

## THE KINGDOM OF THE CHILD.

Out of the common daylight of the world  
I wandered forth into a golden dawn.  
A buoyant and a brilliant atmosphere,  
In which all language had a sweeter sound.  
All faces shone, and salutations glad  
Of love and cheer flew fast from lip to lip.  
Then, as the light glew strong upon the heights,  
Bell answered bell with jubilant refrain.  
Until the hills the dying echoes caught,  
And wafted upward even to heaven itself.  
And then there was a silence and great peace,  
While in the air above me and around  
A whisper rose that grew into a song—  
"Enter the happy kingdom of the Child!"

And then a miracle befell my sight,  
With eyes no longer hidden I beheld  
A realm immeasurable, a golden zone  
That like a ring of flame shone round the world.  
And everywhere the joy was in the air,  
Wreaths bloomed on shrine and window, and so sweet  
The incense rose from every heart and home  
It seemed a bright new world within the old,  
A thousand summers mingled into one,  
And still the burden of a song went on,  
Too silver-sweet for any human voice—  
"This day began the kingdom of the Child."

"Oh, what," I cried, "is lord of this fair realm?  
Why do all hearts leap up with victor's joy?  
I see no lofty forts, no steel-clad ranks,  
Nor signs of martial conquest. Can he be  
A warrior and a king of high renown  
Whose wide dominions thus unguarded lie?"  
The answer came: "By mightier force than arms  
Our monarch has his royal honor proved.  
His truth is keener than a thousand swords,  
His purity so dazzling that the hosts  
Of unclean error flee before the sight,  
And in the fervid summer of his love  
The superstitions of the elder world,  
Like vapors of the sunrise, disappear.  
Look now upon the train of vanquished kings  
Who bow before the sceptre of the child!"

Then down the borders of this shining land  
There passed a gloomy train, and by their front  
Majestic, awful even in their fall,  
I knew them not as warriors, but as gods—  
Osiris, dear to Egypt's ancient shrines,  
And Isis, the world-mother, at his side,  
Whose single tear renewed the wasted Nile;  
They too, the bright Olympian deities,  
With echoes of remembered music still  
Upon their lips, regretfully passed by:  
And the stern monarchs of the icy North—  
Odin, a wanderer from the fallen throne  
Of old Valhalla, and the hoary Thor,  
No longer glorying in his strong right hand,  
And as they passed, the wilderness gave up  
Its tawny gods, the spirits of the storms,  
The mountains, and the precipices wild,  
And all walked heavily, with bowed head,  
Save only Isis, in whose mourning eyes  
I see a wistful yearning for the Child."

As these strange shadows of the fallen faiths  
Slowly departed, over all the sky  
A soft, serene illumination grew,  
A rosy and ineffable morning light:  
And forth from cot and bower and palace came  
Myriads of little children, bounding forth,  
With lilies-of-the-valley in their hands,  
And fragrant branches of the forest green.  
These went before, and with them followed on  
An army with white banners borne aloft,  
On which in shining letters was inscribed,  
The legend beautiful, "Good-will to men."  
"These are his guards and warriors," said the voice:  
"See how the way-side blooms beneath their feet!"  
Then I, in haste of sudden ecstasy,  
Said to the voiceless spirit at my side,  
"If eyes can bear such splendor, let me look  
Upon the face of him you call the Child."

Then, like a cloud, the pageant disappeared,  
And a rare Orient landscape was unveiled:  
Wide plains in moonlight slumber, olive boughs  
Rocking beneath the nests of wakeful birds,  
And, lighted by one radiant morning star,  
The straw-thatched stable of a humble inn.  
There in a manner, warm with breath of kine,  
Behold! the mystery of all mysteries,  
The joy in sorrow and the light in gloom,  
Heaven in earth's lowliness, God in the Child!

No crown he wore, but round his peaceful brow  
An aureole shone, from whence unnumbered rays  
Floated away to crown less worthy heads.  
His hand no sceptre clasped, but fast and far  
The beams of morning as his herald's rode  
To bear the Christmas gladness to the world.  
And fast and far his deeper angel sped,  
Blessing the little children and the poor  
With the best intercession of his perfect love:  
And sorrow bowed, and mourning lips were still,  
And evil hid itself and was afraid.  
Oh, then with heart at rest I heard again  
The voice, that swelled and grew into a song:  
"This day, till time shall end, from shore to shore,  
Shall come the blessed kingdom of the child!"

## UNDER MEETING BRANCHES.

(Concluded.)

"You are very well acquainted with Floy, I suppose," Helen said, as he helped her to cross a stony brook which she was quite in the habit of springing over alone.

