

Technical and Bibliographic Notes/Notes techniques et bibliographiques

The Institute has attempted to obtain the best original copy available for filming. Features of this copy which may be bibliographically unique, which may alter any of the images in the reproduction, or which may significantly change the usual method of filming, are checked below.

L'Institut a microfilmé le meilleur exemplaire qu'il lui a été possible de se procurer. Les détails de cet exemplaire qui sont peut-être uniques du point de vue bibliographique, qui peuvent modifier une image reproduite, ou qui peuvent exiger une modification dans la méthode normale de filmage sont indiqués ci-dessous.

Coloured covers/  
Couverture de couleur

Covers damaged/  
Couverture endommagée

Covers restored and/or laminated/  
Couverture restaurée et/ou pelliculée

Cover title missing/  
Le titre de couverture manque

Coloured maps/  
Cartes géographiques en couleur

Coloured ink (i.e. other than blue or black)/  
Encre de couleur (i.e. autre que bleue ou noire)

Coloured plates and/or illustrations/  
Planches et/ou illustrations en couleur

Bound with other material/  
Relié avec d'autres documents

Tight binding may cause shadows or distortion along interior margin/  
La reliure serrée peut causer de l'ombre ou de la distortion le long de la marge intérieure

Blank leaves added during restoration may appear within the text. Whenever possible, these have been omitted from filming/  
Il se peut que certaines pages blanches ajoutées lors d'une restauration apparaissent dans le texte, mais, lorsque cela était possible, ces pages n'ont pas été filmées.

Additional comments:/  
Commentaires supplémentaires:

Coloured pages/  
Pages de couleur

Pages damaged/  
Pages endommagées

Pages restored and/or laminated/  
Pages restaurées et/ou pelliculées

Pages discoloured, stained or foxed/  
Pages décolorées, tachetées ou piquées

Pages detached/  
Pages détachées

Showthrough/  
Transparence

Quality of print varies/  
Qualité inégale de l'impression

Includes supplementary material/  
Comprend du matériel supplémentaire

Only edition available/  
Seule édition disponible

Pages wholly or partially obscured by errata slips, tissues, etc., have been refilmed to ensure the best possible image/  
Les pages totalement ou partiellement obscurcies par un feuillet d'errata, une pelure, etc., ont été filmées à nouveau de façon à obtenir la meilleure image possible.

This item is filmed at the reduction ratio checked below/  
Ce document est filmé au taux de réduction indiqué ci-dessous.

|     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 10X | 12X | 14X | 16X | 18X | 20X | 22X | 24X | 26X | 28X | 30X | 32X |
|     |     |     |     |     |     |     | X   |     |     |     |     |

4/PZ  
619



The College. Chap. 10. Frontispiece.

# ROBBIE MEREDITH.

BY  
MRS. J. J. COLTER.



*Boston:*  
*Published by D. Lothrop & Co.*  
*Dover, N. H.: G. T. Day & Co.*

A-PZ  
619

Copyright, 1876, by D. LOTHROP & Co.

# CONTENTS.

---

## CHAPTER I.

HOME RETAINED . . . . . 7

## CHAPTER II.

VALUABLE AID . . . . . 15

## CHAPTER III.

CREDIT . . . . . 33

## CHAPTER IV.

AT SCHOOL . . . . . 54

## CHAPTER V.

DEATH . . . . . 65

## CHAPTER VI.

SUNDAY SUITS . . . . . 76

## CHAPTER VII.

CONVERSION . . . . . 92

4858

## CHAPTER VIII.

CHRISTIAN WORK . . . . . 106

## CHAPTER IX.

CHANGES . . . . . 115

## CHAPTER X.

GOING TO COLLEGE . . . . . 125

## CHAPTER XI.

VACATION . . . . . 134

## CHAPTER XII.

HOME AGAIN . . . . . 149

## CHAPTER XIII.

DESIRE TO STUDY . . . . . 163

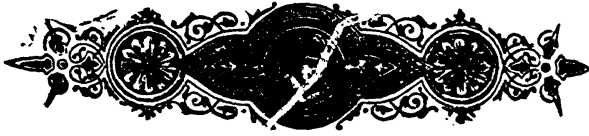
## CHAPTER XIV.

RETURN . . . . . 171

## CHAPTER XV.

UNIONS . . . . . 179






# ROBBIE MEREDITH.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### HOME RETAINED.

T is no use, Robbie, we can't keep together much longer. I have tried to do everything for the best, but work is scarce, and times are so hard. I am afraid we can't manage to live through another winter."

"But what can we do, even if we should separate, mother?"

"Helen can get a situation somewhere, perhaps, as nurse-girl, and I am sure any of the farmers around will be glad to get you, my son."

As she spoke, a gleam of satisfaction bright-



ened the thin, sad face of the mother ; the most careless observer could see that her heart was bound up in the noble-looking boy standing near her easy chair.

“ But where will our little mother go ? ”

In spite of the smile on the lips, and the attempted gayety in the words, his mother saw a twitching about the sensitive mouth, and could hear, too, a quiver of pain in her boy's voice. Glancing through the open window at her side, over the bare brown fields on which the April sun was fitfully shining, she tried to answer carelessly.

“ Oh, there will be no danger about me, I can get a situation somewhere ; I shall not care for myself if my children are only cared for.”

“ Your children will care, though, my mother, so don't let us think of breaking up our home yet ; surely we can manage someway through the summer, and you must recollect I am a good deal stronger to work than last year ; just wait until you see the crop I shall put in.”

Mrs. Meredith turned toward her son with a more hopeful look in her face.

"Do you think, Robbie, we could do anything alone? I would be willing to make any sacrifice if we could only keep together."

"Let us try, anyway, mother, we can't be much worse off in the fall even if our crops should fail, but I don't think there will be any danger of their doing so. Farmer Williams will tell me anything I don't know, and maybe help us with the ploughing; he has so many men I am certain he will let one of them come for an hour or two now and then with the horses."

"Well, my son, you shall have my consent, but you must let us all help you. Helen and Mary will be able to do a little, and, if God spares my life and my health gets no poorer, I shall be able to do a little too."

"O mother! if you will just stay with us, and brighten up our home, we won't ask for any more."

"Why, Robbie, where do you think I may

go?" She looked up at him with a surprised expression.

"Oh, I am all the time afraid you will be floating off out of our sight, up among the angels. I can't wonder, either, that you should wish to go since father is there."

The tears were quivering on the lashes of both mother and son now. The one great sorrow of the mother's life had shadowed her son's childhood too. His sisters were too young at the time of their father's death to feel his loss so keenly as their brother; his long sickness, too, had extended back, almost beyond their recollection, and, unlike Robbie, they could not recall the happy days when their father used to make home so happy by his healthy, cheery presence. How gloomy the gladsome time of harvesting made their mother, they well knew, because it was then their father received the injury that ended in death several years afterward. It was not often the circumstances of his sickness and death were the topics of conversation.

The children loved best to hear their mother describe the happy days when no heavy sorrow rested on their home; when the pinching poverty, with which they were now so sadly intimate, was unknown; when mother and father, Robbie, and baby Harry, who had passed away among the angels before even Helen was born, lived far away in the vine-covered cottage near grandpapa's, and when aunts and uncles, cousins and friendly neighbors, met in pleasant intercourse, sharing their joys and lightening their sorrows. But after this the dreary changes had come.

To better his condition their father had left the home across the sea, hoping to make a richer one in the new world. For a year or two fortune smiled upon them, and he had the prospect of having his best hopes realized, and then misfortune came, but not too soon for him to have made warm friends among his new associates, who generously helped his heart-broken wife care for her slowly dying husband, and also cultivate

a sufficient portion of land to support the family.

Mary could just recollect her father's pale face propped up among the pillows, smiling so tenderly, yet sadly, upon them all, while she could more distinctly call to mind the dreary time when the house was filled with strange faces, and the long, black coffin was followed out through the misty midsummer stillness by her mother and Robbie, with the long procession of kindly neighbors, leaving Helen and herself alone with kind-hearted, homely Nancy, whose face was so familiar where sickness and sorrow were found that, to many of the people, her presence always brought melancholy recollections.

But such was not little Mary's experience. So many delicate bits of cake and confectionery had found their way to her unaccustomed lips from Nancy's voluminous pockets, and so many dark, solitary days in their home, when their mother was ill, had been made pleasant by the self-forgetful old maiden, who waited on the mother with more than a physician's skill, brightening up the

lonely rooms by a score of ways, and, what was next to best of all, telling them such wonderful stories of her own childhood and youth, as well as of dozens of other children who were her play-mates then, but were now, many of them, staid heads of families with grandchildren as large as even Robbie, that she could only have happy thoughts associated with her.

Nancy had an unfailing stock of anecdote,—histories for which she could vouch, and others, also, which she could only tell on trust—wonderful ghost stories which would make the blood curdle, and hair stand on end, as she mysteriously related them, in wide, dimly lighted kitchens, to audiences whose grey-haired members seemed as deeply interested as the little boy or girl who crouched tremblingly near its mother's knee. Only once or twice had the Meredith children been feasted on their friend's ghastly fare. Their mother strictly forbade the narrator from telling them, at the same time commanding them not to listen to such stories. Fortunately neither party

thought of violating her orders, else the timid children might have passed many terrible hours of solitude in their mother's absence.

Nancy could only wonder at the strange prohibition, at the same time pitying the children when she believed they were missing so much useful knowledge; as it was, she tried to make her remaining stories all the more interesting, and was generally satisfied with the result of her endeavors, as she looked in the eager faces of the children while drinking in every word that fell from her lips.

After awhile Robbie seemed less interested in what she had to tell him, taking more pleasure in the books which had comprised his father's scant library, or in those he could borrow from neighboring book-shelves, especially Mr. Carthene's, their minister, whose library yielded him the richest supply.



## CHAPTER II.

### VALUABLE AID.

**T**HE April days, with their fitful brightness and raw uncomfortable winds, were drawing to a close. Every preparation in his power for the coming seed-time, Robbie had diligently made; but, for a lad of thirteen with but few to help, very little could be accomplished, except multitudinous planning with the little mother, as he had learned to call her from his father's playful teachings. Very bright had been his hopes at first; rose-colored dreams of the autumn harvesting had kept him from actually sleeping many an hour during the seed-time. That very



day in which his mother's consent had been gained to try to farm, he consulted farmer Williams and asked his advice. The farmer's answer was not very encouraging, but yet he gladly told the brave, self-reliant boy what he thought would be the best seed for him to invest in, at the same time generously proffering his assistance to help him on.

