...thing,
...without payment,
...ell from the king.

Exquisite may be the table,
Which the rich man's hand provides;
At your own feast you will be able
To have the appetite besides.

Grasts and herbs produced by labor,
Which the meanest cab bestow,
Take a richer, rearer flavor
Than the king can ever know.

Under the Pear Tree.

BY VIRGINIA F. TOWNSEND.

(Conclusion.)

"Jessamine, I've seen Rachel Todd, and talked with her," was the young gentleman's first remark as he entered the sitting-room where his sister was practising at the piano.

The young girl turned her fair face toward him in a sweet surprise.

"You have, Green! where, how?"

"It's a long story and I'm tired. I'll tell you at tea time, and that is close at hand."

"But what did you think of her?" persisted the young girl.

"I thought that it would be no fault of mine if I did not know her better." At that moment the tea bell rang.

Greene Scudder fulfilled his prediction; he did know Rachel Todd better that summer. I cannot follow the progressive steps of the aquaintance. The young man took care to improve all his opportunities of meeting the clergyman's daughter, and when these failed him he was not slow in inventing reasons for interviews, and no man can do this with more tact and grace than Green Scudder. And the more he saw of Rachel Todd the more he admired her. Perhaps one reason of this was that she was so unlike any of the women whom he had seen, she had more strength of character, a great deal more moral independence, and yet she was none the less gentle with these, while she was the more womanly.

Nature had made Rachel Todd a lady. Her social advantages had not been wide for although her father doted on his only daughter, and was disposed to indulge her tastes to his utmost ability, a little country parish afforded small social opportunities. The clergyman was a scholar, and Rachel inherited her father's tastes. Her mother had been dead several years, and to supply her in some sen e to her father and brother had been the noble aim of the young daughter's life. This purpose had wonderfully developed and matured her character.

Greene Scudder had a high and noble ideal of women. To his honor be it said, that all which was best and noblest in him recognized the strength and loveliness in Rachell Todd's character. Those soft, earnest eyes of hers seemed, when they lighted on his face, to clear away some mists which had gathered about his soul—mists of selfishness, and doubt, and vanity.

Books to read, flowers and fruits to offer, rides, walks, sails, all of these brought them together, and so the fair, sweet face of the parson's daughter, with its womanly gravity, and flashes of childlike merriment, grew clearer every day in the foreground of his thoughts.

"There's no 'milkmaid odor' about her, as you feared," said Jessamine, archly, for she had penetrated her brother's liking for Rachel.

"No, you little humbug. If I had seen her at the time, as you had, I should not have made the remark."

"I suppose not; and if Rachel had overheard it, she would only have smiled in that sweet, genial way of hers, with a little twinkle of fun in her eyes. I do love her!" said Jessamine, after her vehement fashion.

"I begin to believe I do," thought Greene. But assuredly, he did not repeat this to his sister, although the thought followed him all through the day with several others. Prominent among these was the question; "How did Rachel Todd feel toward him?"

This man, whose society so many women had courted, so many smiled on and flattered, could not answer this question. He knew that Rachel Todd enjoyed his society, and a friendly liking for him certainly. But did her feeling go into any deeper guilt than that? Greene Scudder resolved to know. That very afternoon he went over to the parsonage, not with the intention of uttering the thought which had tarried in the secret places of his heart all day, but of finding a path that should lead him, in fitting time and place, to the story which he had resolved that sooner or later, Rachel Todd should hear from his lips.

As he entered the parlor he caught a glimpse of Rachel with her sun-bonnet in her hand, while Tom, the youngest of her brothers, put his round, rubicund face inside the door a moment, surveyed his sister's guest with a glance that was anything but gratified, and then darted away, while Greene caught the boy's opinion, delivered in a tone about equally divided betwixt disappointment and vexation.

"There! if he hasn't come again, Rachel. I just wish he'd kept away until her fun was over, and now it's all spoiled."

"Tom, Tom, that is dreadfully inhospitable," said the soft, remonstrative voice of his sister.

And here Greene swung open the door, and bowing to the sister, said; "No, Tom, I won't spoil the fun, provided you'll let me take a share in it."

For a moment Thomas Todd looked amazed and disconcerted; but the rubicund face soon cleared itself up into an expression of animated delight.

"Will you go," said Tom, "and help us shake the pear-tree? The boys are waiting down there now for Rachel; and it's such nice fun."

