

He softened details as much as truth would allow, and strove not to excite Mr. Welles. With all his care the old man resented it deeply that Clarence was not warmly welcomed by the Graces, and he alternately praised the daughter for constancy and sneered at the parents for being "purse-proud."

It was a hard time for poor Aunt Hannah. Under the dust of years there was in her heart a store of sentiment. Fifty years ago runaway matches were more common, and some ended very happily. She dared not openly condone Clarence's action, but she thought of many mitigating circumstances; some purely imaginative. She fancied Louise unhappy at home and tyrannized over by a hard, cold father. In reality Miss Grace had never had an ungratified whim, from the childish days when she used to throw her French candies in the gutter if the colors did not please her, to the day she met Clarence at a german. Aunt Hannah was alternately fearful their home would be a little dull for her, and then secretly glad of another woman in the house. She reasoned away her fears by reflecting that John and Clarence were young enough to make Louise contented. She herself would entertain her with tales of the Welleses for generations. Who could fail to be interested? Did not Elizabeth Hogarth enjoy hearing of Madame Prue Welles, the beauty of Washington's days, of witty Mistress Mildred Welles, etc., etc.? Clarence's wife might find their present way of living very simple, but there would be no doubt to her as to Aunt Hannah's great moral support in looking over the board of ancient silver, the quaint china, and stores of fine linen. To say nothing of the fact that these relics were to be sometime equally divided between John and her husband. Still Aunt Hannah grew very weary in the next two or three days. Stupid Sally could not be of much help in fitting out the bride's apartment. The old lady's little feet toiled up and down stairs time without number before everything in the chosen room was dainty enough to suit her fastidious taste, from the lavender-scented linen, hemstitched in her girlhood, to the marvellous pin-cushion embroidered for Clarence's mother, and thought too fine for human nature's daily use. She was moved, moreover, to make the festive part of her preparations on the sly. She remembered that in the past when Clarence had been beyond measure naughty,

John never saw why he must be given twice as many jam tarts as usual very soon after. It was clear to her mind, though difficult to explain, and after all John never took a tart from him. We might add that Clarence never thought to offer him one.

CHAPTER VI.

CLARENCE'S BRIDE.

As the winter went on, Bess ceased almost entirely to go into the city for her lessons. The weather was often unpleasant. Mr. Welles had to come out to Summerwild for young Sanford; and last, but not least, Elizabeth fancied the even tenor of the Welles family life was disturbed in these days. David Fenton had learned from Aunt Hannah of Clarence's marriage, and had told Elizabeth.

One day, about a month after that event, Bess received her first letter from Aunt Hannah, and found it just such an epistle as one would think characteristic. Her "calla had four blossoms"; the canary had been "distressedly ill"; her brother was quite comfortable; she read aloud to him now every day. They were interested in Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia (Joseph liked old books), and when he felt serious she read her favorite, Thomas a Kempis. Next to the Bible that book was best beloved. It had done her "much good lately, for she had found what the old saint said especially true, that 'when but a small adversity befalleth us, we are too quickly dejected, and turn ourselves to human consolations.'" She did not mention any "small adversity" in detail, but early in her letter said that their dear Clarence's wife was a most beautiful creature, and she was desirous that Elizabeth should meet her. Then appeared the purport of the letter. She invited Bess to come for a little visit, arriving one afternoon and staying at least until late the following day. She could, if she chose, arrange to have her regular lesson during the time. Bess was pleased. She had plenty of girl friends in New York, many of them as brilliant, no doubt, as Clarence's bride, nevertheless Bess was curious to see Mrs. Louise Welles. She promptly accepted Miss Welles' invitation, and started for New York at the appointed time.

* Sally, who now knew Bess, grinned to the entire capacity of her by no means contracted mouth and announced on