

eyes, and, dear good fellow that he was, rejoiced in his heart.

So it befell that three days later a wagon containing our invalid and his self-constituted nurse drove slowly up the long hill, on top of which stands the little village of Burnet. The pink glow of a summer sunset still lay in the west. Soft purple flushes were dying out on the higher mountains; with each breath of the elastic air Ned seemed to revive into life and interest.

Farmer Dean, who drove the wagon, talked steadily on as they climbed the hill. He was fond of reading, and the chance to interchange views with a couple of city men—doubtless addicted to learning, like himself—was too attractive to be lost. So he let the horses go slow, and led the conversation into a deep and improving channel, namely, the "Conquest of Mexico," which instructive work had beguiled many long and snowy days during the past winter.

"They was a cruel race, them Spanish," he ended, as they crested the hill. "Promising the Inca's life if only he'd give Pizarro so many bars of gold, and then a-burnin' of him at a slow fire, after all. It's a sort of thing to bring retribution down on a nation, ain't it? And it's done it too, I guess."

"So it has," replied Perry, politely, desirous of making himself agreeable, but a little misty on the subject of the "Inca's" fate. As for Ned, he was gazing off over the blue far-away distance with a sort of enchanted look in his thin face. After those dull weeks spent between four dull walls, what was it not to see such tints, such width of view—to smell such air?

"I reckon you're pretty well tired," remarked the farmer, sympathizingly, as he checked his horses before the piazza of the white, green-blinded house. Two or three children sat there, and a lady with a book in her lap, at sight of whom Ned, getting out of the wagon gave a frown of surprise, and made a little sound expressive of annoyance. He raised his hat formally.

"What was it?" asked Perry, as they mounted the stairs.

"Oh, nothing," pettishly; "only I did hope to get away from acquaintances up here, and was not prepared to be confronted by Miss Pearl before I was fairly up the steps."

"Miss Pearl! What! daughter of that old cashier at the Bank of Amity, who died two years ago? Why, now I think of it, it's the woman Vance used to rave about. So she's up here! 'Aunt,' forsooth! Ho! ho! I wondered a little over Master Tom's burst of avuncular enthusiasm. Well, cheer up, old fellow! You needn't see any thing of Miss Pearl unless you like, though, from the glimpse I had, I should say it wouldn't be such a bad thing. Not pretty, to be sure, but a nice sort of face."

"She's well enough," tumbling impatiently on to the sofa, "only not what I fancy—that's all. Strong-minded, I suspect, and up in literary matters; the sort of woman who opens conversation by asking if you have read that delightful work of Darwin's, and what you think about protoplasm. I haven't met her more than twice, but I shun that kind instinctively. By Jove, what a pleasant room! I ain't it, now?"

He might well say so. All the freshness of summer seem to rest over the large square apartment, with its cool, matted floor, oak-painted furniture, and waving curtains of white dimity. Snowy napkins covered the tables. A gay rug of home manufacture lay beside the bed, over the foot of which was a folded scarlet blanket. Two or three sticks of hickory cracked in the fire-place, upheld by old-fashioned fire-dogs with brass knobs. On the shelf above stood a wine-glass full of sweet-peas, with a single crimson rose, and from a pine bracket in the corner uprose a tall spreading bunch of fresh green ferns and oak leaves.

"Stunning!" cried Perry, as he turned admiringly from side to side. "A kind of a what-d'ye-call-it—artistic air—hasn't it? This farmer's wife must be a prodigy."

And he reiterated the remark as the supper tray came in. Such a supper! Fresh raspberries, cream, bread like snow, a crisp sweet-bread, brown and very.

"I declare on my soul, I believe the hen is still clucking over this egg!" he said, as he chipped a white shell. "You've fallen on your feet, Ned." And what with the unwonted relish of food, the sweet air, the peaceful contentment of the pleasant "wing chamber," that momentary grievance of Miss Pearl's presence was forgotten by both.

Meantime, on the other side of the partition wall, Marion Pearl was hushing her little niece to sleep. Every corner of the room in which she sat bore tokens of that refining taste whose least touch beautifies. Long tendrils of pine wreathed the looking-glass and framed the photographs on the walls. Fresh flowers were on the shelf, the table; from a box outside the window came the breath of blossoming magnolia. Marion was one of those women who can not spend a day even in any apartment without in some way impressing her individuality upon it. It was almost an unconscious act, she never reasoned over it. A touch here, a touch there, a little adjustment of simple materials, and the charm wrought itself out. The gracefulness of her nature communicated a sort of inevitable grace to its outward surroundings. Her room "always looked like her," said admiring intimates, as they sought in vain to catch the secret and produce the same effect with the same appliances. It was like her. It was her soul.