"Yes, I have met Miss Gay very often," was the answer, so calmly given that Helen decided that if he was an ardent lover, his feelings were wonderfully well controlled.

"She has been very sick," she volunteered.

"Yes; but she is looking better than I expected to find her, from what I have heard."

"He was in the habit of hearing about her. I thought so," said Helen to herself.

"You were about to speak?" said Mr. Maxwell, stopping.

"I was going to speak of the beautiful ring you wear," she said quickly, jumping at the first thought which occurred to her. "It looks like a lady's ring."

"But it is not, yet," he answered, looking down at the diamond on his finger.

"Not yet?"

"No, but it will be some day. The stone belonged to my mother, and years ago, in her last sickness, she gave it to me. 'You will find some one dearer than yourself some day,' she said, 'and when you do, if she is a woman I could love, give her this.' I do not much like jewelry for a man, but I had the stone set in a ring,

and have been wearing it *pro tem.*, till its rightful owner claims it."

"She will not claim it unoffered," said Helen, thinking the topic a very safe one with another girl's lover.

"She will not have to," Mr. Maxwell said earnestly. "If the woman God has made for me will have me, she shall have this trifle, too. I only hope that I shall know her when I see her, that woman my mother would have loved."

He turned away as he finished, as if to hide some feeling too plainly written on his face, and Helen was silent, wondering in her thoughts how Floy could have refused the love of such a man. She was puzzled, too, for he did not speak as if he already loved the woman the ring was waiting for. They walked on a few moments in silence. Then she spoke with sudden frankness.

"Mr. Maxwell. You do not seem like a man who would take a girl at the cost of her own happiness."

"Can any one—can you—think me capable of such a wrong?"

There was honest indignation in his voice, and Helen, obeying an impulse, went on courageously, telling him all she knew of Floy, and the complication which had arisen and wrecked her hopes and health.

Perhaps to make it easier for her to speak, perhaps to conceal some feeling, he covered his face with his hands as she talked, and she wondered, pityingly, if she was cruelly wounding him. But she would not let the opportunity escape of helping Floy, so she spared no details; although it cost her much to tell a man so plainly of the evil he had helped to work.

"I am quite sure, and so is Aunt Cyn," she said, in conclusion, "that Mr. Gay would long ago have given up his opposition to Mr. Martyn if he had not been so determined in your favor."

"Thank you, a thousand times." And the hands, extended to grasp hers warmly and gratefully, were withdrawn from a face which gave no indication of having gone through any struggle. "You have made me your debtor for life."

His admiration of her candor was so emphatic that Helen's long lashes fell upon her flushed cheeks, and her voice faltered a little as she said,

"Then you are not angry with me for being so frank?"

"Angry?" There was a world of expression in his tone.

"But," he continued, "I must say a word in my own defence. Mr. Gay and my father long ago had a scheme for uniting their families in the only way possible. I knew something of their wishes, and as I would gladly please my poor old father, who hasn't too much comfort in life, I called frequently at Mr. Gay's after I came on to New York, and finding his daughter remarkably pretty and attractive, I really did pay her rather constant attention; but I am positive that I never was in love with her. Now this seems a mean story to tell, and I assure you nothing would make me tell it but the desire to right myself in your eyes."

"Your confidence shall be sacredly kept," murmured Helen.

"I know that, but I don't know how to say what I have to say, without appearing like a conceited puppy. Don't look at me, please. I think on most subjects I could drink inspiration from your eyes, but not on this. So, listen, but don't look. One day the old fellow—Mr. Gay, I should say—joined me as we came out of church, and actually thanked me, in his most affable manner, for falling in with the views of my elders, and congratulated me gracefully on having won his daughter's heart. I supposed I had, as he said so, and I began to recall several confirmatory passages in our short acquaintance. At least I considered them as corroborative testimony, although I see now that all Miss Gay's kindness of manner sprang from her good-nature."

"Floy has charming manners when she is like herself," said her friend.

"So she has, and I was an egregious ass to mistake her meaning."

"I wish you wouldn't call yourself names."

"Please let me, it's such a relief. It is so humiliating to confess that I had the vanity to think that a lady cared more for me than I did for her. But really, I was not glad of it, I will say that for myself."

"But you were willing to sacrifice yourself?"

"Oh, don't put it in that way, please. I knew she was a lovely girl; it would certainly be no hardship to spend life with one like her; and I knew I had been devoted enough to warrant her supposing, if she felt inclined, that my heart was hers. So I did not offer any explanation to Mr. Gay, but passively accepted his congratulations, thinking that perhaps at some later time an opportunity to set things right might come."

"But it was doing Floy an injustice, if you did not love her," said Helen, still feeling strongly for her friend.

