispering to his friend as he displayed it,—

“Give it to Bess; I saved it for her till you came, for she will not take it from me, and she has eaten nothing all this day.”

“And you, Jamie?” asked Walter, struck by the sharpened features of the boy, and the hungry look which for a moment glistened in his eye.

“I don’t need much, you know, for I don’t work like Bess; but yet she gives me all. Oh, how can I bear to see her working so for me, and I lying idle here!”

As he spoke, Jamie clasped his hands before his face, and through his slender fingers streamed such tears as children seldom shed.

It was so rare a thing for him to weep that it filled Walter with dismay and a keener sense of his own powerlessness. Ho could bear any privation for himself alone, but he could not see them suffer. He had nothing to offer them; for though there was seeming wealth in store for him, he was now miserably poor. He stood a moment, looking from brother to sister, both so dear to him, and both so plainly showing how hard a struggle life had been to them.

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With a bitter exclamation, the young man turned away and went out into the night, muttering to himself,—

“They shall not suffer; I will beg or steal first.”

And with some vague purpose stirring within him, he went swiftly on until he reached a great thoroughfare, nearly deserted now, but echoing occasionally to a quick step as some one hurried home to his warm fireside.

“A little money, sir, for a sick child and a starving woman;” and with outstretched hand Walter arrested an old man. But he only wrapped his furs still closer and passed on, saying sternly,—

“I have nothing for vagrants. Go to work, young man.”

A woman poorly clad in widow’s weeds passed at that moment, and, as the beggar fell back from the rich man’s path, she dropped a bit of silver in his hand, saying with true womanly compassion,—

“Heaven help you! it is all I have to give.”

“I’ll beg no more,” muttered Walter, as he turned away burning with shame and indignation; “I’ll *take* from the rich what the poor so freely *give.* God pardon me; I see no other way, and they must not starve.”

With a vague sense of guilt already upon him, he stole into a more unfrequented street and slunk into the shadow of a doorway to wait for coming steps and nerve himself for his first evil deed.

Glancing up to chide the moonlight for betraying him, he started; for there, above the snow-clad roofs, rose the cross upon the tower. Hastily he averted his eyes, as if they had rested on the mild, reproachful countenance of a friend.

Far up in the wintry sky the bright symbol shone, and from it seemed to fall a radiance, warmer than the moonlight, clearer than the starlight, showing to that tempted heart the darkness of the yet uncommitted wrong.

That familiar sight recalled the past; he thought of Jamie, and seemed to hear again the childish words, uttered long ago, “God will remember us.”

Steps came and went along the lonely street, but the dark figure in the shadow never stirred, only stood there with bent head, accepting the silent rebuke that shone down upon it, and murmuring, softly,—

“God remember little Jamie, and forgive me that my love for him led me astray.”

As Walter raised his hand to dash away the drops that rose at the memory of the boy, his eye fell on the ring he always wore for his dead mother's sake. He had hoped to see it one day on Bess's hand, but now a generous thought banished all others and with the energy of an honest purpose be hastened to sell the ring, purchase a little food and fuel, and borrowing a warm covering of a kindly neighbor, he went back to dispense these comforts with a satisfaction he had little thought to feel.

The one lamp burned low; a few dying embers lay upon the earth, and no sound broke the silence but the steady rustle of Bess's needle, and the echo of Jamie's hollow cough.

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“Wrap it around Bess; she has given me her cloak, and needs it more than I,—these coverings do very well;” and as he spoke, Jamie put away the blanket Walter offered, and suppressing a shiver, hid his purple hands beneath the old, thin cloak.

“Here is bread, Jamie; eat for Heaven’s sake, no need to save it now;” and Walter pressed it on the boy, but he only took a little, saying he had not much need of food and loved to see them eat far better.

So in the cheery blaze of the rekindled fire, Bess and Walter broke their long fast, and never saw how eagerly Jamie gathered up the scattered crumbs, nor heard him murmur softly, as he watched them with loving eyes,—

“There will be no cold nor hunger up in heaven, but enough for all,—enough for all.”