"A fair, still house, well kept,"

creeping naturally a habitant fair and still as

itself. And in this creation there was peace and subtle pleasure. She had arranged the ferns and the little nosegay that afternoon in Ned Fisher's room almost without a thought of the coming occupant, just for the satisfaction it gave her own eyes. True, she recollected that Mr. Fisher had been ill; that made it natural as well as pleasant to adorn for him a little; but she would have done it as readily for a stranger or a man of seventy.

Ned heard her voice a little later, when Perry, going down stairs to supper, left him alone. She was singing a low nursery song to the half-asleep child. He did not know whose voice it was, but it fell soothingly on his ear, and presently lulled him to dreamless rest. And so the Burnet experiment was successfully inaugurated.

Mr. Fisher, sitting on the stately heights of his preconceived opinion and determined indifference, found it quite easy to "see nothing of Miss Pearl." She was a busy woman, though no woman ever did her business more quietly than she. Those three summer months alone, of all the year, were her own, to do as she liked with. She held them as precious treasure, and, except for such interruptions as duty or kindness imposed, had no idea of spending them on outsiders. Each moment of each day was filled up beforehand in her mind; it was never easy to find or to keep her. At first Ned considered this agreeable—almost Providential. There was no danger of his being bored, he perceived. But by-and-by Perry went back to town, and he caught himself wishing that Miss Pearl could be spoken to a little oftener. He heard the rustle of her dress on the stairs, or her voice, as she played with the child. Once—he had just got down stairs for the first time, and was sitting, white and a little faint, on the piazza, when she came by, her arms heaved with wild clematis, the little niece trotting beside her—she caught his wistful look in passing, and stopping, looped a long flowering spray to the arm of his chair, smiled, and after a few pleasant words went indoors. In two or three minutes Mrs. Dean appeared with an egg beaten up in milk and wine. "It had just popped into her head," she said. Ned was no coxcomb, but somehow he couldn't help connecting Miss Pearl with this timely refreshment. The idea pleased him. For the first time he had noticed the expression of her eyes, and the peculiarly sweet smile which lighted up with beauty an otherwise plain face. After this he fell into the habit of watching from his window each day to see her set off for the woods. Marion always spent all mornings, save rainy ones, in the woods. Sometimes her little niece was perched on her shoulder, while the other hand carried color box or portfolio. It was pretty to see these inseparable friends, the big Marion and the small. Little Marion never disturbed her aunt, was never in the way. Acorns, toad-stools, wild flowers, were her playthings. She would amuse herself all day long, while Aunt Marion, sitting under a tree, made water-color sketches, and wrote letters or children's stories, and careful little papers on domestic and social topics, for some magazine. She was not a genius, but her work was graceful and easy, and it commanded a fair price—no unimportant thing in a family as large and as slenderly provided for as the Pearls.

At noon the pair would come back, rosy, laughing, laden with wood treasures of all sorts. Lying on his sofa, Ned would hear the child's fresh laughter, and Marion's low tones replying. At dusk the line of light under the separating door was a sort of magnet from which he found it impossible to turn his eyes. Little as she guessed it, Marion's cradle-song was sung each night to a second pair of ears. Long after it ended the soft cooling air would ring through Ned's fancy:

"Sleep, baby, sleep,

Thy father is counting his sheep;

Thy mother is shaking the dream-land tree,

And down drops a little dream for thee—

Sleep, baby, sleep."

Did a little dream "drop down" from the lullaby into the older and wide-awake ears? Who shall tell?

Idleness is at the root of many things not distinctly evil. It is a dangerous pastime for a man to get into the way of watching a woman day after day, and in all her comings and goings, even if it be from inertia, and the *désœuvrement*. After following Miss Pearl thus with his thoughts for two or three weeks, it was an easy and inevitable next step for Ned to follow her bodily when returning strength set him free so to do. Marion's walks, hitherto inviolate from interruption, began to be haunted by a tall, thin shadow in flapping Panama hat. She shifted her ground, tried new wood nooks, but the result was the same. Some instinct seemed always to take Mr. Fisher in the same direction. It was always a "happening," with a little preface of apology; but once there, what was she to do? It was not easy to refuse welcome to an apparition whose face showed still the pallor of such recent illness. Suffering, weakness, were pleas to which Marion's sweet nature instinctively opened. And, sooth to say, the apparition was not a disagreeable one. Ned could be a charming fellow when he liked, and he very decidedly liked now. So morning after morning, when the Dean dinner-bell sounded its first note, Mr. Fisher and Miss Pearl, much to the delectation of their fellow-boarders, were seen returning from the woods in company, Ned carrying books and shawls, or sometimes the little Marion, who had grown immensely fond of him. There was quite a family air about the party. No wonder the idlers on the piazza smiled, and

the knowing ones whispered. Marion did not see the smiles; she was too simple and straightforward to suspect gossip. And for Ned, so secure did he feel in his citadel that he would have scouted indignantly the sentimental interpretation of these interviews. Miss Pearl was pleasant company, and he had unoccupied time on his hands. That was all!

