

Choice Literature.

SALEM: A TALE OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

BY D. R. CASTLETON.

CHAPTER VI.—THE PLEDGE OF FRIENDSHIP.

"A place in thy memory, dearest,
Is all that I claim;
To pause and look back when thou hearest
The sound of my name.

"As the young bride remembers her mother,
Whom she loves, though she never may see;
As the sister remembers her brother—
So, dear one! remember thou me."

One fine spring day, shortly after Alice's visit to Nurse's Farm, she had wandered in the early afternoon down to the seashore, and stood awhile idly looking out over the quiet water. Alice, who still retained all the impulsiveness of her childish days, and was still, as then, influenced by every atmospheric change, and sensitively affected by every modification of the many phases of nature (with whom she lived in terms of the closest intimacy), grew buoyant with delight at the perfect beauty of the day, and drew in with every breath of the pure, sweet air a positive enjoyment from the very sense of life, youth and health.

There was not breeze enough to ruffle the surface of the sea; and the calm water lay, softly pulsating at her feet, so still and clear that the intense lapis-lazuli blue of the sky, and its soft garniture of fleecy white clouds, was repeated upon its unbroken surface as clearly as in a mirror.

As Alice stood and gazed, her spirits rising within her at the profuse beauty showered all around her, she experienced that almost universal desire for rapid motion which is often expressed in the common words "wanted to fly;" but as that kind of locomotion was then, as now, out of the question, her next thought was naturally of her little boat, which was moored close by.

In a moment, without pause or reflection, she had embarked and rowed gayly from the shore.

Those who love the water are accustomed to speak in ardent terms of the thrilling enjoyment they find in being upon it; it may be in the exultant sense of superiority that they are thus enabled to ride and rule triumphant over an element so limitless, and of a power so immeasurably vast; for the love of dominion is a deep-seated principle in human nature. But, whatever the cause, Alice enjoyed her trip exceedingly! her spirits rose with the accustomed exercise, from which she had been debarred all the winter; and as she plied her oars vigorously and skillfully, bursts of glad girlish laughter, and snatches of sweet old songs—ballads learned far away in the Scottish home of her infancy—floated after her.

She had meant but to take a short pull, just to practise her arms; but the beauty of the day tempted her on farther and farther, and she scarcely paused until she had reached the shore of Marblehead. She did not land there, but turning toward home, rowed a little way, and then, resigning her oars, she reclined lazily in the boat, suffering it to drift slowly homeward on the incoming tide; while she lay building castles in the air, such as youth and idleness are wont to make pleasure-houses of.

But last a gleam of western brightness recalled her to the fact that the day was spending; and she suddenly remembered that her grandmother might be uneasy at her prolonged and unexplained absence, and, resuming her oars, she rowed steadily and rapidly back to shore.

As Alice rounded the little headland of Salem Neck, she noticed a small canoe, rowed by two persons, which was hovering afar off on the outer verge of the harbour, and apparently making for the same point as herself.

The little skiff was yet too far distant for even Alice's bright eyes to discern who were its occupants; nor did she give the matter more than a passing thought, for boats and canoes were then the more common mode of transportation—almost every householder owned one, and her own little craft had already been hailed by half a dozen of her townspeople in the course of her afternoon's trip. So, wholly occupied with her own busy thoughts and pleasant fancies, she rowed on, making her way, straight to the little landing place, wholly unobserved that the other boat, propelled by its two rowers, had gained rapidly upon her, and was just in her wake.

Springing lightly on shore, Alice proceeded to fasten her little bark at its usual mooring place, heedless of the approach of the stranger, until, as she turned round, she suddenly found herself face to face with a stalwart Indian warrior, decked out in all the imposing pomp of his feathers, arms and war paint.

For one moment Alice was startled, and doubtless most modern young ladies would have shrieked or fainted at such an appalling encounter. But Alice did neither. She was aware of no enmities and consequently felt no fear, and she had grown up in friendly acquaintance with many of the better and most civilized of their Indian neighbours; so, although the colour did indeed deepen on her transparent cheek, it was less from fear than surprise and maiden modesty at finding herself thus suddenly confronted by a young stranger of the other sex; but, before she had time to analyze her own feelings, the young warrior had spoken.