He looked at the sister; her eyes said he would like to go. "Does Tom's permission include yours?"

"Oh, yes; only shaking the old pear-tree, sort of family frolic, and the boys don't go half wild over the sport."

"I'll apologize for them. I was a boy once myself, and would go back now and step into the old, free, careless, happy years if I could; but they swung their gates sharply upon me long ago." He said this as they were passing down through the garden path, past the currant bushes on either hand, to the hall orchard beyond.

"Now, let me hear you say that, Mr. Scudder," the firmly kind yet very voice of Rachel, as you will see by the side glance she gave the sun-bonnet in question, which she had put on during the walk.

"I'll tell you by and by, Rachel."

...she said, those soft, gray ...rs darkening, as they always ...n she was thoroughly in earnest. ...joy them thoroughly, heartily, and ...never much happier than when I am having a real, merry, rollicking time with the boys. Do I shock you?"—her smile running through the words like a small current of sunshine.

"Not a bit, unless by asking the question, which proves how little you understand me."

"But it is so dreadfully rude and unlady like, you see; still you know that my habits and tastes were never run in any fashionable groove."

"I wish that no woman's were," said Greene Scudder, fervently.

And then the hostess went on to explain to her guests the historical and traditional glory which attached itself to the old tree. It had been planted before the Revolution, and during one of the raids of the British, an American soldier, whose house, standing on the very site which the parsonage now occupied, had been invaded and pillaged, found shelter and safety by secreting himself behind the pear tree.

They had reached it now, and, as she stopped lightly over the bars which divided the orchard and the garden, Rachel turned to her guest and said, with a warm light glimmering through her dark eyes: "There it stands, Mr. Scudder, with the weight of its hundred years, gnarled, and old, and scarred; but the sap is strong in its limbs yet, and the birds build their nests and sing sweetly in its branches, as they did a hundred Mays ago; and in all these years it has not failed once to wear its crown of blossoms or to sprinkle the grass underneath with its tribute of fruit. I introduce you to our brave old pear-tree, Mr. Scudder.

The young man took off his hat and bowed reverently; and then came a great shout, far up among the green branches, where the boys clung, and Tom answered it.

Then they went to work, each one with a will. The boys ran up and down the tree like young Indians, shouting and shaking the branches, or picking of the ripe fruit where it clung tenaciously to the limbs. The pear-tree had outstripped itself that year; its fruit lay in small green and golden heaps on the grass, ready to be piled up in the baskets the boys had brought to receive it. It was pleasant to look at Rachel Todd; her laugh rang out with the boys; not so loud, but with such a clear thrill of pleasure in it; her lips red, the faint color in her cheeks steadied itself into a wide glow; the parson's sedate little daughter was a very child in this out-gushing of her spirits.

"I am afraid we shall frighten you, Mr. Scuder," she said, looking up suddenly into his face while they were both kneeling on the grass, and he gathering the fruits into the baskets.

"Do I look so?"

"Not a bit. But you see that my brothers and I count on a frolic here once every year, and I have such pleasant associations with this old pear-tree. If papa were only here at home! Once a year he forgets that he is a clergyman, and scrambles and shouts just like any of the boys. You must just fancy that you are he for an hour. We should have waited for his return; but he will be absent at the association for a week, and the pears are just ripe for picking.'

"I am very happy to supplant your father this time. You keep a seat here, I see," glancing at a rustic bench of twisted cedar boughs.

"Oh, yes. I pass a great many hours under the shadow of the old tree, dreaming dreams which oftenest go away back to the plows and spinning wheels of the Revolution. I believe this is the dearest spot on earth to me."

The path to which he had been seeking opened now all of a sudden. "Miss Rachel, I have something to say to you; and, although I cannot give you the slightest clue to its nature, still, I should like to say it within the shadow of this very tree to-morrow evening if it be pleasant, at half-past seven."

"That will be at twilight," she said, with the wonder in her eyes, eyes of which he now saw that no other thought held possession.

"Yes, and the time of the new moon, too. She will just lift a faint little silver horn in the sky. Will you come, and vastly oblige me?"

"Oh, yes, I shall do all that. And bring Jessamine, too, will you not?"—with not the faintest suspicion of the kind of communication in reserve for her.

"No; I shall not let Jessamine into our confidence; you will understand why when you receive it."

And here the boys broke in, loud and importunate, as boys will, and ended the talk.