"It was indeed, but I did not see how I could give her the mortification of feeling that her affection was unrequited. I can tell you I walked back to the Brunswick in an awful state of mind that Sunday. When I got in, the clerk handed me a telegram from home. My father was very sick again and wanted me. I started that night, enclosing the despatch in a hurried note to Floy, explanatory of my not being able to spend the evening with her, as I had promised. I have never seen her since till to-day, although I called many times early in the sum-

mer. Mr. Gay said she was sick, but has never spoken of any cause beyond constitutional debility."

"And you have never had any explanation with him since that Sunday?"

"No. I have been such a coward that as long as the subject rested I hated to agitate it."

"I don't wonder, but what about Mr. Martyn?"

"Yes, what about him, sure enough? You say Floy is fond of him. I hope she is if he cares for her. I never saw him at her house."

"No, I dare say not, for he does not live in town. Aunt Cyn says he is a tutor at Harvard."

"I suppose that implies want of fortune, and is Mr. Gay weak enough to make that an objection?"

"Oh, no. I don't believe he minds that. It's being the son of Mr. Gay's old enemy that stands in the young man's way. Even that, as I say, might have been forgiven for Floy's sake if your pretensions had not been so agreeable to the old gentleman's feelings."

"I wish I knew Martyn," said Mr. Maxwell.

"Stop a minute, I have an idea."

"Cherish it," said Helen, roguishly.

"No, I won't. I'll act on it immediately. There's a club of walkers, all Harvard men, stopping a few miles below."

"Really?"

"Yes, and I have two cousins in the party. They all graduated three years ago and agreed to get up a walking tour in memory of their old tramps. I'll see them to-day. Some of them must know Martyn."

"And you will get him up here," said Helen, jumping at the conclusion, and clapping her pretty hands with joy.

"I will indeed, if the thing is possible," said Mr. Maxwell, fervently.

He had good news for Helen when he took the little carrier's place, and handed her the mail, the next morning when she rowed across the lake as usual. Not only did the Harvard men know Wilder Martyn, who was one of their own class, but they were expecting him to join them at once. He had given up his tutorship, which was never intended for a permanency, and, with two friends, was bicycling through the country.

"The fellows camped in the valley, near the road, on purpose to accommodate the wheelmen," he explained.

"We must get him up here," said Helen, "but we must take Aunt Cyn in our council."

"But you are not going to tell her—"

"Anything you would not wish her to know," answered Helen, understanding his unspoken thought.

Aunt Cynthia was entirely in favor of bringing Mr. Martyn to call on Floy. As Mr. Gay had summoned his man, they were justified in playing the same card.

"But he can't get over the rocks on one of them velocipedes, or bicycles, whichever you call 'em," she said, dubiously.

"No, Aunt Cyn, but I don't suppose he is so wedded to it that he wouldn't get off for Floy's sake and come up the mountain on foot like the rest of us."

"Well, I shan't make no secret of it to James. If you're sure the young man's comin', I shall just tell him so. He can't forbid a person's comin' into the same woods with him, and he can't lock the doors on Florence, 'cause there ain't no doors, so I don't see as he can help himself no way."

That it was an honest way of dealing with the matter they all agreed, but Helen and Mr. Maxwell both felt that it would be premature, and, after great urging, the old lady consented to let the plot unravel itself.

A day or two later Helen begged so hard for Floy's company in the boat that the girl was actually forced to consent. She had been better, stronger, and more like herself for a few days, and the short walk to the water did not fatigue her as it had done before. In a quiet way she even seemed to enjoy floating on the still water, idly watching the sparkling spray as Helen's oars dipped with slow regularity.

"Floy, darling," Helen said at last, after a long silence, "do you think you are strong enough to see a stranger?"

"Mr. Maxwell?" questioned Floy, not even turning her head toward the shore they were nearing.

"No, Floy; some one else. Look, won't you, dearest! He is waiting so eagerly for a look."

She turned. The man who stood by Mr. Maxwell's side, his blond head uncovered and his brown eyes shining with happy expectancy, made a step forward with arms stretched toward her, as if, even at a distance, he would claim her and clasp her to his heart. It was, as Aunt Cynthia would have put it quaintly, Mr. Right himself.

Floy flushed and trembled, then turned so deathly white that Helen feared the experiment was going to kill her, but the color came back in a moment and she half rose in her seat. Then, with a long, quivering sigh that was half a sob, she sank back, saying—

"Oh, it must not be! Take me back, Helen. I have promised papa not to see Wilder without his consent. Oh, take me back!"