But a change came over this charming security. One night Ned was suddenly waked by hands beating on his door, and a voice—Marion's voice—calling in agonized tones.

"What is it?" he cried, striking a light.

"Oh, Mr. Fisher, my little Marion is so very ill! Will you call Mrs. Dean and send Mr. Dean for the doctor as soon as possible? I dare not leave her, or I would not disturb you."

"Please don't say that!" called out Ned, broad awake by this time, and half-dressed. In another minute he was down stairs, and hurrying through the long entry, was pounding on Mrs. Dean's door.

"Oh, the poor little lamb!" cried the worthy dame, as she comprehended the alarm. "It's croup, no doubt. She's had it once before, real bad. But whatever shall I do? Miss Pearl don't know it, but Jebell is over for the night to Tuxbury, attending the cattle fair. We'll have to wake up Joshua; but he's such a boy to sleep, it'd take half an hour, I'm afraid."

"Where does the doctor live?"

"Most down the hill—next to the meeting-house, you know. Oh, mercy, Mr. Fisher, you ain't thinking of going! I can't let you! You ain't fit! Land's sake! he didn't hear me—he's off!"

So he was—hurrying down the long road at the top of his speed. Mrs. Dean looked after him with a half-muttered "Is't 't 't 't!" Then throwing some wood on the hastily raked-out embers, and hanging on a kettle of water to heat, she hurried up stairs.

Life and death fought for mastery that night in the old farm-house. Ned Fisher, returning with the doctor, found himself, permitted or not permitted, working with the others over the small convulsed form, carrying palls, lifting, heating flannels at the kitchen fire. Marion's white face, as she held the child in her arms, was full of an agony of appeal, but she never lost her self-control. "My darling! my darling! flower of my life!" Ned heard her murmur once, in a tone of irrepressible anguish; but every direction, every remedy, was applied with instant and rapid intelligence. He never forgot that sight—the fair, tasteful room, orderly in spite of momentary confusion, the sick child, and the woman he loved bending with tenderness so ineffable, with grief so speechless, over the little burden in her lap.

The woman he loved! Yes, he knew it now. As the morning dawned Mrs. Dean lifted the child from Marion's lap and laid her in the bed. She seemed sleeping or half-unconscious. The doctor leaned over, felt the hands, the head, listened to the pulse, and then raising himself, looked at Miss Pearl with a smile of relief.

"She'll do now," he said. "Let her sleep as long as possible."

Nobody moved for a moment. Marion buried her face in the pillow. There were no words to express her joy; but she held out her hand, and as Ned clasped it his whole heart seemed to go into the pressure. Was she conscious of it or no? He could not tell.

A midnight run of two miles is certainly not an experiment to be recommended to a half-cured convalescent; but in this case it did no harm. Little Marion lived. In another week she was up again, the shadow of her rosy self, but getting well. The dark sleepless circles round Miss Pearl's eyes grew less; all things seemed brightening, when lo! a dreadful and sudden cloud fell. Marion was summoned home.

"Her ma's an anxious woman," explained Mrs. Dean, as she broke the news at tea-time. "And the whole family's bound up in that child; and no wonder. So the minute they heard of her bein' sick nothing would serve but that they should come back right away. Miss Pearl's real sorry; I can see that, though she don't say nothin'. She gave me this note for you, Mr. Fisher, and told me to say goodbye if she didn't see you again. She's got all her pecking to do, and won't be down this evening."

The note was a few simple words of thanks for Ned's kindness that dreadful night. "I fear I was selfishly forgetful of your recent illness," she wrote, "but in my extremity I could think of nothing but the child. Forgive me."

But those were not mere words of forgiveness which, half an hour later, Ned frantically pencilled in his room:

"You are going away, and I have not seen you, have not spoken words which for days have been on my lips, withheld only by reason of your preoccupation. Now, in such brief time as is left, I must say them, for I dare not let you go while they are unsaid. I love and honor you above all women. I am not worthy—no man is—but will you be my wife? How reverent and tender are my thoughts of you can not be told, and if you can not give me what I ask, they will be reverent and tender still, and always. If possible, let me have one word of hope; but if I fall of utter discouragement, I shall follow you."

