



Now, let us talk a little, if you're tired of reading," said Mrs. Warburton.

PANSIES.

BY LOUISA M. ALCOTT.

(Continued.)

Carrie was one of the ambitious yet common-place girls who wished to shine, without knowing the difference between the glitter of a candle which attracts moths, and the serene light of a star, or the cheery glow of a fire around which all love to gather. Her mother's aims were not high; and the two pretty daughters knew that she desired good matches for them, educated them for that end, and expected them to do their parts when the time came. The elder sister was now at a watering-place with her mother, and Carrie hoped that a letter would soon come telling her that Mary was settled. During her stay with Mrs. Warburton she had learned a great deal, and was unconsciously contrasting the life there with the frivolous one at home, made up of public show and private sacrifice of comfort, dignity and peace. Here were people who dressed simply, enjoyed conversation, kept up their accomplishments even when old, and were so busy, lovable, and charming, that poor Carrie often felt vulgar, ignorant, and mortified among them, in spite of their fine breeding and kindness. The society Mrs. Warburton drew about her was the best; and old and young, rich and poor, wise and simple, all seemed genuine, glad to give or receive, enjoy and rest, and then go out to their work refreshed by the influences of the place and the sweet old lady who made it what it was. The girls would begin life for themselves, and it was that they had this little glimpse of good society before they left the world of homes to choose friends, pleasures and pursuits for themselves, as all young women do when once launched. The sudden silence and then the whispers suggested to the listener that she had perhaps heard something not meant for her ear, so she presently emerged with her letters, and said, as she came smiling toward the group about the fire:

"How are you getting through this long, dull afternoon, my dears? Quiet as mice till just now. What woke you up? A battle of the books? Alice looks as if she had laid in plenty of ammunition, and you were preparing to besiege her."

The girls laughed, and all rose, for Mrs. Warburton was a stately old lady, and people involuntarily treated her with great respect, even in this mannerless age.

"We were only talking about books," began Carrie, deeply grateful that her novel was safely out of sight.

"And we couldn't agree," added Eva, running to ring the bell for the man to take the letters, for she was used to these

little offices at home, and loved to wait on her hostess.

"Thanks, my love. Now let us talk a little, if you are tired of reading and if you like to let me share the discussion. Comparing tastes in literature is always a pleasure, and I used to enjoy talking over books with my girl friends more than anything else."

As she spoke, Mrs. Warburton sat down in a chair which Alice rolled up, drew Eva to the cushion at her feet, and nodded to the others as they settled again, with interested faces, one at the table where the pile of chosen volumes now lay, the other erect upon the couch where she had been practising the poses "full of languid grace," so much affected by her favorite heroines.

"Carrie was laughing at me for reading wise books and wishing to improve my mind. Is it foolish and a waste of time?" asked Alice, eager to convince her friend and secure so powerful an ally.

"No, my dear, it is a very sensible desire, and I wish more girls had it. Only don't be greedy, and read too much; cramming and snattering are as bad as promiscuous novel-reading, or no reading at all. Choose carefully, read intelligently, and digest thoroughly each book, and then you make it your own," answered Mrs. Warburton, quite in her element now, for she loved to advise, as all old people do.

"But how can we know what to read, if we may not follow our tastes?" said Carrie, trying to be interested and "intelligent" in spite of her fear that a "school-marm" lecture was in store for her.

"Ask advice, and so cultivate a true and refined taste. I always judge people's characters a great deal by the books they like, as well as by the company they keep; so one should be careful, for this is a very good test. Another test is, be sure that whatever will not bear reading aloud is not fit to read to one's self. Many young girls ignorantly or curiously take up books quite worthless, and really harmful, because under the fine writing and brilliant color lurk immorality or the false sentiment which gives wrong ideas of life and things which should be sacred. They think, perhaps, that no one knows this taste of theirs, but they are mistaken, for it shows itself in many ways, and betrays them. Attitudes, looks, careless words, and a morbid or foolishly romantic view of certain things, show plainly that the maidenly instincts are blunted, and harm done that perhaps can never be repaired."

Mrs. Warburton kept her eyes fixed upon the tall andirons, as if gravely reproving them, which was a great relief to Carrie, whose cheeks glowed as she stirred uneasily, and took up a screen as if to guard them from the fire. But conscience pricked her

sharply, and memory, like a traitor, recalled many a passage or scene in her favorite books which, though she enjoyed them in private, she could not have read aloud even to that old lady. Nothing very bad, but false and foolish, poor food for a lively fancy and young mind to feed on, as the weariness or excitement which always followed plainly proved; since one should feel refreshed, not cloyed, with an intellectual feast.

Alice, with both elbows on the table, listened with wide-awake eyes, and Eva watched the rain-drops trickle down the pane with an intent expression, as if asking herself if she had ever done this naughty thing.

"Then there is another fault," continued Mrs. Warburton, well knowing that her first shot had hit its mark, and anxious to be just. "Some book-loving lassies have a mania for trying to read everything, and dip into works far beyond their powers, or try too many different kinds of self-improvement at once. So they get a muddle of useless things into their heads, instead of well-assorted ideas and real knowledge. They must learn to wait and select, for each age has its proper class of books, and what is Greek to us at eighteen may be just what we need at thirty. One can get mental dyspepsia on meat and wine, as well as on ice-cream and frosted cake, you know."

Alice smiled, and pushed away four of the eight books she had selected, as if afraid she had been greedy, and now felt that it was best to wait a little.

Eva looked up with some anxiety in her frank eyes, as she said, "Now it is my turn. Must I give up my dear homely books, and take to Ruskin, Kant, or Plato?"

Mrs. Warburton laughed, as she stroked the pretty brown head at her knee.

