



PANSIES.

BY LOUISA M. ALCOTT.

(Continued.)

"The second spring, Lucretia, anxious to waste no time, and ambitious to surprise Mr. Lyman, decided to go and study with old Dr. Gardener at Portland. He fitted young men for college, was a friend of our father's, and had a daughter who was a very wise and accomplished woman. That was a very happy summer, and Lucretia got on so well that she begged to stay all winter. It was a rare chance, for there were no colleges for girls then, and very few advantages to be had, and the dear creature burned to improve every faculty, that she might be more worthy of her lover. She fitted herself for college with the youths there, and did wonders, for love sharpened her wits, and the thought of that happy meeting spurred her on to untiring exertion. Mr. Lyman was expected in May, and the wedding was to be in June. But, alas for the poor girl! the yellow-fever came, and he was one of the first victims. They never met again, and nothing was left her of all that happy time but his letters, his library, and the pansy."

Mrs. Warburton paused to wipe a few tears from her eyes, while the girls sat in sympathetic silence.

"We thought it would kill her, that sudden change from love, hope, and happiness to sorrow, death, and solitude. But hearts don't break, my dears, if they know where to go for strength. Lucretia did, and after the first shock was over, found comfort in her books, saying, with a bright, brave look, and the sweetest resignation, 'I must go on trying to be more worthy of him, for we shall meet again in God's good time, and he shall see that I do not forget.'"

"That was better than tears and lamentation, and the long years that followed were beautiful and busy ones, full of dutiful care for us at home after our mother died, of interest in all the good works of her time, and of a steady, quiet effort to improve every faculty of her fine mind, till she was felt to be one of the noblest women in our city. Her influence was widespread; all the intelligent people sought her; and when she travelled, she was welcomed everywhere; for cultivated persons have a freemasonry of their own, and are recognized at once."

"Did she ever marry?" asked Carrie, feeling that no life could be quite successful without that great event.

"Never. She felt herself a widow, and wore black to the day of her death. Many men asked her hand, but she refused them all, and was the sweetest 'old maid' ever seen,—cheerful and serene to the very last, for she was ill a long time, and found her solace and stay still in the beloved books. Even when she could no longer read them, her memory supplied her with the mental food that kept her soul strong while her body failed. It was wonderful to hear her repeating fine lines, heroic sayings, and comforting psalms through the weary nights when no sleep would come, making friends and helpers of the poets, philosophers, and saints whom she knew and loved so well. It made death beautiful, and taught me how victorious an immortal soul can be over the ills that vex our mortal flesh."

"She died at dawn on Easter Sunday, after a quiet night, when she had given me her little legacy of letters, books, and the one jewel she had always worn, repeating her lover's words to comfort me. I had read the Commendatory prayer, and as I finished, she whispered, with a look of perfect peace:

"Shut the book, dear, I need study no more; I have hoped and believed, now I shall know; and so she went happily away to meet her lover after patient waiting."

The sigh of the wind was the only sound that broke the silence till the quiet voice went on again, as if it loved to tell the

story; for the thought of soon seeing the beloved sister took the sadness from the memory of the past.

"I also found my solace in books, for I was very lonely when she was gone, my father being dead, my brothers married, and home desolate. I took to study and reading as a congenial employment, feeling no inclination to marry, and for many years was quite contented among my books. But in trying to follow in dear Lucretia's footsteps, I unconsciously fitted myself for the great honor and happiness of a life, and curiously enough I owed it to a book."

Mrs. Warburton smiled as she took up a shabby little volume from the table where Alice had laid it, and, quick to divine another romance, Eva said, like a story-loving child:

"Do tell about it! The other was so sad."