Miss Pearl, bending over a trunk, with a sad look in her eyes, heard a light sound, and turned. A note lay on the floor, just beyond the crack of the door.

Ned, listening on his side the wall, felt the silence insupportable. He sat at the table with fixed eyes for what seemed a long hour, but no answer came to his plea. At length the faintest

noise, as of fairy fingers brushing the panels, reached his ear, and then beneath the friendly door a little white strip quivered into sight. This was all it said:

"Follow."

Which, after a day's discreet delay, he did. Perry Long was immensely tickled at the development of the affair. He is never tired of asking Ned if he "saw any thing of Miss Pearl at Burnet;" and his wedding-gift to Marion was a blindfold Cupid hiding his head in ostrich fashion in a silver bush, the whole doing duty as top to a soup tureen. But Perry asserts, and I am of his mind, that the most sensible act of Ned Fisher's life was when he took off that same bandage, and, to quote Perry again, "dropped the invalid rôle, and went into business as a Pearl-Fisher with such astonishing success."

THE BREVITY OF LIFE.

To the young it does not seem short; it seems very long. To the boy of fourteen the man of forty seems a long way off, and he of sixty removed by an age almost illimitable. But as time passes on, the aspect of life changes. The man of forty thinks forty not nearly as old as he thought it when he was fourteen; fifty years appears to him but the prime of life; sixty, far from aged. When at length, increasing years admonish him that his life-work is ended, and that he can enter on no new undertakings, and he looks back to reflect upon what he has accomplished he wonders to see it so little, and is amazed to find the road so short in travelling which appeared so long in prospect. He then understands, as he never did before, the meaning of the Scripture simile. "Yea," he says to himself, "it is indeed true. Life is as a tale that is told, and as a dream when one awaketh."

A moment's reflection will suffice, however, to convince the thoughtful that the old man's estimate is right, and the young man's wrong. Time is short, very short, in which to achieve anything for God, for humanity, or for ourselves. It is known that the average length of human life is stated to be thirty-three years. This average, however, includes an estimate of all those who die in infancy. The statement of the average life of a healthy man may be enlarged somewhat. But it is perfectly safe to say that it is not over fifty years. Some men live on to threescore years, or even to threescore and ten, but more never reach the half century. Of this fifty years, the first twenty are taken in learning how to live. Something the young can accomplish; youth is the time for receiving, not imparting—for preparing to achieve, not for achievement. Thirty years may be fairly accepted as the average limit of the working life. But no man works the full thirty years. Rest, recreation, food, sleep, Sabbath, and the enforced idleness which occasional illness compels, reduce the period to two-thirds.

Eight hours a day are as many as the brain or muscle can ordinarily stand. Some work more, but few to the best advantage. Year in and year out, eight hours may be taken to represent the working day. The working life, then, is not thirty years; it is but ten. And of these ten years, how much is necessarily absorbed by the drudgery of toil, by the gathering of grain that dies in the harvesting, and is never garnered into store-houses? How much in getting clothing to be put on and worn out, in getting food to be consumed in use, in building houses to crumble and fall into decay almost as soon as their owners? How much, too, of this time is lost in plans that come to naught, in fighting battles that are defeats? When we have taken from our life what time is necessary for preparation, what is required for recreation, and what is absorbed in failure and transient success, the fragment that is left is very small—two, three or five years at the most.

A nice place for a medical man must be Cottonwood Point, Ark. About twelve months ago, one Thetford had a slight difficulty with a fellow-citizen, and came off second best with a bullet in his body. He sought the assistance of Dr. Joyner, who relieved him of the bullet, and then sent in his bill, which Thetford, not apparently being accustomed to do such things, refused to liquidate. Whereupon the Doctor sued the great and chivalrous and convalescent Thetford, and attached the noble steed of that brave. This was more than he could bear. The result was a free fight of a lively description, in which Thetford, the Doctor and a young man employed by the Doctor engaged. Grand result: Thetford dead; the Doctor almost dead; and the Doctor's young man badly bruised by the stock of a pistol. Doctors' bills, even in these regions in which doctors are plentiful, are sometimes sufficiently exasperating; but here we take it out in growling. If all doctors who overcharge their patients are to be assaulted and battered by them, we shall certainly live in dark and bloody times.

FORMATIONS.—Have you noticed an icicle as it is formed? You noticed how it froze one drop at a time, until it was a foot long or more. If the water was clean, the icicle sparkled brightly in the sun; but if the water was slightly muddy, the icicle looked foul and its beauty was spoiled. Just so our characters are forming. One little thought or feeling at a time adds its influence. If each thought be pure and right, the soul will be lovely and will sparkle with happiness; but if impure and wrong, there will be a final deformity and misery.