But it was too late. The stranger, who did not wait for an introduction to Helen, had seized the bow of the boat she had not ceased to send toward the shore, and pulled it in. Fortunately for Helen Mr. Maxwell possessed enough presence of mind to assist her to step out, and in a moment, before Floy had time to remonstrate, Mr. Martyn was seated in front of her, holding

her hands and feasting his eyes upon the dear face which love for him had thinned and paled.

Floy would not land, and rather than be *de trop*, Mr. Maxwell and Helen considerably went on a search for beech-nuts, leaving the reunited to tell and tell again the misery separation had caused to each. But it would not do to tarry long, for Mr. Gay was hungering and thirsting for his daily mail. So, as Floy could not climb to the encampment alone and the boat's capacity being extremely limited, Wilder Martyn rowed her across, and after giving his assistance up the mountain, returned to the pair who were awaiting him with wonderful patience.

Mr. Maxwell had attached himself to the Harvard party, so, after taking Helen over the lake, he rowed back to Mr. Martyn, and walked with him to their camp near the old coach-road.

When Helen entered the tent, Aunt Cynthia was administering restoratives to Floy, who seemed to have just revived from a fainting turn, and Mr. Gay looked like a man whom apoplexy had made its prey. His face was dark and swollen, and his hands were clutching at his collar.

"Oh, go to Mr. Gay, Aunt Cyn," she exclaimed. "He looks as if he was going to die. I'll take care of Floy."

It was several minutes before she could understand the situation, but Mr. Gay, after Aunt Cyn's wet towels and other applications to his head had begun to take effect, informed her excitedly that he was a beggar! Like many another good business man whose wisdom deserts him in his riper years, he had invested the bulk of his fortune in some attractive speculation, which letters and papers just received had informed him was doing just as such things generally do, and his whole fortune was imperiled.

"I could save nearly everything," he shouted, as if they were all deaf,—"everything, if I could send a despatch; but, confound this place,—yes, confound it, it's twenty miles from a telegraph station!"

"Send James on horseback," was Helen's prompt suggestion.

"Where are you going to get a horse?" roared Mr. Gay. "and if we had a horse it would take a day to get there, over the mountains, and my broker leaves town every day at three. He lives at Montclair."

"Write the despatch instantly," said Helen, struck by a sudden happy thought, "and give it to me."

"What's the use?"

"Don't ask, but do it instantly," said she, hastily passing him pen, ink, and paper.

He obeyed her in a sort of half-stupid way, and having glanced at the despatch to see if it was addressed, she hastily slipped it into an envelope and ran off like the wind, with the message in her hand, leaving the party in speechless wonder at her behaviour.

They were even more astonished when she came back flushed and triumphant, declaring that the telegram was on its way. She refused to explain, but promised Mr. Gay so solemnly that it should be in his broker's hands that day that he could not help gathering some hope from her words.

Floy had handed her father the mail with such animation in her manner and such an altered look in her face, that he bent over and kissed her fondly, telling her she looked like his own child again.

"It is because I have seen Wilder, papa. He is here," Floy had said, too truthful to deceive him.

Then such a storm of anger had arisen that poor Floy sank helplessly before her father's wrath. Aunt Cyn had flown indignantly to the rescue, and partly to escape from her bitter words of reproach, Mr. Gay busied himself with his newly-received mail matter, and had come upon the exciting news which dwarfed all other troubles into insignificant trifles. This was the account which Aunt Cynthia gave to Helen in return for the whispered explanation she made of the telegram episode.

The autumn moon was round and radiant that glorious night, and the three expectant women, too nervous to occupy themselves as usual, in the cosy quarters prepared for their evening hours, brought their wraps and sat under the trees in the dry, bland air. All day there had been a breeze, but now the stillness was perfect. There was very little conversation between them, for all were listening. At last the distant sound of voices and crackling branches reached their ears, and soon, guided by the fire which Mark had kept burning, Mr. Maxwell brought Wilder Martyn to them.

Helen sprang to meet them. "Were you successful?" she cried.

"Yes," said Mr. Martyn. "The despatch went off in time."

"You are sure?"

"Positive, for I waited for an acknowledgment that it was received. And here it is," holding up a telegram.

"Young man!" said Aunt Cynthia, solemnly.

"Oh, excuse me," interrupted Helen. "I never thought to introduce you. Mr. Martyn, Miss Steel."

"Never mind giving me an introduction," said the spinster. "I know who he is, and it ain't no matter who I am. I only want to tell him that if he's brought a telegraph about that business of James's, it's about the best thing he ever did for himself, and he'd best just hand it to James himself."

Floy and Aunt Cyn led the way into the tent, where Mr. Gay, with his elbows on the table and his hands clasping his temples, looked like despair itself.