"This begins merrily, and had a wedding in it, as young girls think all stories should. Well, when I was about thirty-five, I was invited to join a party of friends on a trip to Canada, that being the favorite jaunt in my young days. I'd been studying hard for some years, and needed rest, so I was glad to go. As a good book for an excursion, I took this, 'Wordsworth' in my bag. It is full of fine passages, you know, and I loved it, for it was one of the books given to Lucretia by her lover. We had a charming time, and were on our way to Quebec when my little adventure happened. I was in raptures over the grand St. Lawrence as we steamed slowly from Montreal that lovely summer day. I could not read, but sat on the upper deck, feasting my eyes and dreaming dreams, as even staid maidens will when out on a holiday. Suddenly I caught the sound of voices in earnest discussion on the lower deck, and, glancing down, saw several gentlemen leaning against the rail as they talked over certain events of great public interest at that moment. I knew that a party of distinguished persons were on board, as my friend's husband, Dr. Tracy, knew some of them, and had pointed out Mr. Warburton as one of the rising scientific men of the day. I remembered that my sister had met him years before, and much admired him both for his own gifts and because he had known Mr. Lyman. As other people were listening, I felt privileged to do the same, for the conversation was an eloquent one, and well worth hearing. So interested did I become that I forgot the great rafts floating by, the picturesque shores, the splendid river, and leaned nearer and nearer that no word might be lost, till my book slipped out of my lap and fell straight down upon the head of one of the gentlemen, giving him a smart blow, and knocking his hat overboard."

"Oh, what did you do?" cried the girls, much amused at this unromantic catastrophe.

Mrs. Warburton clasped her hands dramatically, as her eyes twinkled and a pretty color came into her cheeks at the memory of that exciting moment.

"My dears, I could have dropped with mortification! What could I do but dodge and peep as I waited to see the end of this most untoward accident? Fortunately I was alone on that side of the deck, so none of the ladies saw my mishap, and, slipping along the seat to a distant corner, I hid my face behind a convenient newspaper as I watched the little flurry of fishing up the hat by a man in a boat near by, and the merriment of the gentlemen over this assault of William Wordsworth upon Samuel Warburton. The book passed from hand to hand, and many jokes were made upon the 'fair Helen' whose name was written on the paper cover which protected it."

"I knew a Miss Harper once—a lovely woman, but her name was not Helen, and she is dead,—God bless her!" I heard Mr. Warburton say, as he flapped his straw hat to dry it, and rubbed his head, which, fortunately, was well covered with thick grey hair at that time.

"I longed to go down and tell him who I was, but I had not the courage to face all those men. It really was most embarrassing; so I waited for a more private moment to claim my book, as I knew we should not land till night, so there was no danger of losing it."

"This is a rather uncommon book for a woman to be reading. Some literary lady doubtless. Better look her up, Warburton, when she comes down to luncheon," said a jovial old gentleman.

"I shall know her by her intelligent face and conversation, if this book belongs to a lady. It will be an honor and a pleasure to meet a woman who enjoys Wordsworth, for in my opinion he is one of our truest poets," answered Mr. Warburton, putting the book in his pocket, with a look and a tone that were most respectful, and comforting to me just then.

"I hoped he would examine the volume, for Lucretia's and Mr. Lyman's names were on the fly-leaf, and that would be a delightful introduction for me. So I said nothing and bided my time, feeling rather foolish when we all filed in to luncheon, and I saw the other party glancing at the ladies at the table. Mr. Warburton's eye paused a moment as it passed from Mrs. Tracy to me, and I fear I blushed like a girl, my dears," said the narrator, as she went on with the most romantic episode of her quiet life.

"I retired to my state-room after lunch to compose myself, and when I emerged, in the cool of the afternoon, my first glance showed me that my hour had come, for there on deck was Mr. Warburton, talking to Mrs. Tracy, with my book in his hand. I hesitated a moment, for in spite of my age I was rather shy, and really it was not an easy thing to apologize to a strange gentleman for dropping books on his head and spoiling his hat. Men think so much of their hats, you know. I was spared embarrassment, however, for he saw me and came to me at once, saying, in the most cordial manner, as he showed the names on the fly-leaf of my 'Wordsworth,' 'I am sure we need no other introduction than the names of these two dear friends of ours. I am very glad to find that Miss Helen Harper is the little girl I saw once or twice at her father's house some years ago, and to meet her so pleasantly again.'"

"That made everything easy and delightful, and when I had apologized and been laughingly assured that he considered it rather an honor than otherwise to be assaulted by so great a poet, we fell to talking of old times, and soon forgot that we were strangers. He was twenty years older than I, but a handsome man, and a most interesting and excellent one, as we all know. He had lost a young wife long before, and had lived for science ever since, but it had not made him dry, or cold, or selfish. He was very young at heart, for all his wisdom, and he enjoyed that holiday like a boy out of school. So did I, and never dreamed that anything would come of it, but a pleasant friendship founded on our love for those now dead and gone. Dear me! how strangely things turn out in this world of ours, and how the dropping of that book changed my life! Well, that was our introduction, and that first long conversation was followed by many more, equally charming, during the three weeks in which our parties were often together, as both were taking the same trip, and Dr. Tracy was glad to meet his old friend."