“Walter, you’ll be kind to Bess when I am not here?” he whispered earnestly, as his friend came to draw his bed within the ruddy circle of the firelight gleaming on the floor.

“I will, Jamie, kinder than a brother,” was the quick reply. “But why ask me that with such a wistful face?”

The boy did not answer, but turned on his pillow and kissed his sister’s shadow as it flitted by.

Gray dawn was in the sky before they spoke again. Bess slept the deep, dreamless sleep of utter weariness, her head pillowed on her arms. Walter sat beside the bed, lost in sweet and bitter musings, silent and motionless, fancying the boy slept. But a low voice broke the silence, whispering feebly.

“Walter, will you take me in your strong arms and lay me on my little couch beside the window? I should love to see the cross again, and it is nearly day.”

So light, so very light, the burden seemed, Walter turned his face aside lest the boy should see the sorrowful emotion painted there, and with a close embrace he laid him tenderly down to watch the first ray climbing up the old gray tower.

“The frost lies so thickly on the window-panes that you cannot see it, even when the light comes, Jamie,” said his friend, vainly trying to gratify the boy’s wish.

“The sun will melt it soon, and I can wait,—I can wait, Walter; it’s but a little while;” and Jamie, with a patient smile, turned his face to the dim window and lay silent.

Higher and higher crept the sunshine till it shone through the frostwork on the boy’s bright head; his bird awoke and carolled blithely, but he never stirred.

“Asleep at last, poor, tired little Jamie; I’ll not wake him till the day is warmer;” and Walter, folding the coverings closer over the quiet figure, sat beside it, waiting till it should wake.

“Jamie dear, look up, and see how beautifully your last rose has blossomed in the night when least we looked for it;” and Bess came smiling in with the one white rose, so fragrant but so frail.

Jamie did not turn to greet her, for all frost had melted from the boy’s life now; another flower had blossomed in the early dawn, and though the patient face upon the pillow was bathed in sunshine, little Jamie was not there to see it gleaming on the cross. God had remembered him.

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Spring showers had made the small mound green, and scattered flowers in the churchyard. Sister Bess sat in the silent room alone, working still, but pausing often to wipe away the tears that fell upon a letter on her knee.

Steps came springing up the narrow stairs and Walter entered with a beaming face, to show the first rich earnings of his pen, and ask her to rest from her long labor in the shelter of his love.

“Dear Bess, what troubles you? Let me share your sorrow and try to lighten it,” he cried with anxious tenderness, sitting beside her on the little couch where Jamie fell asleep.

In the frank face smiling on her, the girl’s innocent eyes read nothing but the friendly interest of a brother, and remembering his care and kindness, she forgot her womanly timidity in her great longing for sympathy, and freely told him all.

Told him of the lover she left years ago to cling to Jamie, and how this lover went across the sea hoping to increase his little fortune that the helpless brother might be sheltered for love of her. How misfortune followed him, and when she looked to welcome back a prosperous man, there came a letter saying that all was lost and he must begin the world anew and win a home to offer her before he claimed the heart so faithful to him all these years.

“He writes so tenderly and bears his disappointment bravely for my sake; but it is very hard to see our happiness deferred again when such a little sum would give us to each other.”

As she ceased, Bess looked for comfort into the countenance of her companion, never seeing through her tears how pale it was with sudden grief, how stern with repressed emotion. She only saw the friend whom Jamie loved and that tie drew her toward him as to an elder brother to whom she turned for help, unconscious then how great his own need was.

“I never knew of this before, Bess; you kept your secret well” he said, trying to seem unchanged.

The color deepened in her cheek; but she answered simply, “I never spoke of it, for words could do no good, and Jamie grieved silently about it, for he thought it a great sacrifice, though I looked on it as a sacred duty, and he often wearied himself to show in many loving ways how freshly he remembered it. My grateful little Jamie.”

And her eyes wandered to the green tree-tops tossing in the wind, whose shadows flickered pleasantly above the child.

“Let me think a little, Bess, before I counsel you. Keep a good heart and rest assured that I will help you if I can,” said Walter, trying to speak hopefully.