"You may have a team to-morrow, and one of the hands can go and help you plough, it is high time now the ground was broken up; we might have had it all done in the slack times in the fall if we had only thought, but 'better late than never,' isn't that so, Bob?" and he laughed.

"I am very much obliged to you, sir, and if you will trust me so long, some day I shall hope to pay you for your kindness."

"Oh, never mind the pay. Maybe the little I do may go to my account, somewhere that I need it more than in this world."

As he spoke, the round good-humored face of the farmer sobered thoughtfully for an instant,

only to ripple over again a minute afterward, as he hastened to ask his little friend where he was going to get the seed that must be put in the ground.

"We have talked that all over, too," Robbie said, while a shade of sadness flitted over his hopeful face. "Mother thinks Helen might go out to service, for a few weeks, among some of the farmers, and help us to get a little in that way, and beside, we have father's watch to sell." His lips quivered, but he opened wide those soft grey eyes and looked steadily up at the dark cloud that was slowly bearing down towards them, with the promise of a threatened shower, thereby missing the compassionate look in the kind-hearted old farmer's face, as he said :

"There's no need of doing either. I have more seed, of every kind, than I shall plant. Dick may take you a load over to-morrow when he goes to plough."

Robbie's eyes were too full to watch the cloud any longer.

True to his promise, next day an abundant supply of potatoes, with barley and wheat seed, besides various packages of garden seeds, which were consigned to Mrs. Meredith's care, found their way over to the cottage across the lots from farmer Williams'.

Dick, his handsome, fun-loving boy, went to superintend operations as he gaily announced, accompanied by a trusty farm servant who was good-natured enough to humor the lad's propensity for commanding.

Such a happy day as they had. Even little Mary thought to add her quota to the general fund of helpfulness, by diligently assisting the mother to prepare the unusually generous dinner for their kindly helpers.

It was only when the stars began to assemble across the welkin that Robbie was willing to cease working, although too tired to sleep for hours afterward. But as he lay tossing wearily, the pleasing thought of the day's unhopd for accomplishment reconciled him to the aches and

pains that were the result of his over-exertion.

Next day he was scarcely able to leave his bed; and as his mother bathed the hot, feverish head of her boy, bitter tears fell on the soft curly hair, while a fervent prayer was silently offered for health and life for her idolized child.

In a few days he was at work again, with a caution learned from severe experience, together with the knowledge gained, that he was not like Dick, or the other lads in the place, able to work from morning till night with such untiring energy.

A repining feeling would sometimes take possession of his heart, when he was obliged, in the midst of his work, to rest under a tree or lie panting on the settle bed by the kitchen window, while he thought that not even health was allowed him to cope with the difficulties that so early beset his pathway in life.

“I wonder did God plan it for me, and, if so, why did he give me so poor a chance?” Over and over again had he asked himself this. “If

even father could have lived," he would murmur, "I would not have minded being ill able to work; but how can I ever manage to do for mother and the girls — my poor little mother. Oh! why is life so hard?"

Notwithstanding his fears, however, the crop was got in, and a noble one it was, too, so all the farmers united in saying. Other help was given beside what the Williamses so freely rendered. When the people saw Robbie so anxious to help his mother, their hearts were warmed toward him, and they seemed anxious as to who should do most.

Nancy came proffering her help, in the general contribution, she was not willing to be left out. Mrs. Meredith thought there was nothing for her to do, until Nancy's sharp eyes detected the unfinished appearance of the vegetable garden, and it was not long before she had forced the uneven beds into models of neatness and regularity. Not satisfied with leaving her work there, many a long twilight hour was spent in

freeing them from weeds, and training the climbing plants on poles, which she begged for the purpose from surrounding neighbors.

It could not but pain the sensitive heart of Mrs. Meredith, when her eye would catch a glimpse of her ragged-looking friend bending over those beds, whose untidy appearance was such an eye-sore to herself, weeding diligently there after a tiresome day spent at the spinning-wheel. Remonstrances were vain; her cheery reply would be:

“Why, bless your heart, the breath of the fresh air is such a treat after the greasy smell of the spinning-room; and, beside, you never could keep all this garden clean. It is enough for a man to tend, let alone a little mite of a woman like you.”

Then she would give vent to the light-hearted laugh that was rarely a stranger to her healthy nature, at the same time displaying the unsightly stumps of teeth that seemed never to cause her a pang of mortified vanity.

Thanks to Nancy, rather than anyone else, the garden gradually assumed a prolific appearance that was the delight of both Robbie's and his mother's eyes, while in the early summer, many a dinner, that would otherwise have been sadly deficient, was made sufficiently comfortable, by the help of the mother's skillful cookery, to satisfy the appetites of her children.

From the adjacent barnyards, so much top-dressing, as the farmers aptly call it, had been contributed that the grass on the little farm grew abundantly; another cow, it was thought by Mrs. Meredith's advisers, might be safely invested in, to keep company with the gentle Blossom that browsed contentedly in the narrow strip of pasture land at the back of the meadow.

"But where can it come from?" Robbie asked, perplexedly.

"Do you mean the cow or the money, my son?"

"It makes little difference which, mother."

"Well, I have thought of a plan, Robbie, if you will agree with it."

"I am willing to do anything you may wish, no matter what it is."

"I am afraid my boy has too much confidence in his mother's judgment."

"I can never do wrong, I am sure, if I do as you wish; so let me hear about the cow."

"Do you think, Robbie, we might venture to get one on credit, and pay in small instalments of butter, or anything we could produce?"

"Why, yes," Robbie answered, slowly. He was too much surprised at his mother hinting, even, that they should go into debt, after the life-long teaching he had received from her lips to the contrary.

"You don't think I am getting demoralized?" she said, playfully, as she saw the slightly troubled look on his face.

"No, mother, but will it be safe for us to go in debt so largely?"

"I think so, Robbie, if farmer Williams is our creditor; he will not distress us about the payments, I am sure"



“ Yes, I know that, mother ; but can we allow ourselves to get so deeply in debt ? I mean in every way. See what he is doing for us all along.”

“ Someway, Robbie, I am coming to think we shall pay him back, principal and interest, some day ; and I am certain what he does for us makes him far happier than if he spent it all on himself or family. God gives the poor to the rich as a sacred trust, for them to look after. I am coming to understand this more clearly as I grow older.”

“ I wonder if we ever get rich will we pay Him back, I mean our Father in heaven, for all he is doing for us now ? ”

“ I hope so, Robbie ; but we need not wait until we get rich for that ; every day the poorest can do something for God.”

A long pause followed ; each seemed, unconsciously, to be following out silently the new train of thought. At length Robbie said :

“ Shall we help farmer Williams lay up more treasure in heaven, by taking his cow ? ”

“Yes, my son,” was the quiet reply; and without more ado, Robbie started across the lots, on the well-beaten path, for his friend’s house. Soon Helen and Mary came tripping joyously down the lane, shouting to their mother to come and see White-face, for Robbie was bringing her home.

“I didn’t think he was going to give us one of his very best cows, mother,” he said as he opened the bars to drive her into the pasture with Blossom.

“It is a gift to the good Lord as much as to us. He will get his hundred-fold reward, I hope.”

“Is it a gift, mother?” Helen asked with surprise.

“Almost a gift,” Robbie answered. “He only charges twenty dollars for her, and just now she is worth twice that much.” And so she proved to them before summer was ended.

With so much extra milk Nancy decided that a little pig was a necessity. So partly begging one from a rich old farmer, with whom she was

spinning, she walked proudly over in the amber twilight of a lovely June evening, with a little white piggy, squealing along at intervals, in an old meal sack under her shawl.

Mary begged hard for permission to take it to bed with her the first night of its arrival, so strongly was she drawn to the little pink-eyed stranger. The request was, of course, refused ; so she was reluctantly obliged to listen to its nestling, from her little bed, in the little room off the kitchen, where piggy was kept for the night.

Next day Robbie displayed his carpentering ingenuity, by building it a little stye, at which the mother and Helen assisted. Mary, too, showed her anxiety to help by pounding her fingers, tearing her pinafore, and making herself generally wretched.

For awhile her mother was spared any labor or anxiety on piggy's account, while he was kept in such a state of satisfied quietude, by the abundance of his diet, that she could wash, or fondle him to her heart's content. But it was not long

until she tired of her new playmate. The blood of so many untrained ancestors coursed in his frame that it was in vain she endeavored to awaken a responsive chord in his sluggish breast, answering to the lavish affection she poured out upon him.

At last, haying time came. White-face's milk, supplemented by Blossom's, had so far paid off the debt to farmer Williams that Mrs. Meredith began to breathe freely.

Very few such simple luxuries as tea or sugar had been purchased during the summer, while butter was such a rarity in the economic household, that those were certainly red-letter days to the children when their table was graced by the golden prints. But they took, generally, without a murmur, the skimmed milk and porridge for breakfast, with a thick slice of brown bread, which left them always by dinner time so healthy an appetite that their mother's stew of vegetables, with the infinitesimal bit of pork, or what they liked very much better, a treat of fresh

meat from a neighboring farm-house, was enjoyed as fully as if their breakfast had been the richest.

