

had been collecting my books and placing them in order on my large slate. Mr. Howard left his desk, and came and stood by me; he took up the long composition which I had just read,—it was neatly written, and the sheets of paper were fastened with blue ribbon. "May I not keep this?" he asked. "It will serve as a pleasant memento of my best scholar.—I feel very proud of you, MELLIE," he added; "and I shall expect to hear of other and brighter laurels, which you have won in the field of authorship."—And, stooping down, he imprinted a kiss, the first I had received from him, upon my brow. If it be true that a mother's kiss made one of our own noble artists, I may say with due humility,—"That kiss made me a poet."

Mr. Howard carried home my books for me that night, and we all spent a social, pleasant evening, in our cozy sitting-room. But our happiness was alloyed by the thought of his speedy departure, for we were all much attached to the kind and agreeable school-master. That night, when we knelt around the family altar, I noticed a tremor in my good father's voice, as he prayed for "One who would on the morrow go out from us, to return no more." He prayed that his might be a useful and a happy life,—that he might wisely improve the talents entrusted to his care, and at last receive the Divine commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." And all our hearts responded, "Amen."

The morning meal was partaken of in haste, and with effort at cheerfulness, but I saw that even my brothers, whom I used to condemn as rough and unfeeling, had but little appetite for their breakfast; and Josie, two years my senior, was seen to brush more than one tear from his eyes; Simeon and Benjamin, being now young men, were not expected to manifest their grief outwardly; but I knew that they also felt very sorry to lose Mr. Howard.

The stage stopped before the house, and my elder brothers carried out the trunk, while Mr. Howard bade us all "good-bye." A cordial grasp of the hand, and the one word which is so full of pathos to the loving heart,—and he was gone! The boys went directly to the barn, father had some errand at the village, and mother and I were soon busied in our household labors. It seemed a strange and not very pleasant change to me, to return to the drudgery of house-work, after spending four months in intellectual pursuits. But I resolved to make the best of it. I had already begun to learn the truth, which I have since well proved, that our primal duties are those which lie the nearest to us, the center whence radiate innumerable obligations to the world around, not one of them of equal importance with those that form that center. Think not that I advocate a selfish course of conduct,—I do believe that "charity begins at home," not by any means that it ends there.

I thought of this while washing the dishes and sweeping, that Saturday morning. I determined to be a more dutiful daughter, a kinder sister; and I trust I did not forget that there were still higher

claims upon me than these. I would strive more earnestly than ever before, to lead a new life,—yet marvel not if there was blended with all these resolves and aspirations, the hope, still hidden deep in my heart, that at some future day I might meet Walter Howard and read in his beaming glance an approval of all my filial and domestic virtues; for I was nearing seventeen, the age of romance.

Ere many weeks, I had the offer of a little school for the following summer. It was located about two miles from home, and I could easily walk that distance, morning and night, when the weather was favourable; at other times, one of the boys could take me over. Father and mother made this arrangement almost before I had begun to consider the matter, and as I had no serious objections to bring forward, I acceded to the proposal. It would, at least, do me no harm to review my studies in this way, and as father had promised me that I should go, the next autumn, to a noted boarding-school, some sixty miles distant, I thought this might be a good preparation. And so, through the long summer days, I taught twenty scholars in the little red school-house at "the Grove." It was a pleasant task, for I loved the children, and they loved me. But wearysome days would come, when I longed for something higher and better,—when the oft-drilled elements of learning seemed stale and distasteful to me. Then I sighed for the quiet of my little room at home, where my thoughts were so often penciled down in rhyme, and where I could hold communion with the gifted ones of earth, "the bards whose lays had made my deep heart burn," and "the lovely, whose memorial is the verse that cannot die." But the summer gave place to autumn, and I was, at home, busily preparing for my year at school.

One day a paper came, directed to "Miss Mellie Grant;" the hand was a firm, free one, the same that was to be seen in so many copy-books at Mayfield. A delicate pencil line attracted our attention to a notice of the appointment of Walter Howard, A. B., as tutor in the college where he had graduated a year previous. The paper was carefully read by the family, and then, together with the wrapper, was placed among my treasures. Smile not at the fondness of "old maids" for "relics"—but I have that paper yet. The last of September found me duly installed as a pupil at Mrs. Weston's Seminary,—Oak Hill. It was a model school, not only in name, but in reality; and very profitable to me were the months I there spent.

In addition to my numerous school duties, I found leisure for writing a few poetical articles, which at the suggestion of my room-mate, I sent to a paper which was printed in the vicinity. To my great delight they were published, and that, too, without any of the provoking typographical errors so discouraging to youthful votaries of the muse. My signature was simply "Mellie," which I confess I had chosen partly from the hope that it might, some time, meet the gaze of him who had bestowed that name upon me. I sent copies of the papers home, and my mother wrote that they were all much

pleased with the poetry,—but hoped I would not neglect my lessons; which I was in no danger of doing.

I remained at Oak Hill until the summer vacation, when I went home, with the earnest solicitations of my teachers and schoolmates that I should return to them at the commencement of the autumn term. This it was my desire to do, but I found my mother too much of an invalid for me to think, for a moment, of leaving her again. She had not been well for several months, but with her true motherly love, she forbore to give me cause for anxiety, and had not permitted any of the family to inform me of her illness.

The household had been increased by the arrival of a widowed sister of my father, Aunt Lucy, who assumed the management of all domestic concerns, and a kinder, more faithful friend, we could not have found.

My mother grew gradually weaker through the autumn, and the first snow-flakes fell upon her new-grave. It was a great, a bitter loss to me,—one that the lapse of time has not served to diminish; for true it is, that "God can give us but one mother;" and few daughters can appreciate the blessings of maternal affection until the narrow stream of death flows between the loved one and their bereaved hearts. It was a lonely winter in our desolate dwelling. Aunt Lucy decided to remain with us; and I was to teach the school in our own district the coming summer. Thus passed months of quiet life, until more than two years had elapsed since Mr. Howard left us, and I was now nineteen.

About this time we received a visit from a cousin of my mother, Mrs. Gleason; one of those affable, charming women; who seem to attract all hearts. She was a widow, and childless. Her home was in Boston, and she urged me to share it with her for a number of months,—nothing less than a two-year's visit would satisfy her, she said,—and she persuaded my father to allow me to return with her, saying that a little experience of city life was just what I needed.

Father told her that she would find me quite a "book-worm," and something of a "blue-stocking," too; at which information, Mrs. Gleason, or "Cousin Eleanor," as she preferred to be called, seemed much delighted; for if she had a weakness, it was a fondness for patronizing those whom she thought would, some day, do honor to her wise fore-sight. And thus I was at once taken under her protecting wing.

The city residence, where I was soon duly ensconced, seemed quite grand compared with my unostentatious country abode. Cousin Eleanor was wealthy, and she was, moreover, possessed of traits that are not always its concomitants, viz., taste and tact. By the aid of these most necessary social virtues, she had furnished her house in a style at once rich and harmonious. The colors all blended,—every article was in its appropriate place,—there was nothing harsh or glaring either in design or execution. And then she had drawn around her a large circle of friends who could well appreciate both herself and her surroundings. They were not the mere ephemeral votaries of fashion, but people who were, at least, one grade