“But you come to tell me something; at least, I fancied I saw some good tidings in your face just now. Forgive my selfish grief, and see how gladly I will sympathize with any joy of yours.”

“It is nothing, Bess, another time will do as well,” he answered, eager to be gone lest he should betray what must be kept most closely now.

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“It never will be told, Bess,—never in this world,” he sighed bitterly as he went back to his own room which never in his darkest hours had seemed so dreary; for now the bright hope of his life was gone.

“I have it in my power to make them happy,” he mused as he sat alone, “but I cannot do it, for in this separation lies my only hope. He may die or may grow weary, and then to whom will Bess turn for comfort but to me? I will work on, earn riches and a name, and if that hour should come, then in her desolation I will offer all to Bess and surely she will listen and accept. Yet it were a generous thing to make her happiness at once, forgetful of my own. How shall I bear to see her waiting patiently, while youth and hope are fading slowly, and know that I might end her weary trial and join two faithful hearts? Oh, Jamie, I wish to Heaven I were asleep with you, freed from the temptations that beset me. It is so easy to perceive the right, so hard to do it.”

The sound of that familiar name, uttered despairingly, aloud, fell with a sweet and solemn music upon Walter’s ear. A flood of tender memories swept away the present, and brought back the past. He thought of that short life, so full of pain and yet of patience, of the sunny nature which no cloud could overshadow, and the simple trust which was its strength and guide.

He thought of that last night and saw now with clearer eyes the sacrifices and the trials silently borne for love of Bess.

The beautiful example of the child rebuked the passion of he man, and through the magic of affection strengthened generous impulses and banished selfish hopes.

“I promised to be kind to Bess, and with God’s help I will keep my vow. Teach me to bear my pain, to look for help where you found it, little Jamie;” and as he spoke, the young man gazed up at the shining cross, striving to see in it not merely an object of the dead boy’s love, but a symbol of consolation, hope, and faith.

“It is a noble thing to see an honest man cleave his own heart in twain to fling away the baser part of it.”

These words came to Walter’s mind and fixed the resolution wavering there, and as his glance wandered from the gray tower to the churchyard full of summer stillness, he said within himself,—

“This is the hardest struggle of my life, but I will conquer and come out from the conflict master of myself at least, and like Jamie, try to wait until the sunshine comes again, even if it only shine upon me, dead like him.”

It was no light task to leave the airy castles built by love and hope, and go back cheerfully to the solitude of a life whose only happiness for a time was in the memory of

the past. But through the weeks that bore one lover home, the other struggled to subdue his passion, and be as generous in his sorrow as he would have been in his joy.

It was no easy conquest; but he won the hardest of all victories, that of self, and found in the place of banished pride and bitterness a patient strength, and the one desire to be indeed more generous than a brother to gentle Bess. He had truly, “cleft his heart in twain and flung away the baser part.”

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A few days before the absent lover came, Walter went to Bess, and, with a countenance whose pale serenity touched her deeply, he laid his gift before her, saying,—

“I owe this all to Jamie; and the best use I can make of it is to secure your happiness, as I promised him I’d try to do. Take it and God bless you, Sister Bess.”

“And you, Walter, what will your future be if I take this and go away to enjoy it as you would have me?” Bess asked, with an earnestness that awoke his wonder.

“I shall work, Bess, and in that find content and consolation for the loss of you and Jamie. Do not think of me; this money will do me far more good in your hands than my own. Believe me it is best to be so, therefore do not hesitate.”

Bess took it, for she had learned the cause of Walter’s restless wanderings and strange avoidance of herself of late, and she judged wisely that the generous nature should be gratified, and the hard-won victory rewarded by the full accomplishment of its unselfish end. Few words expressed her joyful thanks, but from that time Walter felt that he held as dear a place as Jamie in her grateful heart, and was content.

Summer flowers were blooming when Bess went from the old home a happy wife, leaving her faithful friend alone in the little room where Jamie lived and died.

Years passed, and Walter’s pen had won for him an honored name. Poverty and care were no longer his companions; many homes were open to him, many hearts would gladly welcome him, but he still lingered in the gloomy house, a serious, solitary man, for his heart lay beneath the daisies of a child’s grave.