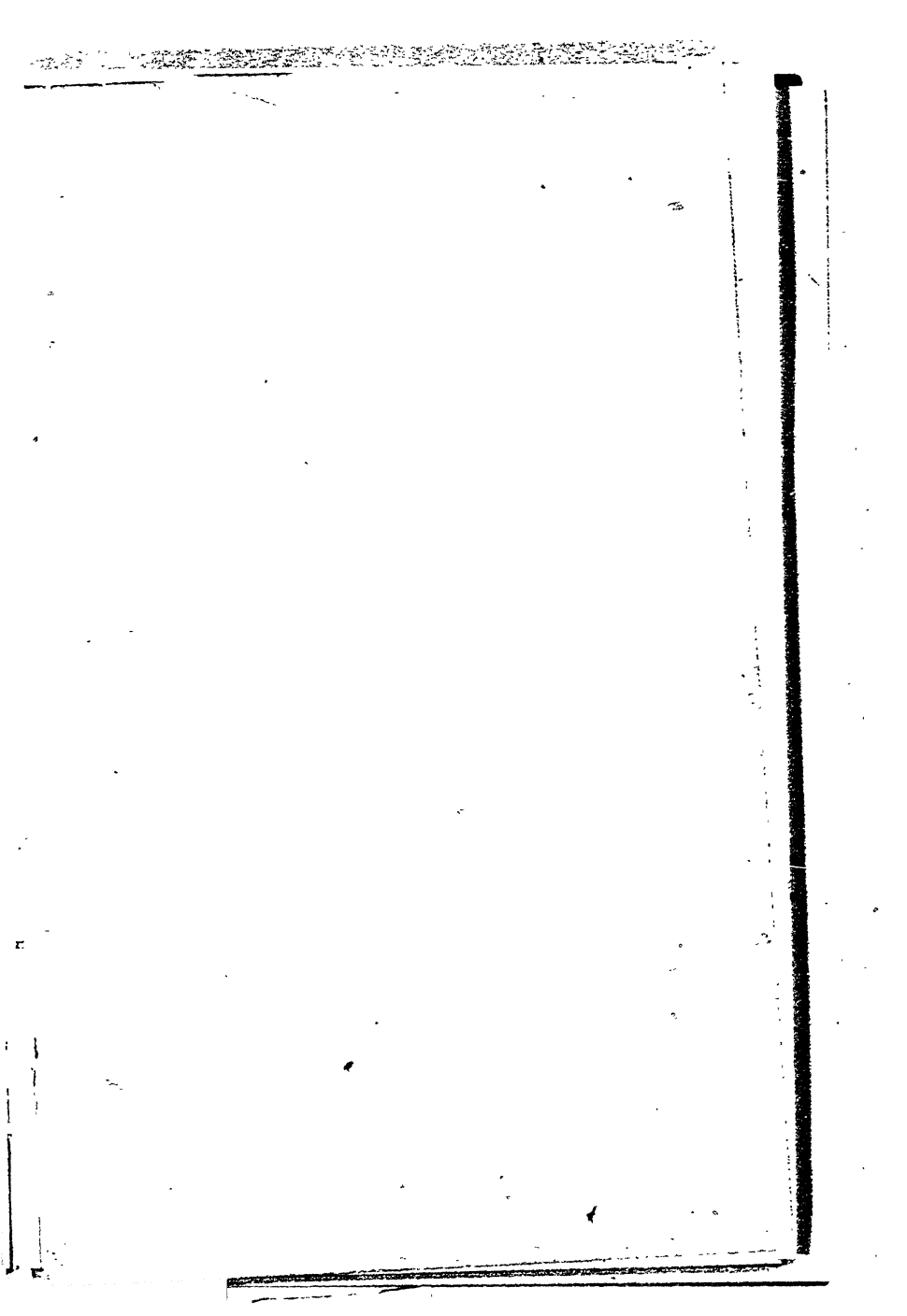
At tea time, generally with them a misnomer, as not even Mrs. Meredith could think of allowing herself that acceptable beverage except on rare occasions, they were obliged to be satisfied with a bowl of milk and a slice of toasted bread.

Robbie always endeavored to look satisfied with his sometimes loathed food, so tired had he grown of the monotonous bill of fare. But Mary would ask now and then for a bit of cake or a taste of butter or molasses. She said one evening:

"They always have preserves or cake over at aunt's, mamma, why can't we have something nice, too, does it cost too much?"

"Yes, Mary," Robbie answered; "but just be patient a little while longer and we shall have those nice things, too. Mother eats just what we do, and she never complains."

"Oh dear, mamma, have I made you cry be-





Haying. Page 27.

cause I was so ungrateful?" the poor child said, when she saw her mother struggling to hold back the tears that would come in spite of all her efforts. Robbie's arms were about her in an instant.

"Oh, mother, you don't think we care what we eat so you are with us. You think that I shall be able to make you comfortable some day, don't you, mother?"

There was a painful uncertainty in his voice. He wondered, could his mother think that, after all, they must separate or starve? Surely everything looked dark enough just then; but the crops would soon be ripe, and the pig fattened, and White-face paid for. As he told all these facts, he was trying to argue away to himself, as well as his mother, the fears that of late would haunt him. The meal barrel so soon emptied itself, and then there was the wheat flour, which was still more discouraging, because of the greater expense in replenishing.

How longingly he thought of the great flour



warehouses in the city; wondering, if the merchants knew of the hard struggle going on in their home to keep the wolf from the door, would not they write and send them their summer's bread?

A day or two after this, Mrs. Meredith sadly announced to Robbie that their flour was all gone.

"I had scarcely enough to complete this week's baking. What we shall do for the next few weeks, I cannot think."

"Shall we not try for credit, mother? I know Mr. Smith at the corner would trust us for one barrel."

"Yes, Robbie, and then a debt of nine dollars would be hanging over us."

"We have the cows, mother. In a little while White-face will be paid for, and then you can pay for the flour."

"I fear, Robbie, we have done wrong by keeping together; we should all have fared better separately."

"Why, mother, what could May have done?"

"Some one would have taken us together; my work, with the little she could do, would have earned us comfortable food, and something to wear."

"Oh, mother, won't you try to bear our poverty bravely a little longer? I am sure we will soon see better days."

The mother looked for an instant in those pleading, eloquent eyes. Two great tears were standing ready to fall, but he kept them bravely back, ashamed that he, their bread winner, should be so weak.

His mother said:

"Forgive me, Robbie, for my seeming impatience. It is not of myself I am thinking. I would gladly live on a crust to have my children with me; but it nearly breaks my heart to see you working so hard on this poor food."

"It would be harder for me to be separated from my mother," he said, gently.

"We will all make the best of our privations,

then, my children," Mrs. Meredith replied; "and trust in our heavenly Father to bring us safely through this season of adversity. 'At the worst,' as Robbie said a good while ago, 'we need not starve.'"





### CHAPTER III.

#### CREDIT.



R. SMITH'S store was about two miles from the Merediths.

That evening Robbie left off work earlier than usual, and dressing himself, he started on his errand. He did not tell his mother what his business was, merely asking permission to go over to the Corner, which was readily granted. It was so seldom he seemed to wish for any amusement she was glad to hear him make the request. With all her anxieties, not the least one was seeing the early gravity that seemed settling over her once fun-loving boy.

It was with much fear and trembling that Robbie walked along the quiet road towards the more thickly settled part of their quiet hamlet, that constituted the nucleus of a future town, which was now only designated by the humble name of "Corner."

Among the various store-keepers, his principal hope for help lay in Mr. Smith; they had usually dealt with him, and Robbie knew that heretofore but little credit had been asked; his mother preferring to suffer for those necessaries of life which she could not immediately pay for.

The store was full when he went in; too late he recollected that evening was the time when loungers were most plentiful about the counters; but the walk was too long for him to be frightened away from doing his business with the merchant, so he waited his turn with Mr. Smith.

The honest lad could not help fearing a little, as he saw that some who had come in after himself were served first. He could not fail to comprehend the reason. The appearance of the cus-

tomers betokened wealth; the daintily dressed ladies with the little girl and boy must be the grand folks who had come to stay a few weeks at Squire Jennings', during the strawberry season, and of whom Nancy had been telling them so much.

Such quantities of candies as they bought, how much he coveted just a taste to take home to Helen and Mary! His longing must have been strongly expressed in his eyes, for the girl happening to look at him whispered to her brother, and a minute after came and offered him a handful, which she poured from the open paper.

"Thank you," he said, softly, but his face expressed more eloquent thanks than his lips could frame. He looked shyly in the face of the little maiden; was it the glow of momentary benevolence on her face, or was it the innate goodness that always shone there? He did not wait to analyze the expression, but then and there gave her the silent and humble, yet lasting devotion of

his boyish heart; a moment after the party left the store. It seemed to Robbie one of the number had left a ray of sunshine behind that lighted him all the way home, while its brightness remained with him for weeks.

His turn to be served came next, and with a beating heart Robbie stepped up to the counter, when Mr. Smith said:

“Well, my boy, what do you wish?”

The words were not unkindly spoken, but there was a sharp ring in the voice that spoke of a selfish nature, and which made the sensitive lad still more shy.

“Could you let my mother have a barrel of flour a few weeks on credit?”

“Who is your mother?”

“Mrs. Meredith, at the Dale farm.”

“Really, my boy, I don't care to trust her; not but that she has always paid me, but the last time I saw her she looked as if she would hardly outlast a barrel of flour.”

A flush of anger and misery spread over the boy's face as he said:

"There will be enough left to pay you, sir."

"I don't doubt that, but times are hard, and I might have so long to wait, the interest would swallow up the principal."

"Don't be too hard on the boy, Smith," a rough voice spoke from the back store, and as Robbie looked up he saw a large, red-whiskered man coming towards them. He knew then it was Mr. Smith's partner, and his hopes began instantly to rise.

"Let him have a barrel of flour, or you will be getting the widow's curse, man. I wish all our customers were as honest and safe as that boy's mother."

"Thank you, sir," Robbie gasped, and then he shut his mouth firmly for fear he might say something tragic.

"Very well, you can have your own way, but you may see to collecting it."

"All right," was the good-humored reply of Phalen, the kind-hearted Irishman, whose ready tact and obliging disposition had already won



him a good situation in America, whither he had come only a few years previously, with pockets innocent of a single shilling.

‘Tell your mother she can pay in butter or anything most convenient, and she needn’t hurry herself, either.’

“Thank you, sir.” This was all the thanks Robbie could manage to utter, but Phalen was satisfied, however, with that slight expression of gratitude, as he saw the quivering lip and glistening eye of the scarcely more than child to whom he had lent the helping hand.

Robbie started for home, calling on his way at farmer Williams’ to ask if he would let his team bring it down when next they were up on business to the Corner.

“One of the hands is going up to-morrow with a load of meat, and he shall bring it down in the empty cart,” the farmer replied, so that Robbie was able to go rejoicing home.

His mother was getting uneasy about him, it was so unusual for Robbie to be gone so long.

Helen and Mary were both up with their mother, and their pleasure was quite unbounded when Robbie came bursting into the room, with the good news that at least one barrel of flour was sure, and with the additional luxury of some candy for each. Mary was more overjoyed with that than with the flour that was to come on the morrow. Robbie tried to divide the candy equally with his mother and sisters, leaving no share for himself.

"Why, Robbie, where is yours?" Helen asked.

"It was pleasure enough for me to bring it to you, and to have it given to me by the dear little child," he said, rather loftily.

"We can't let you be so easily satisfied, Robbie; you must take my share. I lost my fondness for sweetmeats long ago," his mother said, as she laid her share in his hands.

