

various brethren and sisters whose petitions occupied from ten minutes to half-an-hour each; and it was not till the waning light of the room gave token of departing day that the dreary entertainment came to an end.

O, that weary, weary, all-but-endless afternoon. The memory of it haunted me like a nightmare for many a long year; and to this day I cannot recall it without an internal shiver. With what a thrill of ecstatic delight did I welcome the blissful intelligence that the monotonous thanksgiving was over; and what a relief it was to escape into the open air. No scholar dismissed from the thralldom of the school-room ever sprang across the threshold with a more joyous bound. I was soon joined by my brother and sister, and a host of other little ones whose natural joyousness of disposition came back to them the moment they were relieved from the supervision of their seniors. As may readily be expected, we lost no time in striking up a common acquaintance, and

"Away we fled, with gamesome minds,
And souls untouched by sin,"

to the barnyard, where we played hide-and-seek among the straw-stacks by the bright light of the autumn moon until the gruff but not unkindly voice of Job Greaves summoned us to supper, in the course of which meal I fell fast asleep. Shortly afterwards the assembly dispersed, and I was carried home in my father's arms and put to bed.

And here it may appropriately enough be asked: How was it that my father, a man of good birth, and—notwithstanding his neglected training—with many of the hereditary instincts and something of the manner and education of a gentleman: by what strange chance was it that he had seen in the creed and manners of such a community as this, anything sufficiently attractive to induce him to cast in his lot with them, and to become in many respects one of themselves? This enquiry has often suggested itself to my mind; and the only plausible answer I have been able to make has been somewhat after this wise. In matters theological, not less than in matters hymeneal, men—even wise and good men—have, time out of mind, done very extraordinary things. My father was one of the kindest, most amiable, and most lovable of men that ever breathed; but I cannot conscientiously claim for him that he was a man of extraordinary wisdom or force of character. He was easily influenced by those with whom he was thrown into intimate relations, and he was ever wont to recognize in my mother an intelligence higher than his own. His marriage had brought him into close contact with the friends of my mother's family, and after that marriage he had no friends of his own rank in society. The father who should have been his "guide, philosopher and friend" was a solitary and selfish recluse, whose pedantic love had destroyed his sense of social and parental responsibility. The young man had thus no friend to counteract the influence of those amongst whom his lot was cast. Add to this the fact that at the time of my mother's "conversion," he had likewise experienced a craving for spiritual consolation; and the only commodity of that sort that came in his way was supplied by that fraternity whose chapel he attended out of deference to my mother's wishes. All these things concurring, he had joined their ranks and espoused their creed as the one best suited to his requirements. And if this explanation be deemed insufficient to account for the seeming anomaly I have no other to offer. I can only say that "such things were." He sincerely believed in the efficacy of their faith for man's salvation, though he inwardly disapproved of some of their church regulations, and positively declined to take his place in the pulpit. He sometimes went so far as to give an exhortation; and from what I can remember of his efforts in that line I am of opinion that, in respect of matter, they were neither better nor worse than those of his spiritual brethren; though they were certainly couched in phraseology less repellant to ears metropolitan. It was but seldom, however, that he was called upon to exercise his functions, for it was known that such exercise was distasteful to him. He was moreover regarded as not quite so strict in his opinions respecting universal reprobation as the Jesuitical creed enjoined upon its followers. Gilbert Redpath, indeed, had recently mooted the question as to the propriety of requiring every member of the

church to reaffirm his or her declaration upon this point; and it was well known that the proposal was expressly directed at my father. But Master Gilbert had been effectually put to silence by Stephen Duckworth, who reminded him of the dictum of St. Paul: "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations."

CHAPTER VI.

THE EAGLE'S NEST.

EARLY in the forenoon of the day after the thanksgiving-feast, we went, by special invitation, to regale ourselves with a view from the tower of Aspleigh Hall. We were assured by my father that the prospect from there was very picturesque; and we had no sooner beheld it for ourselves than we were able to confirm the epithet from personal observation. We mounted an interminable number of steps, and had almost begun to despair of ever reaching the top, when we suddenly emerged upon a landing-place, and found ourselves within the turret which we had previously admired from terra firma. Then the scene burst upon us in all its splendour. The sun shone brightly, and displayed to the best advantage a landscape which would have been well worth contemplating even on the gloomiest day of the year, and which seemed, I thought, to embrace all the kingdoms of the world. To the north, beyond our home, and also to the west, a vast forest stretched away for miles and miles, and nothing was to be seen but the variegated foliage of the tree tops. To the east was a regular succession of hill and dale, forest, field, and stream, dotted here and there with cottages and farm-houses. The most noteworthy view, however, was directly south of us. It has been stated that Aspleigh Hall stood about a quarter of a mile from the public highway. Fifty yards or thereabouts beyond the highway was the top of the tremendous "bank," as it was called—a steep, and in many places precipitous descent of four or five hundred feet. At the bottom of this descent, a plateau, varying in width from one to three hundred yards, intervened between the bank and the Grand River—a huge stream which rises fifty miles or so above, and pours its turbulent waters into Lake Erie seventy miles below. The stream was here very tortuous, and formed an enormous letter C, six or seven miles wide, with the bank for a background from one extremity to the other. The interior of this letter C lay stretched beneath us, a level plain, which during the spring freshets was sometimes entirely submerged. Beyond, rose a mountainous bank of solid rock, the geological formation there being quite different from that on the side nearest us. The Elder, who accompanied us on our tour of inspection, pointed to a huge, riven cliff, which stared us in the face from the far side of the valley, and which rose abruptly, somewhat nearer to the water's edge than its neighbours, to a height of at least five hundred feet, and was crowned with a clump of diminutive pines. So clear was the atmosphere, and so bright was the sun, that every crevice and cranny on the surface of the cliff seemed distinctly visible to us. Its sides were very steep, and on the front visible to us it was evidently insurmountable. A few yards below the summit, a lump of rock protruded about twenty feet towards the river, and resembled a monstrous wart on the face of the mountain. In answer to my mother's enquiries, the Elder informed us that this protuberance was called "The Eagle's Nest," from an Indian tradition which told of an eagle of Cyclopean proportions that had made its home there in days of yore, and preyed upon the paposes of the district. I gathered from his remarks that the term came in process of time to be applied to the entire mountain, which was known far and wide as "The Eagle's Nest."

The name at once arrested my attention.

"The Eagle's Nest, did you say?" I asked: "why that is where Sebastian Gee lives. But where's his house? I don't see a house anywhere near it."

"Sebastian Gee—what do you know of Sebastian Gee, Master Mark? Your father has been telling you about him, I suppose."

My father here explained how we had encountered the half-breed on the evening of our arrival at the Ford; but I could not help noticing that he said nothing about the strange warning that Sebastian had given, nor about that personage's having accompanied us part of the way home.