But his life was rich in noble aims and charitable deeds, and with his strong nature softened by the sharp discipline of sorrow, and sweetened by the presence of a generous love, he was content to dwell alone with the memory of little Jamie, in the shadow of “the cross upon the tower.”

THE DEATH OF JOHN.

This is not a tale, but a true history.—ED.

FROM “HOSPITAL SKETCHES.”

HARDLY was I settled again, when the inevitable bowl appeared, and its bearer delivered a message I had expected, yet dreaded to receive:—

“John is going, ma’am, and wants to see you, if you can come.”

“The moment this boy is asleep; tell him so, and let me know if I am in danger of being too late.”

My Ganymede departed, and while I quieted poor Shaw, I thought of John. He came in a day or two after the others; and, one evening, when I entered my “pathetic room,” I found a lately emptied bed occupied by a large, fair man, with a fine face, and the serenest eyes I ever met. One of the earlier comers had often spoken of a friend, who had remained behind, that those apparently worse wounded than himself might reach a shelter first. It seemed a David and Jonathan sort of friendship. The man fretted for his mate, and was never tired of praising John,—his courage, sobriety, self-denial, and unfailing kindliness of heart; always winding up with, “He’s an out an’ out fine feller, ma’am; you see if he ain’t.”

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I had some curiosity to behold this piece of excellence, and when he came, watched him for a night or two, before I made friends with him; for, to tell the truth, I was a little afraid of the stately looking man, whose bed had to be lengthened to accommodate his commanding stature; who seldom spoke, uttered no complaint, asked no sympathy, but tranquilly observed what went on about him; and, as he lay high upon his pillows, no picture of dying statesman or warrior was ever fuller of real dignity than this Virginia blacksmith. A most attractive face he had, framed in brown hair and beard, comely featured and full of vigor, as yet unsubdued by pain; thoughtful and often beautifully mild while watching the afflictions of others, as if entirely forgetful of his own. His mouth was grave and firm, with plenty of will and courage in its lines, but a smile could make it as sweet as any woman's; and his eyes were child's eyes, looking one fairly in the face with a clear, straightforward glance, which promised well for such as placed their faith in him. He seemed to cling to life, as if it were rich in duties and delights, and he had learned the secret of content. The only time I saw his composure disturbed was when my surgeon brought another to examine John, who scrutinized their faces with an anxious look, asking of the elder,—"Do you think I shall pull through, sir?" "I hope so, my man." And, as the two passed on, John's eye still followed them, with an intentness which would have won a clearer answer from them, had they seen it. A momentary shadow flitted over his face; then came the usual serenity, as if, in that brief eclipse, he had acknowledged the existence of some hard possibility, and, asking nothing, yet hoping all things, left the issue in God's hands, with that submission which is true piety.

The next night, as I went my rounds with Dr. P., I happened to ask which man in the room probably suffered most; and, to my great surprise, he glanced at John:—

"Every breath he draws is like a stab; for the ball pierced the left lung, broke a rib, and did no end of damage here and there; so the poor lad can find neither forgetfulness nor ease, because he must lie on his wounded back or suffocate. It will be a hard struggle and a long one, for he possesses great vitality; but even his temperate life can't save him; I wish it could."

"You don't mean he must die, Doctor?"

"Bless you, there's not the slightest hope for him; and you'd better tell him so before long; women have a way of doing such things comfortably, so I leave it to you. He won't last more than a day or two, at furthest."

