

THE SUPPER OF ST. GREGORY.

A tale for Roman guides to tell
To careless, sight-worn travellers still.
Who pause beside the narrow cell
Of Gregory on the Caelian Hill.

One day before the monk's door came
A beggar, stretching empty palms,
Fainting and fast-sick in the name
Of the Most Holy asking alms.

And the monk answered: "All I have
In this poor cell of mine I give,
The silver cup my mother gave:
In Christ's name take thou it, and live."

Years passed; and, called at last to bear
The pastoral crook and keys of Rome,
The poor monk, in St. Peter's chair,
Sat the crowned lord of Christendom.

"Prepare a feast," St. Gregory cried,
"And let twelve beggars sit thereat."
The beggars came, and one beside,
An unknown stranger, with them sat.

"I asked thee not," the Pontiff spake,
"O stranger: but if need be thine,
I bid thee welcome, for the sake
Of Him who is thy Lord and mine."

A grave, calm face the stranger raised.
Like His who on Gennesaret trod,
Or His on whom the Chaldeans gazed,
Whose form was as the Son of God.

"Know'st thou," he said, "thy gift of old?"
And in the hand he lifted up
The Pontiff marvelled to behold
Once more his mother's silver cup.

"Thy prayers and alms have risen, and bloom
Sweetly among the flowers of heaven.
I am the Wonderful, through whom
Whatever thou askest shall be given."

He spoke and vanished. Gregory fell
With his twelve guests in mute accord
Prone on their faces, knowing well
Their eyes of flesh had seen the Lord.

The old-time legend is not vain:
Nor vainly art, Verona's Poet,
Telling it over and over again
On gray Vicenza's frescoed wall.

Still where-soe'er pity shares
Its bread with sorrow, want and sin,
And love the beggar's feast prepares,
The uninvited Guest comes in.

Unheard, because our ears are dull,
Unseen, because our eyes are dim,
He walks our earth, the Wonderful,
And all good deeds are done to Him.

JOHN G. WHITTIER, in *Harper's*.

THE KISSING BRIDGE.

A LEGEND OF ALBANY.

"We are coming to it soon," said he.

"To what?" said the very mouse-like little Puritan maiden at his side, with a rising color in her cheeks, and a dimming of the furtive sparkle of her watchful, half-fearful eyes.

"To the bridge," said he, composedly, but with a slightly increased flush to his cheek, and a momentary restraint in his off-hand gallant manner.

"This is a bridge," said she, innocently enough, stopping at the first snow-covered plank of it with a little look of hesitation.

"This is nothing," said he, carelessly, stopping himself too, and half turning round. "They don't count this one. It is the other, that we are just coming to."

"Why, what then? What about the other? Is it not safe?"

"Ah!" said the tall young gallant, with a meaning smile, "that much depends on what you mean by safe. It is called here the Kissing Bridge. Do you not know of it? Are you such a stranger here?"

"I think I will go back now," she said, with a little gasp as if for breath. "Yes, I have heard of it, but I did not suppose that we should have to cross it on our way."

"My dear child," he said, breaking at once and for all through any thin social ice that might exist between their better understanding, and assuming a grand protecting air, "the awful toll on that particular bridge is not like that on most bridges, where you have either to pay it or else go back. In this case it is quite optional: you pay or not as you think best. To tell the truth," said he, becoming more reassuring still, "I think it is only understood to be a frolic between those who are lovers, or at least great friends," and he began to move slowly forward, as if he of course expected her to follow, on those very liberal and safe terms.

The mouse-colored maiden crept slowly on beside him, with rather a hesitating and wavering step, gazing on anxiously ahead toward the innocent snow-covered little structure that bore such an awful reputation. If he had called it the "gallows-tree" at once, it could scarcely have fluttered her little heart more.

And who was she, this little specimen of slightly mitigated New England Puritanism; and what was she doing in roistering Albany, in the stull Dutchified province of New York, among the festivity of the festive, and in the thick of the New Year junketings? She was little Ruth Gray, from Providence, and she was on a visit to uncles, aunts, and cousins whom her good people still loved, although they often mourned to think that they were getting more and more worldly, and their ways were scarcely now the ways of their grandfathers. Even Ruth herself had, from a very child, shown strange little bits of waywardness and mutiny from the iron rule of her fathers. Her mother died when

she was a child, and her father, a bluff sea-captain, who, in moments of anger, had a way of quoting Scripture to his crew that was infinitely more withering to them than the usual maritime profanity, doted on this little lone mouse of his in a way that often brought his tenderness under the ban of sermonizing from his elders of the church. Ruth had no trouble at all in getting her father's permission to go on a visit to his worldlyish, easy-going, money-making brother in Albany; a friendly skipper thither bound with a cargo of New England rum took charge of her safe passage gladly.