"Let us have it between us, then, mother," he said, casting a hungry look at the tempting bite.

"Very well, dear," she said, but she managed it so that he got nearly all.

The next day Robbie had the pleasure of rolling the flour in to his mother. He dispensed with the man's help who had offered to take it in, and independently replied :

“No, thank you, I can manage it myself.”

But it was quite too much for his unaided strength, and his mother and even Helen had to be called to the rescue before it was safely stored away in the pantry.

“Never mind, mother, after we have got a few more in here, I shall be able to do without your help,” he said, encouragingly, as he ruefully watched her panting after the unusual exertion.

“I know that, my son, if you don't kill yourself in the meantime,” she smilingly answered.

And so the gladsome sunny days of midsummer wore on. White-face gave her generous supply of milk. The scent of clover blossoms from farmer Williams' rich meadow lands helped her, Robbie thought, to overflow the bucket with her foamy offering, while Blossom, too, seemed to thrive better for her companionship.

White-face was so nearly paid for now that Mrs. Meredith ventured, the next week, on sending Robbie to the Corner with a load of butter and eggs as a first payment on their new debt.

The evening was fair, with the moon just rising as he left home. His mother and Helen accompanied him part of the way to assist in carrying the basket, Helen eagerly pleading to go all the way, but her suit was denied by Robbie.

"I should be ashamed," he said, "to take my little sister on such an errand. The boys would laugh at me if they saw her carrying this basket."

His mother and Helen had scarcely got out of sight, by the bend of the road, on their way home again, when a handsome carriage and pair of horses came driving leisurely along the road.

Robbie changed his basket to the other hand, and stepped aside on the greensward for them to pass.

The scent of flowers filled the air, already vibrating with the songs of the robin, and linnet,

and others of the feathered warriors, pouring forth their strangely sweet vespers to a generally inattentive audience of busy farmers, with equally industrious families; but to-night, the crowded carriage had brought out those whose ears and hearts were alike open to the delights of the beautiful country, whether animate or otherwise.

Robbie was glad to see, among the brightly dressed people, the little golden-haired girl that had so thoughtfully remembered him in the store. He lifted his hat politely; his mother's careful training had kept all the boorishness out of his manners, that hard work and common play-fellows would naturally give him, and he was glad to see that his simple act of courtesy had not passed unnoticed.

More than one gracious smile responded to his bow, while there was a particularly kindly look from the little girl upon whom his eyes were unconsciously fastened.

A moment after they had passed out of sight; but, somehow, Robbie felt his basket grow

lighter, and the road seemed less hot and dusty. The moon, too, was beginning to shine more clearly along the way, as the twilight glow faded from sky and river. Almost before he was thinking of finding his basket burdensome, Mr. Smith's store was in sight, and with a heart far lighter, if his load were heavier, than on the previous evening, when he stepped so timidly across the foot-worn threshold, he entered, feeling himself already almost a man as he placed his basket on the counter.

This time his turn to be waited on came sooner than before. Phalen's quiet eye caught sight of the lad whose cause he had so warmly espoused, and glad to see so early an installment on the debt, he went to him speaking kindly, while his genial Irish face was lighted up with a benevolent smile.

The butter was duly weighed, the eggs counted, and the credit placed opposite his mother's name on the book, when Phalen said:

"Your bill has come down two dollars and a

half, already. Smith will find my customers are the best pay going."

When farmer Williams' man came for Robbie's flour, he had told Phalen of the struggle the Merediths had to keep the home together, and the generous fellow felt his heart warming towards the noble boy, whom he was glad to help. Every other week Robbie went to the store with his butter and eggs until White-face was paid for, and after that the weekly offering was deposited regularly in Phalen's hands.

New entries were made on the debit side of the book against Mrs. Meredith, but the credit side kept pace steadily with the debit. Then Robbie felt, after a fresh supply of flour had been laid in, with the few other necessary articles his mother had commissioned him to purchase, that an occasional investment in some little luxury for her use was warrantable. It was after this that he rarely returned with an empty basket; but his mother could not tell her boy to cease making his purchases. She always shared such deli-

cacies with her children, and felt assured that the small outlay would be amply repaid in strengthening her boy for his daily labors, which, after the hay was stored, became lighter. It was none too soon, either, that relief should come; the long summer's work and anxiety had told heavily on Robbie's slight frame.

His form, naturally erect and well made, was getting a painful stoop, and she could not see that he had grown an inch since spring.

One rainy day as they were sitting in the clean comfortable kitchen, busily engaged knitting socks for market, with<sup>s</sup> Robbie reading aloud to them, Mrs. Meredith interrupted him by saying:

"Don't you think, Robbie, we could afford to hire a man to help us in harvesting? It is too hard work for you to do alone, and we must not expect any further help from our neighbors."

"But we must remember the long winter," Robbie said, thoughtfully.

"I do, my son, it is not out of my thoughts many hours at a time."



"Well, mother, if we can't get on alone, rather than have the crops injured, I will be willing to hire a man; but I should like to do what I can myself, it will be so much clear gain."

"Yes, Robbie, of money, but I fear not of your health. We can all help in gathering the roots; even Mary can pick up potatoes." As she spoke the mother stroked the flaxen hair that was so apt to get such tiresome tangles.

They did all work diligently from dawn till dusk, but even then they could not perform all the work that was awaiting a speedy accomplishment, and Robbie was beginning to acknowledge the fact sadly to himself, as he looked over the rapidly ripening grain fields, and the dry stalks of the early blighted potatoes.

But every cent seemed to have two ways it needed to go; and, alas, their cents were so terribly few, and then a man's wages, even for one day, would cost so much.

One morning Robbie attempted to rise early as usual, but as he lifted his head from the pil-

low, a dizzy sensation came over him, and he was forced to lie down.

It was so hard, just then, he felt, to be sick. The little strip of wheat which had been his pride and hope all through the summer discouragements had been cut two days before. He and Nancy had managed to reap it between them, it must be confessed Nancy doing much the larger share, and to-day he had planned to get it turned, and perhaps housed, if the day were hot enough.

He lay awhile and then made another attempt, but it was unavailing; his head swam so that he feared to trust himself to take a step. Soon he heard his mother's step on the stair; he brushed away the tears that, in spite of himself, had been gathering in his eyes.

"Is Robbie sick?" she asked, cheerily.

"Just a little; mother, but I shall be able to get down-stairs by and by."

"What is the matter?" was the anxious enquiry. She knew it must be something unusual.

or he would not lie in bed this day that he considered so important.

“It is only my head that troubles me; I must have worked too hard to keep up with Nancy. What shall we do if I can't get up?” he asked, piteously.

After all he was only a boy, and he could not hide all his fears, even from his mother.

“If you only get well, Robbie, we won't mind the wheat. I ought not to have allowed you to work so hard. Oh, what shall I do if you leave me?”

“You needn't be afraid for me, mother, I am only tired. I have no mind to die just now, and leave you. In an hour or two you will see me as busy at work as ever.”

The mother shook her head sadly as she bathed his hot feverish head. While they were talking together over their dark future, and wondering where they could turn for help, Helen came rushing up-stairs, with the glad news that there were three men down-stairs come to help them.

"You said, mother, that God would provide," Robbie said, reverently, as he turned his brightened face toward her.

"Yes, my son, and we must never doubt his goodness again, no matter how dreary our prospects may be."

As she was leaving the room Robbie called her back. "Tell them, mother, that our Father in heaven will reward them, some day."

"I will tell them, Robbie," she replied, and then hastily left the room. A moment after he heard, through the thin partition that separated his mother's bed-room from the one he occupied, her voice in prayer. He could not distinguish the words, but he felt assured it was thanksgiving his mother was offering for mercies given.

It was not long after his mother had gone down-stairs, until Helen came up with the glad tidings that the men had gone to the wheat field, and then she brought the still better news that they expected to get the harvest all stored that day.

"And, O, Robbie," she added, "I saw a tear in Ben's eyes when mother told them what you said; he says he don't want any better pay. Wasn't that good for him to say?"

Robbie did not make any reply, he turned his face to the wall, and Helen could not think that he was crying.

"Maybe you want to go to sleep?" she said, after vainly waiting for an answer.

"I would like to be alone awhile," he said, bravely trying to steady his voice.

Stealing quietly out she went with a frightened face to her mother.

"Can't we send for a doctor, mother? I am afraid Robbie is going to die."

The happy look faded from the mother's face as she asked:

"What makes you think so, Helen?"

"He seems so quiet, and then he didn't appear a bit glad that they have come."

"Robbie does not show all he feels, and maybe it was his very gladness and gratitude that kept him from talking."

"I did not know that to feel glad made us cry, and I am almost sure he was crying," she replied, more mystified than ever.

That night their harvesting was completed, and when Mrs. Meredith went to say good-night to Robbie, he said to her, half shyly :

"Might not we thank our heavenly Father for putting it into their hearts to come and work for us to-day, mother?"

"Will you thank him, Robbie?" she replied, at the same time kneeling beside him, her example silently followed by Helen and Mary, who exchanged wondering glances.

A moment's silence ensued, and then in trembling voice Robbie uttered his few words of thankfulness for all God's mercies, particularly for the blessing that had crowned that day with gladness, and then fervently implored God's protecting care for the whole journey of life, and that they might at last become a family complete in heaven. He ended by repeating "Our Father." A silence ensued in which the children believed they could hear their mother weeping.

"Shall I ask her why she cries?" Mary whispered to Helen.

"Hush, dear," was the softly whispered response. As Helen raised her head, Mary wondered as she saw that her sister, too, was crying.

Soon the loving good-night was spoken, and Robbie was left alone with the silent companionship of the stars. The harvest moon, he knew was somewhere shining among the trees, although unseen by him; it was only the brighter constellations he could distinguish in the far northern heavens.

Peaceful, happy thoughts filled his heart, as he lay on his lowly cot; he could feel now that the Saviour whom he had been earnestly seeking was his friend. That very day, alone in his room, he believed the word of pardon had been spoken to his soul, while in his prayer that evening a partial acknowledgment had been made. The joy he felt was so deep, the peace so unutterable, that long after the hush of night had fallen over field and forest, his thoughts were

still busy in planning what he might do to express his gratitude to his newly found Redeemer.

No wonder the calm was sweet, coming as it did after the tempest, through which his frail bark had been wearily tossing in its conflict with the powers of darkness that had assailed his soul.







## CHAPTER IV.

### AT SCHOOL.

**D**AYS glided swiftly on. In a few days Robbie was as well as usual — even better, for the rest his mother compelled him to take left him better able to begin his school duties.