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I could have sat down on the spot and cried heartily, if I had not learned the wisdom of bottling up one's tears for leisure moments. Such an end seemed very hard for such a man, when half a dozen worn-out, worthless bodies round him were gathering up the remnants of wasted lives, to linger on for years perhaps, burdens to others, daily reproaches to themselves. The army needed men like John,—earnest, brave, and faithful; fighting for liberty and justice with both heart and hand, true soldiers of the Lord. I could not give him up so soon, or think with any patience of so excellent a nature robbed of its fulfilment, and blundered into eternity by the rashness or stupidity of those at whose hands so many lives may be required. It was an easy thing for Dr. P. to say, "Tell him he must die," but a cruelly hard thing to do, and by no means as "comfortable" as he politely suggested. I had not the heart to do it then, and privately indulged the hope that some change for the better might take place, in spite of gloomy prophecies, so, rendering my task unnecessary. A few minutes later, as I came in again with fresh rollers, I saw John sitting erect, with no one to support him, while the surgeon dressed his back. I had never hitherto seen it done; for, having simpler wounds to attend to, and knowing the fidelity of the attendant, I had left John to him, thinking it might be more agreeable and safe; for both strength and experience were needed in his case. I had forgotten that the strong man might long for the gentler tendance of a woman's hands, the sympathetic magnetism of a woman's presence, as well as the feebler souls about him. The Doctor's words caused me to reproach myself with neglect, not of any real duty perhaps, but of those little cares and kindnesses that solace homesick spirits, and make the heavy hours pass easier. John looked lonely and forsaken just then, as he sat with bent head, hands folded on his knee, and no outward sign of suffering, till, looking nearer, I saw great tears roll down and drop upon the floor. It was a new sight there; for though I had seen many suffer, some swore, some groaned, most endured silently, but none wept. Yet it did not seem weak, only very touching, and straightway my fear vanished, my heart opened wide and took him in, as, gathering the bent head in my arms, as freely as if he had been a little child, I said,—"Let me help you bear it, John."

Never, on any human countenance, have I seen so swift and beautiful a look of gratitude, surprise, and comfort, as that which answered me more eloquently than the whispered,—

"Thank you ma'am; this is right good! this is what I wanted!"

"Then why not ask for it before?"

"I didn't like to be a trouble; you seemed so busy, and I could manage to get on alone."

"You shall not want it any more, John."

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Nor did he; for now I understood the wistful look that sometimes followed me, as I went out, after a brief pause beside his bed, or merely a passing nod, while busied with those who seemed to need me more than he, because more urgent in their demands; now I knew that to him, as to so many, I was the poor substitute for mother, wife, or sister, and in his eyes no stranger, but a friend who hitherto had seemed neglectful; for, in his modesty, he had never guessed the truth. This was changed now; and, through the tedious operation of probing, bathing, and dressing his wounds, he leaned against me, holding my hand fast, and, if pain wrung further tears from him, no one saw them fall but me. When he was laid down again, I hovered about him, in a remorseful state of mind that would not let me rest, till I had bathed his face, brushed his “bonny brown hair,” set all things smooth about him, and laid a knot of heath and heliotrope on his clean pillow. While doing this, he watched me with the satisfied expression I so linked to see; and when I offered the little nosegay, held it carefully in his great hand, smoothed a ruffled leaf or two, surveyed and smelt it with an air of genuine delight, and lay contentedly regarding the glimmer of the sunshine on the green. Although the manliest man among my forty, he said, “Yes, ma’am,” like a little boy; received suggestions for his comfort with the quick smile that brightened his whole face; and now and then, as I stood tidying the table by his bed, I felt him softly touch my gown, as if to assure himself that I was there. Anything more natural and frank I never saw, and found this brave John as bashful as brave, yet full of excellences and fine aspirations, which, having no power to express themselves in words, seemed to have bloomed into his character and made him what he was.

After that night, an hour of each evening that remained to him was devoted to his ease or pleasure. He could not talk much, for breath was precious, and he spoke in whispers; but from occasional conversations, I gleaned scraps of private history which only added to the affection and respect I felt for him. Once he asked me to write a letter, and, as I settled pen and paper, I said, with an irrepressible glimmer of feminine curiosity, “Shall it be addressed to wife, or mother, John?”

“Neither, ma’am; I’ve got no wife, and will write to mother myself when I get better. Did you think I was married because of this?” he asked, touching a plain ring he wore, and often turned thoughtfully on his finger when he lay alone.

“Partly that, but more from a settled sort of look you have,—a look which young men seldom get until they marry.”