Her aunts and cousins were deeply amused at first with all her prim, staid little ways, and with her still more prim and starched little costumes. No attempt, however, was made to add a ribbon or a bit of lace to her dress, or to modify in any way her ideas of propriety; rather at first did the place take on a little of her sober tone, though, truth to say, she did not crave it, or even strongly desire it; on the contrary, wishing to be good fellow with the rest, she allowed the narrow strings of her plain cap to run a little wider, and the mutinous crinkle of her gold-brown hair to relax from the smooth-as-it-could-be-brushed parting down each side of her fair brow to now and then a little tendril of a rebellious curl that went as it listed. The rigid little white aprons had soon a little pocket, and not long after a little embroidery of white stitching around the hems. She also took kindly to a stray pucker and wrinkle about her staid, severe black hood, and a wider and a more aggressively tied bow at the instep of her russet shoes; and as for the bewitching little muff trimmed with mink that her good uncle bought her, it would be flat insult and cruelty to him not to wear it; and she in time even let them fix a pair of goodly sarsnet bows to each end of it. All these little gradual changes or developments in Ruth brought different degrees of feeling to those about her. Her younger and more thoughtless brood of cousins and "cousins" friends hailed each new bow and ribbon with hilarious joy, but her elder aunts and uncles thought seriously of the day when she would have to be returned to her somewhat strait-laced father and his rigid friends. If her good father could be with her and follow her pliant ways with a like relaxation of his rigidity, that would be another thing; but when they would say to her, "What a pity your father couldn't come too!" and she would look at the complications that might ensue therefrom with a wistful smile, they still felt that any wishes they might have about the father's influence did not much alter the account they might be called on to render to him for the taking on of unhalloved furbelows on the part of the daughter.

Among Ruth's hidden cousins there were some four or five more or less engaged, some others about to be engaged, one or two states of affection that would puzzle an anxious parent to put a name to, and in view of all this gushing condition of the affections, and the hilarious season, there was such a general and unblushing practice of good-natured kissing that poor Ruth, whose ideas of this art, or pastime, or science, or sin, whichever you choose to call it, had gone from state to state of scandalization and outraged proprieties until she had finally accepted the inevitable as best she could, so long as she, barring female cousins, could be left out.

The aunts and uncles, with a remnant of propriety, had made the thoughtless cousins promise not to put Ruth in the way of the ordeal of the Kissing Bridge, and they had so far kept the promise well. The proper uncles and aunts meant that Ruth should fully enjoy herself, but if there might be a line drawn anywhere, their united consciences said it should be at the first plank of that bridge. She, poor girl, had heard much of it, and after the first shock had kindly accepted it as one of the customs of the country; and even when she somewhat severely said that they didn't do such things in Providence, she mentally tempered the severity by vaguely wishing they could, now and then, if it was as nice as the girls and boys made out. Of kissing or being kissed, except in the way of now and then a hearty smack from her father in an expansive mood, or the careful embraces of cousins or aunts, who seemed anxious not to crumple her nicely starched pinner, poor Ruth knew nothing except by reports, which at that gushing season of the year, as we said before, were rather loud and common.

And now she was suddenly brought face to face, if not with the actual thing, at least with the possibilities of it.

And the tall cavalier by her side in the snow?—Miles Foxcroft, so called. Not much was known of him, except as a friend of one of the "engaged" youths hovering about the youngest and prettiest cousin.