When all his work had been completed for the autumn, the last root safely stored in the cellar, the house earthed about, so as to keep, as far as possible, Jack Frost's saucy fingers away, with the other preparations which every country householder finds necessary to perform in our cold climate, — when these had been completed, Robbie began to think anxiously of his vacant seat in the red school-house away over the hills.

To be sure, it was a long, cold walk in the pinching winter days, but the same energy that enabled him to perform a work in the grain and potato field that was the admiration, and perhaps envy, of every parent farmer in all the country side, made him equally energetic in getting what knowledge it was possible for him to gain.

"I never expect to be anything better than a farmer," he explained to his mother, as he urged eagerly his request for directly beginning his studies, before taking what she deemed the needed rest, "but then I want to be an intelligent one. I can be a great deal better fitted for even that work by knowing everything I can find time to learn, and, besides, my winters are getting so sadly few for school going," he added, somewhat ruefully.

"I know that, Robbie, but they will be still less if you work yourself into your grave before your time."

"Is it good to be always talking about the grave, mother? I hope I don't fear it now," he

said, reverently; "but then, I do not want to think that every little breath of wind may thrust me into it."

He soon carried his point, and the next Monday morning, bright and early, he was up performing his tasks so cheerily that his mother wondered did he love knowledge so well, pitying him his few opportunities for gaining it.

Helen was to accompany him on fine days, before the severe weather set in and the deep snows came. Fully an hour earlier than was necessary, they were ready to start, and the boyish impatience that had not been wholly crushed out by hard work forced him to urge the tardy Helen along as well.

"Maybe I can find where the morning's lesson is and get mine learned before the school opens," he said to his mother; he was ashamed to let her know how eager he was to be back among his books.

A new teacher had taken the place of "Irish Tim," as he was irreverently styled by his pupils,

who had been teacher there for years. His day was now gone by, and ill as it was for himself, it was none too soon for the little flock whom he ignorantly tried to instruct.

His successor, although but an indifferent scholar, was regarded by his children, and Robbie among the foremost, as a pattern of perfection.

He was a young man of obscure parentage, but of an ambitious turn of mind, and quite sentimental withal, who had once thought to be a teacher would satisfy the deepest craving of his heart, but who had already found, when only in the third term of his longed-for employment, that there were other heights beyond for which he ardently sighed.

To be a city lawyer was the thought and aim that now occupied nearly every waking moment, and so filled with the idea had his brain become that he found it necessary to unveil to even unsympathizing eyes the dream that had taken possession of him.

In Robbie he found an attentive listener; allowing no such brilliant hopes to take possession of his fancy, knowing how vain it would be for him to think of getting more than the plainest education, with his mother and sisters to support; but it did not lessen the pleasure he took in listening to his friendly teacher's brilliant anticipations.

"It will be so grand a calling to give justice to the poor," Robbie said one day after listening to his companion's expected greatness. "I have thought sometimes I should like to be a lawyer, or minister, or something, so that I could help others; after knowing so well what a sad thing it is to be poor and weak, I think I could do so better."

"I want to be rich to be happy myself; I never thought much about what I could do for others," was the selfish response.

"Maybe you have never known how blessed it was to receive a helping hand in some sore time of need," Robbie said, with a scarcely concealed

shudder, as he thought how many times the wolf had been turned from their doors by a neighbor's hand.

"Well, yes, I have needed help as much as most persons at my age, and have had it from very unexpected sources, too; but somehow I never think of others as being in like circumstances with me, besides, I can't find time to look after everyone."

"I cannot, either, I can only help my mother; but what I do for her makes me so happy I wish sometimes I could extend the circle of my helpfulness. I am sure the Bible speaks truly when it says, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Robbie was afraid to say anything further lest his teacher might think him intrusive; he could only hope that he might soon learn this first lesson in the Christian life, the duty of not living to ourselves alone.

The school-days went happily by; Robbie did not find it difficult to attend White-face and

Blossom, bringing to his mother their daily offering, which hitherto had gone so far towards making them easy in their straitened finances. Now the basket he carried to Phalen at the Corner became every week lighter to bear, and a little before Christmas his mother made the sad announcement that once a fortnight at most would suffice for him to go.

Fortunately they were free of debt; Whiteface was paid for and the account-book at the Corner at least showed no debit against them; indeed Phalen had told Robbie on his last trip there that the credit was crossing to the other side the book; but then there was but a small supply of flour in the little kitchen pantry, and as for groceries they were becoming sadly precious in the frugal mother's eyes; however, a good cellar of potatoes, with other vegetables, were hidden away from Jack Frost's icy fingers, while Mary's pink-eyed piggy, long ago outgrown from her cleanly affections, was silently curing in the pork barrel up-stairs.

They could live without butter, and sugar, and tea, Mrs. Meredith said over and over, reassuringly to herself, as she daily took stock of their slender winter store; but it was hard to think of being on allowance for bread, but Robbie would soon get their small grain crop to mill, now that the farmers were getting their fall work done, and could lend him a hand in thrashing it, and which with economy might be made to last two or three months, and then she resolved not to think of the long hungry spring. The Lord would provide someway. The fulness of the whole earth was his, while the widow and orphan were his especial care.

Robbie could not help wondering at the peaceful gladness that shone so constantly now in his mother's face. His own faith was so strong in his new-found Father in heaven he could only hope, it was from the same unfailing source his mother found her strength.

It was not many weeks until Robbie regained his place at the head of the different classes in



the school, much sooner, indeed, than he had expected.

So eager was his haste, and so ready his brain for receiving knowledge, that before the winter was nearly completed, his teacher found that he was ahead, not only of his most advanced pupils, but, what was not very agreeable to himself, that he was rapidly approaching the terminus of his own scant supply of educational stock. The greatest obstacle found in the way of study was the short term of daylight when out of school. No matter how long before daylight his work might begin, the moment arrived only too soon when he must leave for the school-house where fresh duties awaited him.

Anxious to supplement their income by a few dollars, he had assumed the task of lighting the fires and keeping the school-room in order, a burden that sometimes seemed heavy enough as he trudged bravely along through cold and storm.

He had, it is true, long winter evenings at home when he might have studied, but candles

and oil, like every other luxury except love, were too scarce in their home to be used so lavishly.

The little mother and Helen could see to knit by the open fire-light, while Robbie was obliged to content himself with the same poor illumination, assisted only by the troublesome light obtained from birch bark, large rolls of which he hunted up every spare holiday.

Mary did not often weary with attending to his quickly consuming light on the hearth, while he lay beside her with book or slate eager to improve each flickering gleam it afforded; but the dust man generally came around early in the evening, when she was unwillingly obliged to yield to his power, so that Robbie often for hours tended his bark while he learned difficult lessons and stern ones, too, of economy and perseverance. The summer's training of self-reliance was greatly strengthened by the winter's mastery of difficult lessons.

It was not text-book knowledge alone, or lessons of thrift, that he acquired by the evanescent

light of pine knot or birch bark, at the quiet hearthstone where his mother diligently plied her needles, but what was even better than these, a determined strength of will to overcome even the most obstinate, and what might seem next to insurmountable, obstacles that lay in the way of his advancement to a greatly desired goal. As his mother watched him in the flickering light that threw fantastic shadows along her humble kitchen wall, it was not strange if she pictured for her eager determined boy some bright future in the great busy world that lay beyond the narrow confines of their quiet village.





## CHAPTER V.

### DEATH.

**T**HE short winter days slipped only too quickly by to suit Robbie's heavily planned list of studies to be accomplished before the early seed-time should begin. He worked hard, too hard his friends thought, but their fears did not find an answering chord in his breast. It only made him study the harder while in the school-room, that he might have the less to do at home when he knew his mother was anxiously watching him; but when his home duties were all completed, he found it a hard matter to gain rest, or recreation in complete idleness.

He came in from the barn earlier than usual

one bright evening in the early part of March, and, with a joyous ring in his voice that gladdened his mother's heart, exclaimed :

“ Hurrah! I have finished my winter's stint.”

“ How so, Robbie?” and the mother cast an amused glance at the small supply of wood that occupied the place of a generally much larger heap.

“ Oh, never mind the wood, mother, to-morrow is Saturday, and I shall cut plenty of wood then, but won't you be glad to hear that I have finished the stint I gave myself in my studies when I began to go to school? I was afraid then I couldn't do it, but I've got it done,” he exclaimed with greater eagerness than elegance.

“ I am glad you have accomplished what you wished, but would it not be well for my son to practice something that he learns, and make a more careful selection of the words he uses?”

“ When I am happy I don't think how I speak, and I do feel so glad to-night,” and he threw himself down on the settle bed, clasping his arms under his head for a pillow.

"I am very glad for my son's happiness," and the little mother smiled contentedly as she laid the dishes on the snowy cloth, preparing for their evening meal.

"It is not right to trouble about the future, when I am so happy in the present; but, oh, I would so like to study for years; there are so many things I should like to know. After I had finished my lessons to-day in school, I took up one book after another and looked through to the end, and with the look there came a little pain to think their secrets would always remain a mystery to me."

"Maybe not always, Robbie."

"Why, mother, what do you mean?"

"Do you not think that in heaven all these studies will be pursued by those who love them?"

"I never thought of that." He paused, thoughtfully looking up at the bright sunset sky, and then said, a slight flush mantling his cheek:

"If I get to heaven, maybe I won't care so

much for the knowledge we think so much of on earth, and maybe I let my heart get set too much upon my studies while I think too little about a better knowledge, that of the love of God."

"I have been thinking more about that lately, Robbie, than ever I did before," his mother answered softly, "and it seems to me all my anxieties have grown lighter since I began casting them on the Lord."

"I believe, mother, I have been losing ground rather than gaining, lately; any kind of prosperity, I fear, must be injurious, and getting along well in my studies is a kind of prosperity, I suppose; besides, I find more things to try my patience at school. Some of the larger boys impose on the rest of us. I do not mind so much for myself, but there is lame Peter, some of the big boys tease him so, and if I try to stop them, they begin calling me *young parson* or *little hypocrite*, so that sometimes I just clench my fists I get so angry. Do you think I can be a real Christian and feel that way, mother?"

He raised himself on his elbow, looking anxiously toward her.

“‘Be ye angry, and sin not,’ is one of the Bible precepts. Oppression and wrong of any kind may kindle our just indignation; the sin is in giving away to it violently. I hope you will never yield so far to your feelings as to fight with any of your school-mates, no matter what may be the provocation.”