“I don’t know that; but I’m not so very young, ma’am; thirty in May and have been what you might call settled this ten years; for mother’s a widow; I’m the oldest child she has, and it wouldn’t do for me to marry until Lizzie has a home of her own, and Laurie’s learned his trade; for we’re not rich, and I must be father to the children, and husband to the dear old woman, if I can.”

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“No doubt but you are both, John; yet how came you to go to war, if you felt so? Wasn’t enlisting as bad as marrying?”

“No, ma’am, not as I see it, for one is helping my neighbor, the other pleasing myself. I went because I couldn’t help it. I didn’t want the glory or the pay; I wanted the right thing done, and people kept saying the men who were in earnest ought to flight. I was in earnest, the Lord knows! but I held off as long as I could, not knowing which was my duty; mother saw the case, gave me her ring to keep me steady, and said ‘Go;’ so I went.”

A short story and a simple one, but the man and the mother were portrayed better than pages of fine writing could have done it.

“Do you ever regret that you came, when you lie here suffering so much?”

“Never ma’am; I haven’t helped a great deal, but I’ve shown I was willing to give my life, and perhaps I’ve got to; but I don’t blame anybody, and if it was to do over again, I’d do it. I’m a little sorry I wasn’t wounded in front; it looks cowardly to be hit in the back, but I obeyed orders, and it doesn’t matter in the end, I know.”

Poor John! it did not matter now, except that a shot in front might have spared the long agony in store for him. He seemed to read the thought that troubled me, as he spoke so hopefully when there was no hope, for he suddenly added,—

“This is my first battle; do they think it’s going to be my last?”

“I’m afraid they do, John.”

It was the hardest question I had ever been called upon to answer; doubly hard with those clear eyes fixed on mine, forcing a truthful answer by their own truth. He seemed a little startled at first, pondered over the fateful fact a moment, then shook his head, with a glance at the broad chest and muscular limbs stretched out before him:—

“I’m not afraid, but it’s difficult to believe all at once. I’m so strong it don’t seem possible for such a little wound to kill me.”

Merry Mercutio’s dying words glanced through my memory as he spoke:—“’Tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door, but ’tis enough.” And John would have said the same, could he have seen the ominous black holes between his shoulders, he never had; and, seeing the ghastly sights about him, could not believe his own wound more fatal than these, for all the suffering it caused him.

“Shall I write to your mother, now?” I asked, thinking that these sudden tidings might change all plans and purposes; but they did not; for the man received the order of the Divine Commander to march, with the same unquestioning obedience with which the

soldier had received that of the human one, doubtless remembering that the first led him to life, and the last to death.

“No, ma’am; to Laurie just the same; he’ll break it to her best, and I’ll add a line to her myself when you get done.”

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So I wrote the letter which he dictated, finding it better than any I had sent; for, though here and there a little ungrammatical or inelegant, each sentence came to me briefly worded, but most expressive; full of excellent counsel to the boy, tenderly “bequeathing mother and Lizzie” to his care, and bidding him good-by in words the sadder for their simplicity. He added a few lines with steady hand, and, as I sealed it, said, with a patient sort of sigh, “I hope the answer will come in time for me to see it;” then, turning away his face, laid the flowers against his lips, as if to hide some quiver of emotion at the thought of such a sudden sundering of all the dear home-ties.

These things had happened two days before; now John was dying, and the letter had not come. I had been summoned to many death-beds in my life, but to none that made my heart ache as it did then, since my mother called me to watch the departure of a spirit akin to this in its gentleness and patient strength. As I went in, John stretched out both hands,—

“I knew you’d come! I guess I’m moving on, ma’am.”

He was; and so rapidly that, even while he spoke, over his face I saw the gray veil falling that no human hand can lift. I sat down by him, wiped the drops from his forehead, stirred the air about him with the slow wave of a fan, and waited to help him die. He stood in sore need of help,—and I could do so little; for, as the doctor had foretold, the strong body rebelled against death, and fought every inch of the way, forcing him to draw each breath with a spasm, and clench his hands with an imploring look, as if he asked, “How long must I endure this, and be still?” For hours he suffered dumbly, without a moment’s respite, or a moment’s murmuring; his limbs grew cold, his face damp, his lips white, and, again and again, he tore the covering off his breast, as if the lightest weight added to his agony; yet through it all, his eyes never lost their perfect serenity, and the man’s soul seemed to sit therein, undaunted by the ills that vexed his flesh.