"My friend Miles," was all the introduction that Gerrit Schuler, the engaged youth, vouchsafed, over a week previous to our introduction to him, and not much more was asked of Gerrit, who, in good truth, had little more to tell. They had met in New York, and having many points not at all in common, had at once sworn eternal friendship. One was the open vessel; the other was the wine that poured into it. Wine? Well, scarcely that; it was rather a mixture, with little of the true grape in it; but it satisfied the friendly thirst of Gerrit. He loved a hero, and, according to many accounts—Foxcroft's most of all—this was the hero. Under oaths of strict secrecy deeds were recounted, as they entered about at midnight, that thrilled the very marrow of the eager listener—dark hints of half-unwitting piracy, quite

excusable murder, and pardonable villainies of every kind; these, illustrated with narratives of hair-breadth escapes and thrilling adventures of a more ordinary kind by flood and field, stories of a weird and ghastly kind, were never wanting to fill the porous natures whom he thought likely to credit him. There was a happy scar, an ugly welt across his temple, that would always be brought in as an indisputable proof of combats with pirates, or with Indians, or with anybody who at that moment figured as the enemy.

Few doubted these stories, as he was very careful in the matter of his audience, but when he did happen to mistake his man that man generally doubted him enormously, scar notwithstanding. Little did he care; he knew that the world was wide, and inquiring minds were few compared with the absorbent and trusting natures.

Gerrit had told a certain few of his friend's escapades, not enough to get him into serious trouble, but rather to increase the general heroic attitude in the eyes of the young men and maidens. Ruth had had a carefully revised edition of his career retailed to her for her own personal admiration. To her it was like a fairy tale; it was the one peep into enchanted land that her young eyes had opened to. *The Pilgrim's Progress* had hitherto been her only fairy tale, for to her, notwithstanding most careful explanations, this poor Pilgrim was all the knights of romance rolled together. To be sure, this was a very different kind of hero, this tall, well-dressed, rosy-scarred youth walking beside her, so kindly, so protective, so different from any one she had ever known.

She half feared him, yet did not wish to bid him go away and leave her. On ahead of them were the laughing and chatting cousins and lovers. She had been mildly scandalized to see on the distant bridge some light-skirted skirmishes that looked very much like "taking toll"; her steps faltered somewhat, her heart fluttered like an imprisoned bird, but she still followed meekly to the fatal bridge.

On the top rail of the first bridge, at which our story began, Ruth picked up a ready-made snow-ball left behind by some of the merry party gone before. (Snow-balling was almost the first thing her riotous cousins had taught her after her arrival, by the way.) She held the chilly missile in her gloved hand as she walked along beside this looming youth, held it in a very gingerly, ineffective way, too, he noticed. She had only a very dim notion of using it as a weapon of defense; still, she kept it in her hand as something to fall back on in a moment of peril.

"What are you going to do with your snow-ball—throw it at some one when you get over the bridge?" observed he, with a half-amused smile.

"I—no—I'm not sure that I shall cross the bridge at all, and if I do I should not care to hurt any of my friends with this icy ball." She was careful to imply that the ball was very hard, and capable of serious damage.

"Don't you think you will be apt to wet your gloves and spoil them with that damp snow?" This was said with the same kindly, protecting air, which he had now put on permanently, it would seem.

"I don't mind the gloves. Besides, the snow is such a cold thing to handle without gloves," she said to him; and to herself she wondered what his motives might be in wishing her to give up her one visible weapon.

He was so much amused at the situation, at her half-fright and entire simplicity, that he gave up all idea of thrilling her just then with any wild stories of his past life.

The rest of the party had turned down the lane over the bridge of kissing, and were in sight only now and again between the tall trees on either side the road. They could be well heard, though; the screams and peals of laughter rang through the frosty air. Then all was suddenly hushed; they hid behind the trees to see what would happen on the bridge to Ruth. The elder and more staid cousin wished to go back to prevent the dire catastrophe that they had weeks ago been cautioned to avert. She was easily kept within hiding, however, by the assurance that Ruth would readily take care of herself, and if not—good sakes alive!—what harm, after all?—only a bit of frolic.

The timid mouse had, beneath that placid exterior, a certain strong will of her own, and between the two bridges she had pretty neatly planned out a course of action.

When they came to the crucial first plank of the dreadful crossing-place, Ruth suddenly sprang forward, and ran as if the spirit of Atalanta had given to her her own fleet sandals in exchange for her russet shoes. There was a swish of a sad-colored robe, a flutter of white apron, a twinkle of little gray feet—and she was gone away and over the bridge before Foxcroft knew what had happened to break the quiet thread of their conversation off so suddenly.

She stood with her face half hidden by her little muff, actually enjoying a wicked, roguish, quite unparliamentary laugh at him, her cheeks now redder than ripe cherries, and her rebellious curl fluttering with excitement.