The lad sighed heavily, and laying down in his former position, he said :

“I will try, mother, but it is hard to see poor Peter knocked down, and his crutches thrown away in the snow, just for fun as the boys say, to see him crawling for them, or his little sister Sally wading through the deep snow after them, with her little pinched, hungry-looking face red with the cold and tears that are always there when Peter is getting teased.”

“Well, why do not you go and get the crutches?”

“I do, mother, but they beat me too, if I do,



and then I am generally a good ways off when they do it."

"But why do you not tell the teacher?"

"I have, but he does not seem to mind what the rich boys do. They generally act as they please, and it makes it harder for the rest of us."

"Never mind yourself, Robbie, only try and take the part of the weaker ones."

"I do try, mother, but I cannot do much alone. I wonder why it is so much easier to do wrong than right. If I were to fall in with the ways of the other boys, I should have no trouble getting along with them, and it seems so unjust for them to laugh at and shun me just because I can't find it in my heart to tease the weaker children, cheat the master, and say words I should blush for you or the girls to hear me speak."

"I hope my son will always be brave enough not to mind what his school-fellows say, when he he knows he has right on his side."

After a moment's pause, he said :

"God will help me if I ask him, for he knows how much I sometimes need it."

His mother had the tea prepared now, and Robbie was ready to do justice to it; the bit of luncheon he had at school was but unsatisfactory food for the growing, active boy, while the school-house was too far away in the deep snows and sudden storms of winter for him to go home and return in the short noon hour.

They had scarcely finished their tea when Dick Williams came hastily into the house, and without waiting to respond to their cordial greetings he said:

"Mrs. Meredith, they want you to come over directly. Mother is very sick."

"What is the matter?" was her startled question.

"We are afraid she is dying. She was taken only a few minutes ago."

In a moment Mrs. Meredith was ready, and taking Robbie with her she was soon across the lots at farmer Williams' door.

When Mrs. Meredith entered the room where her kindly neighbor was lying, to all appearance struggling with a cruel death, the remembrance of her own life sorrow was brought fresh to her mind. A momentary weakness passed over her, but she soon regained her usual calmness, and instantly set about trying to see if something could not be done to give the sufferer relief.

No one had as yet been dispatched for the doctor. The farm hands were in the woods and would not be home until dark, while Dick was unwilling to leave his mother's bedside. In a few minutes Robbie had saddled the fleetest horse in the stable, and was galloping along the beaten road for the doctor.

With what anxiety they all waited his coming, although fearing that she had passed beyond all human skill! When he came, their fears were found to be correct; and so hopeless did he deem the sick woman's case that the only medicines he gave were to deaden the pain.

When Mrs. Williams found that in a very

few hours, at farthest, she should be face to face with the Judge of all the earth, a momentary alarm increased the pallor of her agonized countenance; but faith in the Redeemer whom she had loved and served for years soon took away death's sharpest sting, and in a few moments she was able to give directions for the immediate guidance of the family, as, also, advice for their more distant future.

Before midnight her spirit escaped from the suffering body. Her dying testimony, together with her past life, left her friends without a fear as to her blissful future.

Robbie had not seen any one die since the sad day when he had watched with wondering, frightened gaze his own father entering the cold river. As he accompanied his mother home in the early dawn, he said :

“After all, there is nothing so necessary in this world as preparation for death; only to think how soon she was taken from all she held dear on earth.”

"Yes, Robbie, I see every day more clearly how small the affairs of this life are in comparison with the endless hereafter. I thought, when I was wiping the death dews from her face, would I ever yield to ambitious desires for my children in the future as I had done in the past?"

"How strange, mother, that we should think alike. It seemed to me then that my success at school was of such little value; but then we ought to make the best of everything while in the world; the only danger I suppose is getting to think more of the intellect than of the soul."

"Yes, we had better reach heaven ignorant than to have all knowledge and fail of getting there."

They were at their own door now; a cold, raw wind was blowing over the frozen meadows from the east, while threatening storm-clouds were slowly rising above the distant hills; a lurid red marked the approach of another day, a day of sorrow and desolation to the friends who had so many times made glad the home of the widow and her son.

No-wonder that on this cold March morning their hearts seemed in unison with nature's dreariness, and that a vague sense of the fitness of the coming day to the scene upon which it should dawn, in the house across the lots, should be presented to Robbie's susceptible mind.





## CHAPTER VI.

### SUNDAY SUITS.

**I**N April, Robbie was obliged to leave the school. There were fences to be repaired, and wood drawn from the back pasture and cut for the summer's burning; while he had still much ploughing to do that had been left from the previous autumn; the farmers had been using their teams, and the mother's limp purse could not at that time bear the drain upon it of a hired man and his team. Now Robbie felt large enough to hold the plough, while Helen, bright and active beyond her years, could easily manage the horse, so that a man's wages at least would be saved.

But, at the best, prospects were dark enough. The pig Nancy had brought in the summer was well-nigh used up; only what the prudent mother had reserved for the toilsome seed-time, when meat was scarce and appetites so sharp.

White-face and Blossom had nearly ceased to yield their daily offering, while the flour, and even the buck-wheat were getting alarmingly low.

But there were no debts, and summer was coming, and, after the seasons they had passed through, Robbie did not yield much to fears for the future.

What was hardest to bear, they could none of them go to church or Sunday-school. The mother had turned and returned the garments worn in better days until their faded, threadbare appearance was no longer presentable for God's house.

As Robbie put on his out-grown Sunday best the last time, he said, half playfully :

“ If it were the heart they wished to see, they might always see mine through these clothes,



they are so thin. I guess I won't go again until I can get better, unless you will let me wear my every-day suit, it does not look quite so poverty stricken."

His mother gave her consent, but soon the patches even on that suit became so multitudinous that Robbie was obliged to stay at home.

"I do not care so much for myself," he said, one bright May morning, when the bells in the village were calling the people to the house of prayer, "but it is so hard to see you confined at home, and it will be so long before we can get clothes for us all."

"Never mind, Robbie, we can read God's word at home, and if we sit on the door-step and watch the fair clouds and listen to the birds making their glad harmonies all about us, we can imagine the clouds to be kind messengers from heaven, freighted with blessings, while we remember that the birds are one rich gift left us from Adam's transgression."

"Ah, yes! but I should so like to have the services at church and these too."

"Maybe, my son, when you get to have an abundant home of your own you will prize your blessings all the more highly, and be the more ready to share your means with those who have but little."

"I may never have anything to share, mother."

"If you live, I have no fears but that your life will be a successful one."

"Why do you think that?"

"Your energy and perseverance, if nothing else, assure me of it, so let us wait patiently for those richer days, I won't say happier. Someway of late I have realized my blessings as I never did before, and I cannot reasonably wish to hasten to any happier future."

Robbie looked up in his mother's face from his low seat at her feet on the door-step. There was a surprised gladness in his own face that effectually chased away the momentary discontent that had somewhat clouded his handsome countenance.

"You are satisfied, then, that we have kept together?"

“Yes, Robbie, I have found that mother does not always know best. You were right that time.”

“That was the only time, and then you could not know how determined I was to keep our home together. We do not mind the hardships now that they are past, and we can surely afford to endure the few yet to come.”

Seed-time came and went. Midsummer suns rose and set, ripening golden grain and fruits, and still Robbie was held prisoner on the Sundays.

His thoughtful pastor, quickly divining the reason for his absence, supplied him with reading matter best suited for the bright, clever boy, so that his Sundays might not be quite lost. His own narrow income alone preventing him becoming the anonymous donor of a complete Sunday suit; but a widowed mother, with children still unprovided for, absorbed all his surplus funds, and it was only books and similar help he could give the brave, earnest lad who claimed so strongly his hearty admiration.

Another midsummer evening, nearly a year from that well remembered eventide when he first started out alone to look for bread, found Robbie, after his hard day's work trudging along, somewhat wearily under a heavy basket of butter to Phalen's store at the Corner.

The cows were performing unusually well in the butter line this summer; so much so that the flour barrel had been replenished, and other household necessities supplied.

Robbie's mother had given him permission to invest the supply of butter he carried in the basket this night according to his own fancy, thinking, of course, that he would buy himself a new suit, and finish paying for it with future churnings.

No such selfish plan, however, was cherished by her boy. Arriving at the store, Robbie found, to his satisfaction, Phalen in, and responding to the kind-hearted fellow's hearty greeting he straightway delivered his butter-basket, and after the weighing had been attended to, inquired,

with a measure of self-distrust, if Phalen had any pretty dress material for women's wear.

"That we have, my boy, something that will make your eyes sparkle."

"I want something sober, it's a dress for my mother."

Phalen turned from the piles of reds and greens he was about reaching down to a heap of quieter tints.

Robbie espied a piece of silver grey it occurred to him how prettily it would match the soft grey hair that was beginning to whiten so rapidly on his mother's fair brow. "May I look at that piece?" he asked, pointing to it.

"Ah, sonny, I am afraid that's too dear for you."

Robbie inquired the price. The next question, something he had quite forgotten before, how much it would take? Phalen made a ready guess; he knew Mrs. Meredith's size. Robbie reckoned it up, ten yards at one dollar a yard; it certainly was a great sum for them, but a happy thought presented itself.

“My mother makes her dresses very plainly,” he said, “and that looks so wide I think she could do with much less.”

Phalen agreed with him, suggesting that more could be got if necessary, and giving it to him for ninety cents a yard.

Soon it was measured, and Robbie on his way home in the soft summer twilight, whistling blithely, but there was mixed with his pleasure a slight fear lest his mother should be dissatisfied with his purchase.

He had never seen her wear anything to church, since his father's death, except the sombre black that so often became distasteful to him; but he shrewdly thought the possible reason might be the lack of some brighter article of costume to replace the black that had done duty so long.

When he reached home he slowly undid the package, handing it with a deprecating air to the little mother, who was watching curiously her son's proceedings.

"What is it?" she said, as he held up the shining silvery folds. "What a charming piece of goods it is; but who is it for?"

"Who should it be for but my mother?" Robbie replied with a brightening face. "Do you think it is pretty?"

"Quite too pretty for me, my son; how could you be so extravagant?"

"It is not extravagant if it pleases you. Now you at least can go to church."

"Ah! Robbie, I had far rather you had got clothes first. Your generosity pains me."

"Our turn will come next. You should be clothed first, and I am so glad you like it."