"Are the memories of the pale faces indeed so short," he said, in grave, low tones, which, though sad, awakened in Alice dim, pleasant memories of the past, "that the sister does not remember the brother! that the Water-lily has forgotten the Fir-tree?"

"Oh! Pashemet, Pashemet! my brother! welcome, welcome!" cried Alice impulsively. "Forget? Oh, no! never, never!" and springing forward with extended hands, she placed them both in the hands of the young warrior, and looked up into his face with the sweet, frank, confiding smile of her childhood. "I am so glad! Oh, my brother! I have looked for you so long! I have so longed to see you."

"That is well—that is good!" said the young warrior, gravely, though a flush of gratified feeling rose up even to his dark brow. "The words of the young pale face are good; I, too, have wished to look upon my sweet Water-lily again. Listen to me, my sister—the people of my tribe hold their council fire not far from this, and I was bidden to it. I came—but I have come more than twenty miles out of my way to look once more upon the face of my little sister; and see—I have brought something to show her."

Turning, even while he spoke, toward the little boat which was rocking on the water's brim, Pashemet uttered a low, sweet cry, resembling the note of the wood pigeon, and in quick obedience to his summons, from among the gaudy blankets and glossy furs, which were heaped in gay confusion in one end of the boat, arose a dusky but beautiful young Indian woman. Tall, straight, and supple as a young forest tree, she leaped lightly on shore, and stepping with the free grace of a gazelle to his side, she glided with quiet motion just before him, resting her slight form against his shoulder, and, folding her arms, stood in an attitude of shy yet proud repose; her great, eloquent black eyes, bright as diamonds, stealing quick furtive glances of curiosity and admiration from beneath their drooping, long lashed lids at the fair young daughter of the pale faces.

"Behold, my sister!" Pashemet said, in a voice of inexpressible tenderness, as he took the little dusky hand of his bride in his, and held it out to Alice. "This is the Silver Fawn; she dwells in your brother's wigwam; she makes his nets; she trims his arrows; she weaves his wampum; she is his sunshine. Will not my sister give her a welcome too?"

"Yes, yes, indeed!" said Alice, cordially. "She is my brother's wife—she is my sister, then I will love her;" and, taking the offered hand kindly in hers, she bent forward, and pressed a warm, sisterly kiss upon the smooth, round cheek of the dark but beautiful stranger.

"Good!" said the young husband, laconically. "The words of my sister are pleasant. See!" and as he spoke he took their united hands in both of his own—"See, my sister! we are three, and yet we are but one."

Then, as the two graceful heads bent before him, Pashemet took a small strand of Alice's golden curls, and a strand of his wife's long, raven black locks, and with quick dexterous fingers braided them together, and severing the united braid with his hunting knife, he held it up to Alice, saying, "Behold, my token!" and hid it in the folds of his blanket.

"Yet listen again, my sister," he said. "The Great Spirit has smiled in love upon my little Water-lily, and it has blossomed very fair; but my sister has neither father nor mother to take care of her; but see, Pashemet is a boy no longer—he is a man; he drew himself up proudly as he spoke. "My father is dead. Pashemet is a warrior and a Sagamore now; his arm is strong; his arrows are swift; his young men are brave—they do his bidding. Take this, then," and he slipped a small chain of wampum from the wrist of the Silver Fawn, and held it out to Alice. "If my sister should ever need the aid of Pashemet, let her send him this by a sure hand—by the hand of a Naumkeag—and the heart and arm of her brother shall not fail her. And, now, farewell!"

"Oh, no, no! not farewell. Pashemet, do not go yet—do not leave me yet, my brother. I have so much to say to you. Come up to the house with me—do not go yet. Stay, oh stay!"