"I need not tell you how delightful such society was to me, nor how surprised I was when, on the last day before we parted, Mr. Warburton, who had answered many questions of mine during those long chats of ours, asked me a very serious one, and I found that I could answer it as he wished. It was a great honor as well as happiness, and I feared I was not worthy of it, but I tried to be, and felt a tender satisfaction in thinking that I owed it to dear Lucretia, in part at least; for my effort to imitate her made me fitter to become a wise man's wife, and twenty years of very sweet companionship was my reward."

As she spoke, Mrs. Warburton bowed her head before the portrait of a courtly old man which hung above the mantelpiece.

It was a pretty, old-fashioned expression of wifely pride and womanly tenderness in the fine old lady, who forgot her own gifts, and felt only humility and gratitude to the man who had found in her a comrade in

intellectual pursuits, as well as a helpmate for his declining years.

The girls looked up with eyes full of something softer than mere curiosity, and felt in their young hearts how precious and honorable such a memory must be, how true and beautiful such a marriage was, and how sweet wisdom might become when it went hand in hand with love.

Alice spoke first, saying, as she touched the worn cover of the little book with a new sort of respect, "Thank you very much! Perhaps I ought not to have taken this from the corner shelf in your sanctum! I wanted to find the rest of the lines Mr. Thornton quoted last night, and didn't stop to ask leave."

"You are welcome, my love, for you know how to treat books. Yes, those in the little case are my precious relics. I keep them all, from my childish hymn-book to my great-grandfather's brass-bound Bible, for by-and-by when I sit 'Looking toward sunset,' as dear Lydia Maria Child calls our last days, I shall lose my interest in other books, and take comfort in these. At the end as at the beginning of life we are all children again, and love the songs our mothers sang us, and the one true book, our best teacher as we draw near to God."

As the reverend voice paused a ray of sunshine broke through the parting clouds, and shone full on the serene face turned to meet it, with a smile that welcomed the herald of a lovely sunset.

"The rain is over; there will be just time for a run in the garden before dinner, girls. I must go and put on my cap, for literary ladies should not neglect to look well after the ways of their household and keep themselves tidy, no matter how old they may be." And with a nod Mrs. Warburton left them, wondering what the effect of her conversation would be on the minds of her young guests.

Alice went away to the garden, thinking of Lucretia and her lover, as she gathered flowers in the sunshine. Conscientious Eva took the "Life of Mary Somerville" to her room, and read diligently for half an hour, that no time might be lost in her new course of reading. Carrie sent her paper novel up the chimney in a lively blaze, and, as she watched the book burn, decided to take her blue and gold volume of Tennyson with her on her next trip to Nahant, in case an eligible learned or literary man's hat should offer itself as a shining mark.

When they all met at dinner-time the old lady was pleased to see a nosegay of fresh panies in the bosoms of her three youngest guests, and to hear Alice whisper, with grateful eyes:

"We wear your flower to show you that we don't mean to forget the lesson you so kindly gave us, and to fortify ourselves with 'noble thoughts,' as you and she did."

THE END.

GIRLS AND WOMEN.

A New York paper recently offered a prize of £5 for the best brief answer to the old, yet ever-new question: "What shall we do with our girls?" Madame Albani-Gye was judge, and awarded the prize to the writer of a short essay, which proved to be from Ella Wheeler Wilcox. This is the essential part:—The foundation of society rests on its homes. The success of our homes rests on the wives. Therefore, first of all, teach our girls how to be successful wives. Begin in their infancy to develop their characters. Teach them that jealousy is an immorality and gossip a vice. Train them to keep the smallest promise as sacredly as an oath, and to speak of people only as they would speak to them. Teach them to look for the best quality in every one they meet, and to notice other people's faults only to avoid them. Train them to do small things well and to delight in helping others, and instill constantly into their minds the necessity for sacrifice for others' pleasure as a means of soul development. Once given a firm foundation of character like this, which the poorest as well as the richest parents can give to their girls, and no matter what necessity arises they will be able to rise above it.—*British Weekly*.

RELIGION finds the love of happiness and the principle of duty separated in us; and its mission—its masterpiece—is to reunite them.—*Vinet*.