"How could I help liking anything you would choose for me?" the mother murmured, softly.

On measuring, it was found there would be quite enough, not only to make the dress, but also a cape, without which Mrs. Meredith could scarcely go to church. Her summer shawl had done duty so many years it would no longer be presentable over the handsome dress.

“How fortunate that it was so wide; after all it will be a very cheap dress.”

“It will, indeed, Robbie; the pleasure it has given me already, poor as we are, is half as much as it is worth, and then I expect it will serve me all the year round until you are quite a man; when, I suppose, there will be no longer need of economizing so strictly.”

Mary had been silently stroking the smooth fabric that seemed to have brought such pleasure to the humble home, with a wistful look in her brown eyes; suddenly an eager, brightened expression took the place of the wistful look:

“Will he be a man by next summer, mamma?”

Robbie laughed shyly, while Mrs. Meredith turned to stroke lovingly the upturned face of the child.

“Not quite so soon as that, my little one; but why do you ask?”

“I thought I might get a new frock, then.”

The little face lost its brightness at the prospect of such long waiting.



"Never mind, pet, you shall have a good many dresses before I'm a man. White-face and Blossom will find them for you pretty soon."

After that, many a shy clover head was held temptingly through the pasture bars to the gentle cows, who soon learned to follow Mary, pretty sure of getting something.

Her not wholly unselfish care was soon rewarded. In less than a month Robbie had made the last payment on his mother's dress, and again he was starting out one rainy afternoon with an umbrella hoisted over his basket.

"This butter must go to pay for our last flour, and then the next will be for you," his mother said to him when leaving.

He did not make reply; for once he had concluded to disobey his mother.

Reaching the store he found Phalen ready to wait on him, and also willing to let the flour still remain unpaid for.

"Of course you can get anything you wish," he said, heartily. "Smith himself acknowledges you are one of our most prompt customers."

The keen-eyed fellow did not fail to see the flush of pleasure his encouraging words had caused.

“I would like to get a dress and some fixings for my little sister, if you can tell me what is suitable.”

“Why not get them for yourself? I have joined the Sunday-school lately, and they gave me the class to which you belong, but I haven't seen you there. I guessed the reason why.”

“I should like to go, but the poor little thing has her heart set on going, too, and I can wait more patiently than she.”

“Well, you are a good boy, Bob. I wish there were more like you.”

In a little while Robbie and Phalen were busily engaged selecting a dress for Mary. Robbie's choice was divided between a delicate muslin and brightly colored-merino. The muslin would be quite within his means, but would also very soon be too thin to wear. Phalen urged him to take the merino.

"I don't think we could afford it."

"Yes, but then see how wide it is," was the encouraging reply.

That was a recommendation, Robbie thought, as he recollected his mother's dress which she had made so much out of on account of its width. This fortunate circumstance decided him in favor of the merino.

The next thing to get was a hat, of the suitable selection of which Robbie felt somewhat fearful; but with Phalen's really good taste to assist in choosing, a pretty little hat was soon lying beside the dress, ready to take home to the delighted child. The slippers were easily selected, when Robbie's purchases were complete. As he took up his basket to leave the store, Phalen said:

"You need not pay for that dress. I will make the little maid a present of it."

Robbie's face expressed more grateful thanks than his lips were able to frame.

"If I could only do something for you," he said; "it seems as if I must always be receiving from others and not doing anything in return."

“Never mind, you may help us all some day.  
‘It’s a long lane has no turn.’”

When Robbie reached home the tea was ready, and the mother had, from her carefully hoarded store, added a few luxuries, for Nancy was there. She had been visiting some friends at a distance, and taking care of an aged relative who had left her, most unexpectedly, a snug little sum of money. Her kindness had so endeared her to others that there were none to envy her her little store of wealth.

Robbie set down his basket. In his delight at seeing Nancy he forgot for awhile its contents, until his mother, looking into it, said:

“May we look at your new clothes, Robbie?”

She was so busy exploring the basket, Robbie’s flushed face was unnoticed. True a friend as Nancy was, he had rather she should not know he bought the girl’s hats and dresses; it was bad enough for Phalen to know he did it.

“What have you got here?” was his mother’s surprised question, as she unrolled first the hat with its gay ribbons and then the dress.

"I got Mary's Sunday clothes."

"Oh, let me see," the delighted child eagerly cried. Her delight was unbounded.

Robbie glanced at his mother; he could not fail to see a proud, loving look in her face, although when she caught his eye she said :

"I am sorry, Robbie, that you have spent your money so foolishly. Mary could have done without better than you."

"Never mind, mother, our turn will come next, won't it, Helen? Beside, you must know that dress is a present from Phalen to our baby."

They did not say much more, but when Robbie went out after tea, and his mother told Nancy how long he had been kept at home for want of clothes, and yet how unwilling he was to be clad first, the latter, nowise injured by her recent accession of money, said :

"If you are willing, Mrs. Meredith, I will buy Robbie a new suit."

"I do not think he would be willing," was the timid reply; "he thinks we have been too great

a tax already on our friends, but maybe he would be glad to borrow the money and then pay you back when we are able."


Nancy readily agreed to this, and so the next morning found her early at Phalen's counter, eager about the purchase. With his usual generosity he gave her the cloth at cost, and it was not long until she and Mrs. Meredith had the garments cut, and were busy with their needles in an up-stairs room where Robbie would not be likely to surprise them unexpectedly.

It was a happy moment for Mrs. Meredith when the Sunday morning came to place the clothes on a chair in Robbie's room, where his eyes would be sure to rest on them when he come in. They were a happy pair, as they walked together, accompanied by little Mary, to church that morning.



## CHAPTER VII.

### CONVERSION.

OBBIIE was once more in the Sunday-school, and could listen again to the words of instruction and warning uttered from the sacred desk.

The evening of that first Sabbath after he had again taken his accustomed seat in the house of prayer, the minister took for his text that strangely symbolic text, from the sayings of the wise man, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes."

Robbie was first amused, and next fascinated by the quaintness of the good man's text, and

the remarks he uttered as he took up the various branches of his discourse.

With a satisfied self-complacency he listened, as one by one the habits and actions likely to injure the work of grace in the Christian character and life were dwelt upon; until, at last, the preacher in a masterly manner pressed home more and yet more closely the truths which he was uttering upon the consciences of his hearers. The more flagrant sins were first arraigned, and then he narrowed down more closely, until Robbie felt his cheeks crimson. Were not his own heart's coveted idols passing under scrutiny now?

Pride, self-esteem, ambition, impatience, oh! so many sins were set in array before him, as his thoughts quickly reviewed the months that had passed since he had felt his sins forgiven. Even that very evening he had entered the church, holding up his head as if he were better than the other boys around him; mentally making the difference between his own active services for others, and their careless, fun-loving habits. Now he



felt ready, like the Publican, to cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner," as the curtain was being lifted from his heart, and sins that had been hiding there were exposed to view.

Robbie went home through the calm summer night, feeling sadder and more condemned than he had done before for months. His thoughts had been so engrossed in the 'every-day duties of life but little time had been given to the higher interests of his spiritual welfare.

He realized now that the strangely fascinating story of Pilgrim, in Bunyan's allegory, was not over-drawn. He had only gone but a little distance on that way that Pilgrim followed so steadfastly until the termination, which lay beyond Beulah over the river, in the Celestial City.

Robbie felt that he too had been loitering in the Valley of Carnal Security; had been listening to the words of Giant Pride and other enemies of the soul; but he determined, as he leaned over the fence looking up at the bright stars shining far off in the quiet heavens, that he would again begin.

"I will at least not let Giant Despair get hold of me," he murmured; "my case is hard enough, and I have been forgetful and wicked enough to make me give up all hope, but I shall look earnestly to Christ for help and he will save me from myself."

He followed his mother into the house after a time. Nancy was there. In his silent communing, under the watching stars, Robbie had new views of the duties and responsibilities of life; he saw how many things he had left undone for his blessed Master; how little he was trying to do to show his gratitude to the Saviour, who had left the abode of his own and his father's glory to die for him.

"I have not acknowledged him to any one but my mother, except in a half-ashamed, frightened way, as if it were a disgrace to have God's love in my soul," he said, half aloud, before entering the house; and then in the still night air vows were uttered and prayers breathed forth, unheard by any human ear, but the result of which brought

before many weeks a joy nearest that of the angels to very many hearts.

That evening, before they retired, Robbie said to his mother :

“If you are willing, mother, I think we should have prayers together before we sleep.”

She gave him a surprised look, but said, “I am willing, Robbie.”

With a quivering heart, and a feeling of humiliation almost terrible in its strength, Robbie opened the Bible. He turned to that sad story of our Saviour's agony in the garden, and, as he read, strength seemed given to him. For a moment he forgot his mother, and Nancy, and his wondering sisters. Christ did all this for him, wrestled, agonized, bled; should he refuse so light a cross in view of the heavier one his Master struggled under so many hours alone? The prayer he uttered was short but fervent. When they arose from their knees, Nancy was not ashamed to be found in tears.

When Robbie retired that night he wondered

should he always be so happy in the love of Christ; when he went about the duties of the day, week after week, and year after year, until life was done, should he always carry this deep, inexpressible comfort with him?

The following evening he found time to visit his minister. He thought there might be found some work he could do for Christ and his fellow creatures; and, beside, he wished to unite with the church. He longed to share with Christians the privilege of commemorating Christ's death in the mystical emblems of bread and wine. When he spoke to his minister Robbie said modestly:

"I thought, sir, that it was my duty to tell you how much your sermon benefitted me. I never was so happy in my life as I have been to-day."

"You could not tell me any better news my, dear boy," was the glad reply. "It was with a sad, discouraged heart that I prepared that sermon; indeed, I have seen so little fruits of my ministry since I came here, I have feared that I was not in the work God wished to have me in."

"It is not much, I suppose, to help a poor ignorant boy like me, or that might encourage you," Robbie said, gently.

"When our blessed Master came on earth, his direct mission seems to have been mostly to the poor, and let us hope, Robbie, that the good work begun in your heart may spread to scores beside."

Robbie's wish to join the church was heartily approved of, and the next Sunday appointed, when he should receive public recognition of membership.

"You will meet with us in our prayer-meeting on Wednesday evening, and tell there what joy you have recently experienced," were his minister's parting words.