"Farewell!" repeated the Indian, in a sweet but inflexible tone. "I can not stay. The day is fading fast; soon night will be upon the waters. We have far to row, and the Silver Fawn is with me. Farewell!" and catching his young bride in his strong arms he sprang into the little canoe without apparent effort, and with one vigorous push sent it whirling from the shore; and while Alice stood, holding the little wampum chain in her hands, feeling that that was the only proof that the whole visit was not a day dream, the little boat had passed round the headland, and was already lost to her sight.

Half an hour later, and Alice came into her grandmother's presence, bright and glowing, and flushed with health, exercise and excitement.

"Why Alice! my bairn," said the grandmother, glancing up with ill-concealed admiration at the sweet, blooming young face that bent caressingly over her. "Ye hae been lang awa', my bonnie lassie. I mistrust ye are gettin' to be jist a ne'er-do-weel gad-about. I hae missed ye sadly; an' where hae ye been the noo?"

"Guess, grannie, guess. I will give you three chances. See if you can guess."

"Na', na', Alice, my lass, I kin na' guess; I am na' guid at the guessin'. Sure ye wad na' hae been to Nurse's Farm agin sa sunn—wad ye?"

"Oh, no, grandmother! Of course I would not go so soon; but I have been quite as far, I think. Ah! you will never guess: I shall have to tell you. I have been out on the water."

"My darlin', an' is that sae?"

"Yes, indeed, I have. I went down to the shore just for a walk, and the water looked so calm and blue, and our boat was so nice (you know Winny cleaned it out for me last week, that I felt as if I must have a little row. You know I have not been out all winter in her, and I meant only to take a little pull, just to limber my arms a little; but the boat was so trim and nice, and the day was so fine and still, and the water was so calm, I went on and rowed across to Marblehead."

"To Marblehead? My certies, tha' wa' a lang pull for the first ane, I'm thinkin'. Are ye na' tired, an' did ye gae ashore at Marblehead?"

"Oh, no! I only wanted the exercise, and I got it. My arms ache—I am so out of practice of late. It is full of time I began again;" and as she spoke Alice pushed up her loose sleeves, and laughingly rubbed her firm, round, white arms.

"But, grandmother, dear, I have a great adventure to tell you. I have seen Pashemet! only think!"

"Seen Pashemet! Lord save us. Is the lassie wad or fua? An' where wad ye hae seen him?"

Then Alice told her little story of the visit, adding,

laughingly, "And, oh, grandmother, grandmother! only think—he is married! Pashemet is married."

"Weel, an' why should na' he be?" And the matron glanced anxiously in her darling's face, as if she half feared to read a disappointment there. "He wa' a braw chiel an' a bonnie laddie; an' I'm gey glad to hear't, giv' he ha' gotten a guid, sensible lassie for his wife."

"Oh, she is a beauty!" said Alice, warmly; "and he seemed so fond of her; and was it not kind in him to bring her here for me to see her? Oh! my dear old friend; Pashemet, my brother. Oh, I am so glad he has got somebody to love him!" And the clear, smiling, truthful blue eyes, looking full into her own, satisfied the grandmother that her unowned fear was misplaced.

"Allie," she said, laughing, "an' do ye mind the day an' ye wa' but an idle wean, an' he fished ye up out o' the water, an' brought ye hame to me on his back?"

"Do I remember it? To be sure I do. I should be ungrateful indeed if I could ever forget it. It was all my own carelessness too. I remember it as well as if it were but yesterday it happened. I reached too far over the boat to get a water-lily I wanted; and I not only went over myself, but I upset the boat. I shall never forget how I went down, down, down—it seemed as if I should never reach the bottom; and then I saw Pashemet coming down after me, like a great fish hawk; and he picked me up, and swam ashore with me. I was thoroughly frightened for once in my life; and then the question was how I should get home, for my clothes were so wet I could not move in them; and at last the great, strong, kind fellow set me on his shoulder, and marched home with me, as if I had been only a wild turkey. Oh! I'll never forget that."

"An' I'll never forgit the droll figure ye made, the twa ye, all drouket an' drippin', an' the varry life half scart out of ye! An' he scart half to death about ye."

"Well! he saved my life—dear, kind, brave old Pashemet! I'll never forget it while that life remains."