One by one the men woke, and round the room appeared a circle of pale faces and watchful eyes, full of awe and pity; for, though a stranger, John was beloved by all. Each man there had wondered at his patience, respected his piety, admired his fortitude, and now lamented his hard death; for the influence of an upright nature had made itself deeply felt, even in one little week. Presently, the Jonathan who so loved this comely David came creeping from his bed for a last look and word. The kind soul was full of trouble, as the choke in his voice, the grasp of his hand betrayed; but there were no tears, and the farewell of the friends was the more touching for its brevity.

“Old boy, how are you?” faltered the one.

“Most through, thank heaven!” whispered the other.

“Can I say or do anything for you anywheres?”

“Take my things home, and tell them that I did my best.”

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“I will! I will!”

“Good-by, Ned.”

“Good-by, John, good-by!”

They kissed each other, tenderly as women, and so parted; for poor Ned could not stay to see his comrade die. For a little while, there was no sound in the room but the drip of water from a stump or two, and John’s distressful gasps, as he slowly breathed his life away. I thought him nearly gone, and had just laid down the fan, believing its help to be no longer needed, when suddenly he rose up in his bed, and cried out with a bitter cry that broke the silence, sharply startling every one with its agonized appeal,—

“For God’s sake, give me air!”

It was the only cry pain or death had wrung from him, the only boon he had asked; and none of us could grant it, for all the airs that blew were useless now. Dan flung up the window. The first red streak of dawn was warming the gray east, a herald of the coming sun. John saw it, and with the love of light which lingers in us to the end, seemed to read in it a sign of hope of help, for, over his whole face there broke that mysterious expression, brighter than any smile, which often comes to eyes that look their last. He laid himself gently down; and, stretching out his strong right arm, as if to grasp and bring the blessed air to his lips in a fuller flow, lapsed into a merciful unconsciousness, which assured us that for him suffering was forever past. He died then; for, though the heavy breaths still tore their way up for a little longer, they were but the waves of an ebbing tide that beat unfelt against the wreck, which an immortal voyager had deserted with a smile. He never spoke again, but to the end held my hand close, so close that when he was asleep at last, I could not draw it away. Dan helped me, warning me as he did so, that it was unsafe for dead and living flesh to lie so long together; but though my hand was strangely cold and stiff, and four white marks remained across its back, even when warmth and color had returned elsewhere, I could not but be glad that, through its touch, the presence of human sympathy, perhaps, had lightened that hard hour.

When they had made him ready for the grave, John lay in state for half an hour, a thing which seldom happened in that busy place; but a universal sentiment of reverence and affection seemed to fill the hearts of all who had known or heard of him; and when the rumor of his death went through the house, always astir, many came to see him, and I felt a tender sort of pride in my lost patient; for he looked a most heroic figure, lying there stately and still as the statue of some young knight asleep upon his tomb. The lovely expression which so often beautifies dead faces soon replaced the marks of pain, and I longed for those who loved him best to see him when half an hour’s acquaintance with Death had made them friends. As we stood looking at him, the ward master handed me a letter, saying it had been forgotten the night

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before. It was John's letter, come just an hour too late to gladden the eyes that had longed and looked for it so eagerly; yet he had it; for, after I had cut some brown locks for his mother, and taken off the ring to send her, telling how well the talisman had done its work, I kissed this good son for her sake, and laid the letter in his hand, still folded as when I drew my own away, feeling that its place was there, and making myself happy with the thought, even in his solitary place in the "Government Lot," he would not be without some token of the love which makes life beautiful and outlives death. Then I left him, glad to have known so genuine a man, and carrying with me an enduring memory of the brave Virginia blacksmith, as he lay serenely waiting for the dawn of that long day which knows no night.