

and, emptying her apronful of flowers upon it, took her vases from the shelf, and with her scissors sat down to the task of clipping and arranging them.

Just then Letitia Ferguson came across the garden, and entered after her, with a knot of choice roses in her hand, and a plate of seed-cakes covered with a hem-stitched napkin. The Fergusons and the Seymours occupied adjoining houses, and were on footing of the most perfect undress intimacy. They crossed each other's gardens, and came without knocking into each other's doors twenty times a day *apropos* to any bit of chit-chat that they might have, a question to ask, a passage in a book to show, a household receipt that they had been trying. Letitia was the most intimate and confidential friend of Grace. In fact, the whole Ferguson family seemed like another portion of the Seymour family. There were two daughters, of whom Letitia was the eldest. Then came the younger Rose, a nice, charming, well-informed, a good girl, always cheerful and chatty and with a decent share of ability at talking lively nonsense. The brothers of the family, like the young men of New-England country towns generally, were off in the world seeking their fortunes. Old Judge Ferguson was a gentleman of the old school,—formal, stately, polite, always complimentary to ladies, and with a pleasant little budget of old gentlemanly hobbies and prejudices, which it afforded him the greatest pleasure to air in the society of his friends. Old Mrs. Ferguson was a pattern of motherliness, with her quaint, old-fashioned dress, her elaborated caps, her daily and minute inquiries after the health of all her acquaintances, and the tender pityingness of her nature for everything that lived and breathed in this world of sin and sorrow.

Letitia and Grace, as two older sisters of families, had a peculiar intimacy, and discussed everything together, from the mode of clearing jelly up to the profoundest problems of science and morals. They were both charming, well-mannered, well-educated, well-read women, and trusted each other to the uttermost with every thought and feeling and purpose of their hearts.

As we have said, Letitia Ferguson came in at the back door without knocking, and, comingly softly behind Miss Grace, laid down her bunch of roses among the flowers, and then set down her plate of seed-cakes.

Then she said, "I have brought you some specimens of my *Souvenir de Malmaison* bush, and my first trial of your receipt."

"Oh, thanks!" said Miss Grace: "how charming those roses are! It was too bad to spoil your bush, though."

"No; it does it good to cut them; it will flower all the more. But try one of those cakes,—are they right?"

"Excellent! you have hit it exactly," said Grace; "exactly the right proportion of seeds. I was hurrying," she added, "to get these flowers in water, because a letter from John is waiting to be read."