"An' noo, Alice, hear to me: I hae had a visitor too, a n-y-lane," said Mistress Campbell.

"You don't say so! Have you, indeed? And who was it? John English's wife?"

"Na', na'! not a bit o' it: mine wa' a young man, too. Ye kinna hae them a' to yersel'—it wa' jist Thomas Preston from the farm. He came to bring the pot o' barbers that Goody Nurse promised ye she'd send, an' a big pot it is. She's a free han' at the givin', I'm thinkin'. An' he brought ye some flowers that his wife sint ye—them yellow daffy-down-dillies ye wa' speakin' about. I jist pu' 'em in a beaker of water out yander, till ye could settle them; I am nae hand at it, ye ken."

"How kind they are. I never saw such people; they remember every thing, and seem to love to give."

"I'd think sae indeed! an' there's mair yet. Goody Nurse sint her love to ye, an' bid him say ye wa' pleased wi' her fowl; an' she'd a rooster an' three hens for ye, if ye could manage to fix a place to keep them in, and I said I wa' thinkin' ye could."

"My goodness! find a place for them? I guess I will, if they have to roost in my own chamber. I guess Winny and I can fix up a coop for them somewhere—and won't it be splendid? Oh! such dear little, fluffy yellow chicks as she had. Why, there's na end to the pleasure I'll have in them. Dear, kind, generous old Goody! Is she not just as good and kind as she can be?"

"Whist! Alice, whist! or I'll be gettin' half jealous o' her myself."

"You have no need to be," said the girl, fondly kissing her. "But I do think she is too kind to me."

"She is unco' generous, surely; an' sae I telled Goodman Preston, myself." "She ha' a free han' at the givin'," quo l. "Deed ha' she," says she. "I dinna think," he says, "the Lord ever made a better or kinder woman than Mother Nurse. An' as to givin', he says, 'Why, we say at hame she'd give awa' the varry ears fra' her head, gin they wad kin off, an' anybody wanted them.'"

"I almost think she would," said Alice, laughing. "But is he not pleasant? I am sorry I missed him."

"Varry pleasant—an' unco' nice young mon. I wanted him to hide here ye kin hame, but he said he could na'. He had business in the toon, he said, an' he must awa'. But he sat an' hour or so, I thinks, an' he telled me mair about the terrible doin's at the village. Hey, zis! but it's jist awfu'!"

"What did he tell you about it, grandmother? Do tell me what he said."

"Oh! Lord save us! de says it's dreadfu'. He ha' beed to see the childer, an' he says he believes in them, though most of the family o'er at the Farm doubt them. But he says they hae na' been to see them, an' they kinna be judge. He says they wi' fa' to the floor, as if they were deed, jist; an' then they wi' hae sich awfu' fits. They wi' foam an' bleed at the mou', an' they wi' be a knotted up, as it were; an' whiles their han's are clenched sae tight, nae ane kin open them; an' other whiles they are open an' stretched out sae stiff naebody kin bend them: an' he says it's jist grursom an' awfu' to hear how they'll groan an' screech. An' sometime they'll be struck wi' blindness a' o' a sudden, an' grope about, an' their eyes wide open too. An' again they'll cry out they are tormentin'; that some ane is stabbin' them wi' pins, or bitin', or pinchin', or chokin' them; an' they'll gasp for breith, maybe, an' turn black in the face, an' ye'd say they wa' decein' jist. Oh! Lord's sake! it wa' jist dreadfu' to hear him tellin' it, let alone seein' it. And the folks say they mair be bewitched."

"And do you believe they are, grannie?"

"Gude sake! an' how should I ken? I hae na seen them, na mair than yersel'."

"But if they are bewitched, grannie, who do they think it is that bewitches them?"

"Ah! tha' is what everybody is spierin' at them to tell who it is."

"But surely they must know; if any one pinches them, or sticks pins into them, they must know who does it."

"True for ye, Alice! I put it to him myself that way; an' he said there were two persons who were suspectit; twa who they hae named—an' who do ye think is ane o' them?"