Two nights later, Greene Scudder sat under the pear-tree, a little before the appointed time. The winds, with some faint breath of the distant sea, flashed themselves among the leaves, or sang in a sleepy monotone among the branches. The west was a river of golden light, whose edges were fading into a pearl gray; and the young moon smiled serenely over the earth, going with her evening service into night. I think that Greene Scudder had never felt quite so humble and solemn as at this hour. No worldly ambitions nor selfishnesses entered into the offering he was to make. He was about to ask Rachel Todd to be his wife, for her own sweet sake solely, for her truth, her purity, her womanliness, and because the best part of himself had discovered these things in her, and loved and honored them above all things which other women could bring him of wealth, and station, and wider culture. He felt that her influence about his life would make him what his highest wishes and aims pointed toward—a better man; and, as his whole life rose and passed before him, it was full of reproaches for weakness and failure, for spasmodic efforts in right directions, for high impulses which had not crystallized into earnest performance. It was, as I said, almost the tenderest, humblest moment of the young man's life, as he waited under the tree.

"Mr. Scudder." The small figure had come lightly over the grass, and he did not see her until she was at his side; and her voice had a little shyness in it not quite natural with Rachel Todd.

Greene Scudder turned and looked at her. There she stood, the woman of his heart's seeking, in some faintly-tinted lawn, with a cambric frilling like a fine frostwork about her neck, closed with an ancient brooch, in the centre of which a cluster of carbuncles smoldered and blazed.

"I half expected to anticipate you"—as he gave him her hand.

"No. I have waited for you nearly a full an hour."

Their talk for awhile was light enough. It had in it, indeed, some unusual element of jesting on both sides, but gradually grew serious. The young moon smiled in overhead, the stars came out one by one, until the sky seemed all sanded over with drops of golden dew, and then Greene Scudder spoke.

"What is it?"

"Have you wondered at my inviting you to meet me here to-night?"

"Well, yes," she said in her serious, simple way, "I must acknowledge that your request struck me as singular. Still, I have no doubt that will justify itself."

"And you have no faint suspicion of my object in all this?"

"Oh, no. How should I have, Mr. Scudder?" and her eyes rest, half gray, half brown, with their sweetness and candor on his face.

And then Greene Scudder told her—not with the words he had expected to use; a most unusual feeling of doubt and unworthiness took possession of him; and Rachel Todd listened, her sweet face drooping down and half hidden under her sheltering brown hair, so that he could only see her profile and the hurrying blushes on her cheeks.

When he had finished, she turned and looked at him with her clear, serene eyes. I think that amazement had quenched all other expressions in her face that moment.

"Do you mean what you say, Greene Scudder?"

"As before God!"

She drew her hand, a little soft hand, across her eyes, as though to assure herself she was awake. The action was so characteristic of her. "I never dreamed—I never thought this possible," she said at last.

"Why not, Rachel?"

"Because of what I am and what you are. In many senses utterly unfitted to be your wife, lacking in all the worldly advantages and social culture which I fancied would be indispensable in the woman of your wooing. You have certainly done me a great honor, Mr. Scudder." But she did not say it with the shy joy that he wanted, he drinking her words, watching her face greedily.

"But, Rachel, you do not answer me."

She shook her head sadly, and yet into the serene gray-brown eyes there came some softness before her eyelids veiled them. "You will get over this strange fancy in a little while," she said. "You will learn to smile at it."

"Rachel—Rachel Todd, do not mock me; I tell you my love is vital"—with a passionate tenderness in his voice that choked back other words.

The tones moved her; her sweet face was shaken with some troubled yearning. "Think what your life is—what mine has been. How many women you have admired and flirted with; you would tire of me as you tired of them. And then I should not, I could not be what you desire in a wife."

"Why not?" he asked, quickly.

"Because my conscience would forbid it. A life of luxury, of graceful ease, and esthetic enjoyment would be very alluring to me, but I know there are better and nobler aims in living than all these." She faced him now, this calm, little Rachel Todd, with a steady brightness in her eyes. "Life is a solemn, earnest thing to me, Mr. Scudder. It has awful responsibilities, duties and services which cannot be ignored, and which hold very close relations with another."

And here Greene Scudder spoke as he never had done before to man or woman; the better, truer part of his nature cleared itself into speech.

