

a garden, as within its borders grew almost every variety of vegetable and fruit with which its owner was acquainted. She was also blest with a faithful man servant and hand-maiden, who performed the heaviest of the outdoor and household labour. A row of stately trees near the fence screened the quaint, old-fashioned house from the gaze of passers-by, without depriving it of its daily portion of sunshine. The square, grassy front yard was cut into halves by a straight gravel walk, on either side of which bloomed flowers as sweet and odd and unworldly as their mistress.

When the stage containing her nephew stopped at the gate, Mrs. Pinkney, or rather Ruth Pinkney, as she would best like to be called—for she is a Quakeress—smoothed her thin locks of grey hair and the voluminous folds of her grey dress, neither of which required smoothing in the slightest degree, and, clasping her hands in a delicate, old-fashioned way at her waist, went down to meet her young kinsman with a sweet smile of welcome. She spoke little until the stage had rattled away again, and then, reaching up her two hands to his shoulders, she softly said:

‘Dear boy, I am rejoiced to see thee once more. It was very good of thee to think of paying thy old aunt a visit.’

It is pleasant to be praised for doing what we please, so Philip Kale thought as he kissed the lovely old face uplifted to his, and expressed his pleasure at seeing it again.

‘But how poorly thee is looking,’ continued his aunt, glancing at him keenly over her spectacles. Thee has done wisely to come into the pure country air. We shall see what fresh eggs and new milk will do for thee; we have them both in abundance.’

‘Oh, dear Aunt,’ said Philip, seating himself on the pleasant porch beside her, ‘you have a very squeamish guest on your hands. I’m afraid I can’t digest your nice eggs and milk.

I’d like to, but my stomach is very weak.’

‘Just like thy father,’ murmured Ruth Pinkney. ‘I see thee favours him in many ways. But he used to say that no one could cook for him but sister Ruth; so if it is thy stomach that is disordered, I’ll engage to send thee back in improved health at the end of thy stay.’

Philip gave a trustful sigh of relief, and his hostess rose to show him to his room. It was not very large, but it had three windows; the walls were white-washed, and the floor covered with a sober-hued rag carpet. There were a great many green and climbing plants growing near the light. A single picture relieved the wall, representing broad-hipped maidens with their rustic swains attendant upon a flock of fine looking sheep. As a work of art it was not satisfactory, but it was in sweet and peaceful ‘unity,’ as Ruth Pinkney would have expressed it, with the general effect of the room. Beneath Philip’s armour of defence, his hard and worldly exterior, there beat a sensitive heart, easily impressed by outside influences; and it yielded readily to the brooding spirit of peace that hovered almost in visible form over his aunt’s abode. It gladdened him to think that, sick and unrestful and life-weary as he was, he could yet enter into blessed communion with the deep unworldliness of his surroundings. Looking from his western window he could see the same gnarled old pear trees and rows of gooseberry bushes that had delighted his boyish heart years before. The familiar scene made him almost willing to believe that he was a boy again, instead of a man, grown old, not with years, but with cares and doubts, and a deepening despondency. All his old troubles seemed to resolve themselves into a dark, distant cloud, and to float away out of sight, leaving his sky blue and serenely beautiful. The veriest trifles afforded him pleasure. He was even grateful that his slippers were not