"I am not to pay now the toll, as you call it. You should have been more watchful. I am quite safe now." This with her face still behind her muff, and the threatening snow-ball ready for action.

"You need not have fled at that pace from me at all," said he, with rather a hurt intonation, when he reached her side. "I had no malice in my mind. Nay, Mistress Ruth, you

do not know me at all. I should not have claimed the usual toll against your will. We are both strangers here, and why need we follow their hoidenish customs?"

Poor Ruth felt that she had herself been somewhat guilty of hoidenism in a mild form; her swift scamper over the bridge from a purely imaginary danger looked to her now as a mistake more unpardonable than certain forms of wickedness.

The smiles had ceased to ripple over her cheeks, and the laughing eyes were now sad and wistful almost to tears.

"You must have heard some awful tales about me, and, moreover, you must have well believed in them, to have the fear you show of me."

He said this with a desire to clear his tarnished reputation, if need be, but it was really offered as the prelude to some few little stories of his own valorous deeds, the offspring of his own fertile brain. He was now beginning to take an interest in the little gray maiden, and to think her worthy of some of his choicest lies.

"I never like to think evil of any one soever, more especially of one we all like," Ruth was not quite happy over her little speech; it told too little of one thing and too much of another.

She could not then explain herself better, as they soon found themselves among the laughing revellers, who had been watching the incident of the race over the bridge, and its denouement. Noisy astonishment was freely expressed at the curious contradictory actions of each. Ruth was the last person in the world that they would have expected such spirited and exciting action from, and Miles was the next last to have taken it so calmly. They were both unmercifully teased about the affair, as one may well imagine; but, to the further astonishment of all, Ruth warily defended him, and even took no end of blame upon herself. He magnanimously blamed nobody in particular; it was all the fault of the strange custom itself. They were both strangers, and were in no way bound to conform to such unheard-of usages.

"Of course if I had been crossing the bridge with a native I should be a brute not to conform as gallantly as the best men here. Or, had one of you natives here been crossing with Mistress Ruth, then would he have been within his rights to have had his fair toll; but it would have been rank impudence in two persons strange to the country and almost to each other to take a liberty such as that with your sacred bridge and its time-honored customs."

He spoke so fairly and with such serious bearing that he silenced the jeerers, and almost spoiled the frolic for the rest of the walk. As for Ruth, she was losing her heart more and more every moment. He was so different from the others, so manly, so fair, so generous, and withal so protecting! It was impossible that the strange whisperings of his deeds could have much truth in them—and yet she had always been taught to believe that the Demon had over a fair outside, and won souls to him by seeming goodness.

"Do you take—toll, as you call it, every time you cross that place, returning as well as going?" asked Ruth of the younger cousin, with less hesitation now as she was getting used to the subject.

"Oh, that indeed we do!" said that spirited damsel, with the air of one determined to stand by every right of way. "And I think it would be a good thing to have a change of partners going back, and then there would be no strangers and no shirking." This was levelled full at Miles and Ruth.

She looked at him with one little mute appealing glance, and he, understanding, spoke up.

"Let those change who will. For my part, I am well suited, and if Mistress Ruth thinks she may trust me this time, we will go back as we came, and finish our talk together. What say you?" said he, kindly, to her, and with calm directness.

She was pressing a little pattern in the snow with the point of her tiny shoe. She brushed back the stray curl with her gloved hand, and answered only with a smile and the faintest of nods, but the smile and nod and the silence spoke many volumes of consent.

"I hope you do not dislike our queer old custom; it is as old as the hills," said another female cousin, as the beginning of a defense of it, to Miles, in case he wished to "argue it out."

"Nay, mistress, I like the notion of it amazingly, and if I find myself crossing it with those to the country born, I will practice it with the best of ye." There was a general laugh at this sally, in which even Ruth joined; in fact, she was getting to laugh more easily now that the thaw in her manners had fairly set in. It was like the ripple of a frozen brook set free in spring-time.

When the merry party set their faces homeward, Ruth and Miles lingered behind the others again, much to the amusement of the jestingly inclined. "We who are strangers should stay behind, so that you may show us the way, and, moreover, we can then the better study the customs and behaviour of you all, so as to be less strange in time," spoke up Miles. "So go you all on before, and try and bear yourselves more seemly."

The mouse was no longer timid, as she kept more closely to his side on the return saunter along the snow-covered road. There was here and there a slide of glistening ice where little streams crossed the road, and on these they