"Not yet, my love, perhaps never; for those are not the masters you need, I fancy. Since you like stories about everyday people, try some of the biographies of real men and women about whom you should know something. You will find their lives full of stirring, helpful, and lovely experiences, and in reading of these you will get courage and hope and faith to bear your own trials as they come. True stories suit you, and are the best, for there we get real tragedy and comedy, and the lessons all must learn."

"Thank you! I will begin at once, if you will kindly give me a list of such as would be good for me," cried Eva, with the sweet docility of one eager to be all that is lovable and wise in woman.

"Give us each a list, and we will try to improve in the best way. You know what we need, and love to help foolish girls, or you wouldn't be so kind and patient with us," said Alice, going to sit beside Carrie, hoping for much discussion of this, to her, very interesting subject.

"I will, with pleasure; but I read few modern novels, so I may not be a good judge there. Most of them seem very poor stuff, and I can not waste time even to skim them over as some people do. I still like the old-fashioned ones I read as a girl, though you would laugh at them. Did any of you ever read 'Thaddeus of Warsaw'? I re-read it recently, and thought it very funny; so were 'Evelina,' and 'Cecilia.'"

"I wanted to try Smollett and Fielding, after reading some fine essays about them, but papa told me I must wait," said Alice.

"Ah, my dears, in my day, Thaddeus was our hero, and we thought the scene where he and Miss Beaufort are in the park a most thrilling one. Two fops ask Thaddeus where he got his boots, and he replies, with withering dignity, 'Where I got my sword, gentlemen.' I treasured the picture of that episode for a long time. Thaddeus wears a hat as full of black plumes as a harse, Hessian boots with tassels, and leans over Mary, who languishes on the seat in a short-waisted gown, limp scarf, poke bonnet, and large bag—the height of elegance then, but very funny now. Then too, there is William Wallace in 'Scottish Chiefs.' Bless me! We cried over him as much as you do over your 'Heir of Clifton,' or whatever the boy's name is. You wouldn't get through it, I fancy; and as for poor, dear, prosy Richardson, his letter-writing heroines would bore you sadly. Just imagine a lover saying to a friend, 'I begged my angel to stay and sip one dish of tea. She shipped one dish and flew.'"

"Now, I'm sure that's sillier than any-

thing the Duchess ever wrote with her five o'clock teas and flirtations over plum-cake on lawns," cried Carrie, as they all laughed at the immortal Lovelace.

"I never read Richardson, but he couldn't be duller than Henry James, with his everlasting stories, full of people who talk a great deal and amount to nothing. I like the older novels best, and enjoy some of Scott's and Miss Edgeworth's better than Howells's or any of the realistic writers, with their elevators, and paint-pots, and every-day people," said Alice.

"I'm glad to hear you say so, for I have an old-fashioned fancy that I'd rather read about people as they were, for that is history, or as they might and should be, for that helps us in our own efforts; not as they are, for that we know, and we are all sufficiently commonplace ourselves to be the better for a nobler and wider view of life and men than any we are apt to get, so busy we are earning daily bread, or running after fortune, honor, or some other bubble. But I mustn't lecture or I shall bore you, and forget that I am your hostess, whose duty it is to amuse."

As Mrs. Warburton paused, Carrie, anxious to change the subject, said, with her eyes on a curious jewel which the old lady wore, "I also love true stories, and you promised to tell us about that lovely pin some day. This is just the time for it—please do."

"With pleasure," replied Mrs. Warburton, "for the little romance is quite apropos of our present chat. It is a very simple tale, and rather sad, but it has a great influence on my life, and this brooch is very dear to me."

As Mrs. Warburton sat silent a moment, the girls all looked with interest at the quaint pin which clasped the soft folds of muslin over the grey silk dress which was as becoming to the still handsome woman as her crown of white hair and the winter roses in her cheeks. The ornament was in the shape of a pansy; its purple leaves were of amethyst, the yellow of topaz, and in the middle lay a diamond drop of dew. Several letters were delicately cut on its golden stem, and a guard pin showed how much its wearer valued it.

"My sister Lucretia was a great deal older than I, for the three boys came between," began Mrs. Warburton, still gazing at the fire, as if from its ashes the past rose up bright and warm again. "She was a very lovely and superior girl, and I looked up to her with wonder as well as admiration. Others did the same, and at eighteen she was engaged to a charming man, who would have made his mark had he lived. She was too young to marry then, and Frank Lyman had a fine opening to practise his profession at the South. So they parted for two years, and it was then that he gave her the brooch, saying to her, as she whispered how lonely she would be without him, 'This pansy is a happy, faithful thought of me. Wear it, dearest girl, and don't pine while we are separated. Read and study, write much to me, and remember, 'They are never alone that are accompanied with noble thoughts.'"

"Wasn't that sweet?" cried Eva, pleased with the beginning of the tale.

"So romantic!" added Carrie, recalling the "amber amulet" one of her pet heroes wore for years and died kissing, after he had killed some fifty Arabs in the desert.

"Did she read and study?" asked Alice, with a soft color in her cheek, and eager eyes, for a budding romance was folded away in the depths of her maidenly heart, and she liked a love story.

"I will tell you what she did, for it was rather remarkable at that day, when girls had little schooling, and picked up accomplishments as they could. The first winter she read and studied at home, and wrote much to Mr. Lyman. I have their letters now, and very fine ones they are, though they would seem old-fashioned to you young things. Curious love-letters,—full of advice, the discussion of books, report of progress, glad praise, modest gratitude, happy plans, and a faithful affection that never wavered."

(To be Continued.)

CHRIST FOR US IS ALL OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS before a holy God: Christ in us is all our strength in an unholy world.—Robert McCheyne.