Rachel Todd listened, amazed. This man, whom she had fancied with all his gifts of heart and mind, with all his taste and cultivation, to be merely floating idly down the smooth currents of his life—this man showed her his dissatisfaction and disgust with his past aimless life, his his hopes and resolves for the future, his longings to break away from all the idolence and sweet enticements of his youth, and live for some better purpose; and then he told Rachel Todd how she was the one only woman whom his heart desired to walk with him, to give his manhood her sweet, womanly sympathies, and help, and love.

And the tears swam themselves into Rachel Todd's eyes as she listened. "I need strength and help myself, how can I give either to you?" she asked.

He told her.

But she was doubtful of his love still. It had taken her so completely by surprise.

"Would it stand the test of time and absence?" she asked.

"Do you wish to try it?"

"Yes: come to me a year from this very night, under this old pear-tree, and say, if you can, what you have said this one."

"And if I could, Rachel, what would my answer be?"

Her face dropped away from his gaze, but through the indrawn breath he caught a faint, little whisper, "Wait and see."

It was late now. The leaves overhead were asleep. The blue lanes of the sky were thick with stars, as the village windows with lights, and so the compact was made betwixt them. Please God, Greene Scudder was to come back in a year from that night, if his heart and his judgment should call him.

So they parted. He struck down through the lane which led west of the parsonage, and was half through this when he caught a light whisper of feet on the grass, and Rachel Todd stood by his side. She laid her hand in his and tried to speak.

"What is it?" he asked, clasping the warm, little fingers close.

"If—if you do come back as you go, Green, my heart will welcome you."

"Rachel, little Rachel!" he said, drawing her to him for a momen, in unutterable tenderness.

She slipped away from him in a moment, and he watched the gleam of her faintly-tinted dress as it went up the lane, until it was drowned in the darkness.

That night Greene Scudder said to his sister, "Jessamine, next week I shall start for Europe."

The book which she had been reading dropped to the floor.

"For Europe! Greene, what do you mean?"

"Only what I said. Don't look so shocked. I expect to be back in less than a pear.

* * * * * * *

Under the old pear-tree, in the October nightfall, Green Scudder sat alone again. The winds rumpled the leaves, the river of golden light burned in the west; it was the twin sister of the night a year ago, Greene Scudder thought.

He was sunburnt with his year's travel. He had reached his home only a day before, after a stormy voyage, and had only given himself time for rest before he started for Dayton. And now he awaited Rachel Todd. He knew that a terrible shadow had fallen upon her life within the last year, for the stately, kindly-hearted old parson slept now by the side of his wife, and the burden of household cares, with narrow means, had fallen heavily upon the young shoulders of Rachel Todd.

A soft step stole along the grass, and there she stood in her black dress, with the little fancy frill about her neck.

"Rachel! Rachel!" I cannot repeat the exultant joy and tenderness of Greene Scudder's tones, as he uttered these words. The fair, pale face went up from doubt into light and gladness that were beautiful to see.

"Oh, Greene, Greene, have you come back to me as you went?" There was a piteous cry in her tones.

"As I went, Rachel, little Rachel!"

She burst into passionate sobs, and he gathered her to him—he had earned the right—under the old pear-tree.

"It was a foolish, romantic fancy of mine, Greene, to try your love for me by such a test," she said, a long time after this, when the tears were dry upon her cheek. "I saw it so, after dear papa left me, and my heart was sick and lonely. I out to have trusted you deeper. But it was hardest for me, after all," with the little indrawn breath, and the faint whisper he remembered.

"No, it was wisest and best, Rachel. I have learned my need and the depth of my love for you in this absence, as perhaps, I never otherwise should. I have tried to live as we said that night. The test has done me good in all ways."

She looked up at him and smiled, the smile that broke up into a great gladness all the sweet gravity of her face.

"And Rachel, my darling, you are ready to come to me now, ready to let my heart take into its shelter and love your sweet womanhood, and find your rest there until God shall part us."

"Until God shall part us," answered softly through her tears the voice of Rachel Todd, and overhead His stars smiled on them; as they sat together under the old pear-tree.

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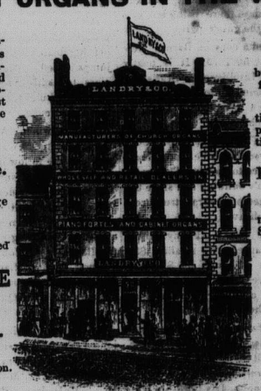

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