

for the soul,' exclaimed Nora, with merry perversity, as she danced off in search of her bonnet.

She had not far to look ; for the one poor room contained all of the sisters' earthly goods. And they were easily summed up—a bed in one corner, a loom in another, a spinning-wheel in the third, and a corner-cupboard in the fourth ; a chest of drawers sat against the wall between the bed and the loom, and a pine table against the opposite wall between the spinning-wheel and the cupboard ; four wooden chairs sat just wherever they could be crowded. There was no carpet on the floor, no paper on the walls. There was but one door and one window to the hut, and they were in front. Opposite them, at the back of the room, was a wide fire-place, with a rude mantel shelf above it, adorned with old brass candlesticks as bright as gold. Poor as this hut was, the most fastidious fine lady need not have feared to sit down within it ; it was so purely clean.

The sisters were soon ready, and after closing up their wee hut as cautiously as if it contained the wealth of India, they set forth, in their blue cotton gowns and white cotton bonnets, to attend the grand birthday festival of the young heir of Brudenell Hall.

Around them spread out a fine, rolling, well-wooded country, behind them stood their own little hut upon the top of its bare hill ; below them lay a deep, thickly-wooded valley, beyond which rose another hill crowned with an elegant mansion of white free-stone. That was Burdenell Hall.

Thus the hut and the hall perched upon opposite hills, looked each other in the face across the wooded valley. And both belonged to the same vast plantation—the largest in the county. The morning was indeed delicious, the earth everywhere springing with young grass and early flowers ; the forest budding with tender leaves ; the freed brooks singing as they ran ; the birds darting about here and there in search of materials to build their nests ; the heavens benignly smiling over all ; the sun glorious ; the air intoxicating ; mere breath, joy ; mere life, rapture ! All Nature singing a Gloria-in-Excelsis ! And now while the sisters saunter leisurely on, pausing now and then to admire some exquisite bit of scenery, or to watch some bird or look at some flower, taking their own time for passing through the valley that lay between the hut and the hall, I must tell you who and what they were.

Hannah and Leonora Worth were orphans, living alone together in the hut on the hill

and supporting themselves by spinning and weaving.

Hannah, the eldest, was but twenty-eight years old, yet looked forty ; for, having been the eldest sister, the mother-sister of a large family of orphan children, all of whom had died except the youngest—Leonora, her face wore that anxious, haggard, care-worn and prematurely aged look peculiar to women who have the burdens of life too soon and too heavily laid upon them. Her black hair was even streaked here and there with grey. But with all this there was not the least trace of impatience or despondency in that all-enduring face. When grave, its expression was that of resignation ; when gay—and even she could be gay at times—its smile was as sunny as Leonora's own. Hannah had a lover patient as Job, or as herself, a poor fellow who had been constant to her for twelve years and whose fate resembled her own ; for he was the father of all his orphan brothers and sisters as she had been the mother of hers. Of course, these poor lovers could not dream of marriage ; but they loved each other all the better upon that very account, perhaps.

Leonora was ten years younger than her sister, eighteen, well grown, well developed, blooming, beautiful, gay and happy as we have described her. She had not a care, or regret, or sorrow in the world. She was a bird, the hut was her nest and Hannah her mother, whose wings covered her. These sisters were very poor ; not, however, as the phrase is understood in the large cities, where, notwithstanding the many charitable institutions for the mitigation of poverty, scores of people perish annually from cold and hunger ; but as it is understood in the rich lower counties of Maryland, where forests filled with game and rivers swarming with fish afford abundance of food and fuel to even the poorest hunters, however destitute they might be of proper shelter, clothing or education.

And though these orphan sisters could not hunt or fish, they could buy cheaply plenty of game from the negroes who did. And besides this, they had a pig, a cow, and a couple of sheep that grazed freely in the neighbouring fields, for no one thought of turning out an animal that belonged to these poor girls. In addition, they kept a few owls and cultivated a small vegetable garden in the rear of their hut. And to keep the chickens out of the garden was one of the principal occupations of Nora. Their spinning-wheel and loom supplied them with the few articles of clothing they required, and with a little money for the purchase of