

ST. ELMO.

CHAPTER I.

HE stood and measured the earth: and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow."

These words of the prophet upon Shigionoth were sung by a sweet, happy, childish voice, and to a strange, wild, anomalous tune—solemn as the Hebrew chant of Deborah, and fully as triumphant.

A slender girl of twelve years' growth steadied a pail of water on her head, with both dimpled arms thrown up, in ancient classic Caryatides attitude, and, pausing a moment beside the spring, stood fronting the great golden dawn—watching for the first level ray of the coming sun, and chanting the prayer of Habakkuk. Behind her in silent grandeur towered the huge outline of Lookout Mountain, shrouded at summit in grey mist; while centre and base showed dense masses of foliage, dim and purplish in the distance—a stern, cowled monk of the Cumberland brotherhood. Low hills clustered on either side, but immediately in front stretched a wooded plain, and across this the child looked at the flushed sky, rapidly brightening into fiery and blinding radiance. Until her wild song waked echoes among the far-off rocks the holy hush of early morning had rested like a benediction upon the scene, as though nature laid her broad finger over her great lips, and waited in reverent silence the advent of the sun. Morning among the mountains possessed witchery and glories which filled the heart of the girl with adoration, and called from her lips rude but exultant anthems of praise. The young face, lifted toward the cloudless east, might have served as a model for a pictured Syriac priestess—one of Baalbec's vestals, ministering in the olden time in that wondrous and grand temple at Heliopolis.

The large black eyes held a singular fascination in their mild, sparkling depths, now full of tender, loving light and childish