Robbie found his way to the meeting on the Wednesday evening, accompanied by his mother and sisters, although the church was more than a mile away, and Helen and Mary had no other covering for their feet but what nature provided. With generous self-sacrifice, Mary declared her

determination to go barefoot rather than have Helen appear so alone.

Robbie felt grieved to think of it, but he believed there was a better time coming, when he and the dear ones with him could sit in God's house without being pained with a sense of their outward unfitness for that sacred place.

However the small congregation may have esteemed the humble family, as the mother and her two barefoot daughters softly went up the uncarpeted aisle, to farmer Williams' pew where they were always welcome to a seat, at least before the service was ended they could but rejoice with her when they heard her soft, tremulous voice telling what great peace had recently come to abide in her heart, and still more might they wonder at her joy when Robbie, with an eloquence thrilling from its very simplicity and intensity of feeling, told them what God had done for him.

It was not a usual thing, in that church, to hear any one speak of the love of Jesus, unless

the minister or some of the aged members; but when a timid woman and her boy told, with such deep pathos, their simple story, it was not strange if there was in the little assembly scarce an unmoved spectator.

After Robbie sat down, one and another spoke quietly, but with an earnestness that betokened a belief in the awful realities of another state of existence. The cold apathy that had been the habitual state of that prayer-meeting was quite broken up, and so unconscious was Mr. Carthen, the minister, of the flight of time, and so willing were the people to remain where the power from on high was so manifested, that one after another of the villagers dropped in to ascertain the cause of the unusually long meeting.

When at last they did close, Mr. Carthen asked if it would not be wise to have another meeting the next evening.

"We have been," he said, "careless so long, surely we may now afford to be a little while in earnest, else God may leave us entirely. We

have felt his presence here wondrously to-night. Let us believe it is a manifest token that he is about to pour out his Spirit in our midst. All willing to unite in working and praying for a revival will please manifest their willingness to cooperate by rising."

One after another the congregation responded, until scarcely a person remained sitting.

In a tremulous voice the benediction was pronounced, and the people, some in groups and others alone, went to their homes. Some were astonished, others rejoicing.

"It is the dawning, I believe, of a day I have long prayed for," one saintly old mother in Israel exclaimed, as she said good-by to her pastor at the parsonage gate.

Robbie went about his work next day happy enough, and strong enough in his great new joy to resist Satan's wily snares. As he worked in the harvest field that day, the thought was suggested to him that there was no necessity for his beginning so young in life to work for Jesus;



but he repelled the temptation by reminding himself how very short, even at the longest, our work-time is on earth.

His eyes rested on the golden grain he was rapidly cutting down with his sickle, and he was reminded of the time soon to be here, when death, with his "sickle keen," should cut him down and usher his spirit into the presence of the Judge of quick and dead.

"I won't regret then that I began when I was only sixteen to work for Jesus," he said aloud as if answering some invisible companion.

When he entered the crowded church that evening it did not occur to him that it would be his duty to take any public part in the service; but, during the evening, his afternoon's meditation in the harvest field came into his mind, as he was half unconsciously watching Dick Williams' strangely moved countenance. Eager to encourage him, before he scarcely knew what he was doing, he was on his feet, thrilling with his simple, homely message, not only the heart of

good-natured, light-hearted Dick, but also his friend Phalen who had come as many others had, to see the strange doings.

His simile of the ripening grain-field was one they could all understand; and, as he spoke, old farmer Williams, who had never quite sympathized with his wife in her love for religion, inly trembled as he reflected upon how nearly ripe his years must be, and how little precious seed he had borne for Christ or the world.

Robbie, a mere child compared with himself, was working for his Master, while he, soon to be called from all his planning and treasures, was only thinking of that certain future with dread.

When Robbie had ceased speaking there was for several moments a solemn pause; a wagon going by was distinctly heard far down the road, while an occasional muffled shuffling of feet seemed to disturb the house.

A few moments after, Mr. Carthen, as well as the old man's neighbors, were startled as farmer Williams arose to his feet. Dick and his sisters,

who were sitting in the large square pew with their father, exchanged half-frightened glances. The congregation turned their heads to listen. All were surprised. Old comrades of the farmer were there, those who had played with him in boyhood, consulted together the serious business of life, grown old together, and who, like him, had never thought much of those things that made for their eternal peace. These listened as perhaps few others did. What he might say or do would probably have more influence than even their minister's words could have.

"My friends," he said, while every nerve of his labor-hardened body seemed quivering with emotion, "I feel to-night, as I never felt before, the necessity of being prepared for death. I have seen a father and mother calmly meeting death. I have closed the eyes of my children for the last time, and not very long ago I saw the companion of my youth and riper years passing through the gates of death. Each of these warnings from Providence has had a certain influence

over my mind, but not one of them has made me realize as I do this night that some day, and that before very long, I must go to meet my Judge, that I must live either in heaven or hell forever and ever. I believe if I should die this present hour, where God is I could not come."

He sat down. Not so much the words as the manner in which they were uttered brought a solemnity awful as death itself over the congregation.

The meeting went on. Other voices never before heard speaking for Jesus were asking how they might find him.

At its close Mr. Carthen announced a similar service on the following evening, and for the Sunday also.

"We will all be workers together," he said, "in this glorious harvest work, and we must look and pray that the coming Sabbath may be the best day we have ever known."

A mighty power seemed resting on the people, and after the benediction had been pronounced, they still seemed unwilling to leave the house.



## CHAPTER. VIII.

### CHRISTIAN WORK.

**T**HAT Sabbath, and many succeeding ones, were days long to be remembered in the little village, as well as in the surrounding hamlets. Robbie was received into the church, together with farmer Williams, who was made happy in the pardoning love of God that very night, and several others also on the succeeding Sunday, while for many ensuing Sabbaths the minister and his people were gladdened by seeing scores of people enrolling themselves with the church.

Phalen became one of the most earnest workers in the good cause. Soon experiencing his

utter unfitness to teach others, he became a humble disciple in Christ's school; and when he had found the pearl of great price, he did not rest content with possessing that blessing himself, but, with all the fervor of his earnest nature, urged others to come and gain the eternal riches so freely offered to all.

Robbie still worked on with increasing faith and zeal; the meetings greatly strengthened his purposes. He had not, however, so far overcome sin and an evil heart that temptations and even failures of duty were unknown to him, but he now more than ever realized the need of hourly cleansing in the fountain opened to take away his sin. Every night he was grieved to look back over a day in which some work for Jesus had been left undone; some easily besetting sin yielded to; but, helpless as he felt himself to be, there was joy, supreme and abiding, in the consciousness that in Christ he could find strength and grace necessary to help him even in this world to overcome; and that, not when he was

old and the world had lost its charm, and its allurements were not so strangely sweet. But now, in the early dawns of manhood, as well as in its full strength, he looked to have his Lord taking stronger possession of his affections, of his entire being, so that one day he trusted to be entirely what his Heavenly Father would have him be.

Was it an expectation beyond what the Bible warrants a Christian attempting? A state too blessed for an heir of glory while yet on earth attempting to realize?

After it was decided the services had been held sufficiently long they gradually ceased, until the usual Wednesday prayer-meeting was the one public service of the week.

Robbie felt grieved as he thought of the many who were yet unconverted, and would willingly have walked the mile and more every evening after his day's work was done if they had deemed it advisable to continue.

At last he gained courage and went to his min-

ister with a plan that had been troubling him for days. If Mr. Carthen were willing he would get those of the lads near his own age to hold a prayer-meeting together once a week.

Of course Mr. Carthen gladly gave his consent, and then Robbie's next endeavor was to get boys willing to join him in the undertaking. He spoke to Dick Williams first, who consented to attend the meeting. He would promise nothing further. Notwithstanding all his endeavors, Robbie could get no more than five willing to have their names enrolled among the little band, and these were only obtained by the most urgent entreaties.

He chose Saturday evening for their prayer-meeting, and as he finished up his weeks labors on that day, it was with fear and trembling he looked forward to the hour so rapidly approaching.

A little before the appointed time Robbie was at the door, key in hand, but up and down the long stretch of road that lay like a brown belt



between the meadows on either side, no person was visible in the bright moonlight.

With a heavy heart he turned the key and entered the softly illumined house. How silent everything seemed; oppressively so, after the accustomed buzz of children's voices. Only the clock told of the departing moments in its solemn, measured tone.

Robbie hastened to light the lamp with which he had provided himself, hoping some of the boys might see it and come.

It seemed a long time waiting, as he sat there in the shadowy room. He was beginning to yield to a feeling of discouragement, when he heard the door softly open. As he turned to look, Dick Williams was just closing the door behind him. He was alone. Robbie then gave up all hope of any one else coming. Where were all the lads, he wondered, who had seemed so deeply impressed during the meetings.

When Dick saw only Robbie present, he looked relieved. His promise had been kept at

considerable self-sacrifice, and now there would not be any meeting, and he would have very little annoyance with it after all.

But he was disappointed. Robbie opened his little pocket Bible immediately, saying :

“ We need not wait further, we shall be the only ones to-night.”

Dick moved uneasily on his seat ; this was going to be worse than he bargained for. A congregation of two was likely to be far more personal in its tendency than a much larger one would be.

Robbie chose the story of Christ's crucifixion which he read with a pathos not often heard. He read as if it had been the death scene of a friend whom he knew and loved above all others. His own tears were flowing before he had finished, and Dick, too, came to listen as he had never done before to that well-known story. It seemed only a fitting close to those sad words when Robbie, falling on his knees, poured out his full heart to that crucified, yet now exalted Friend and Saviour.

Dick at first trembled, and then as his companion's petitions grew more fervent, the tears came dropping on the bench before him. When Robbie ceased he did not wait for an invitation to pray, but with strong emotion, cried :

"O Lord forgive me a wicked sinner! I have tried to forget that I have a soul to save, but I want to be one of thy followers. Help me to overcome Satan and my own wicked heart."

This prayer was more than Robbie dared to expect, and the conversation they held, as they followed the moon-lit path across the meadows, encouraged him still more. He learned then that his companion had, since first the meetings began, been anxious about his soul, but they had come to an end, and he was apparently as far from being a Christian as when they commenced; and as the days went by, and things began to settle back into their old grooves, he thought less and less of religious subjects, and was trying to satisfy the workings of an uneasy conscience by promises that when he got older, or at the very first revival he would certainly be a Christian;

but the fear would haunt him that before that time would come he might be suddenly called to appear before God.

“Now, he said, “I am afraid it is too late, the door of mercy may be shut against me forever.”

“Ah, that cannot be,” Robbie replied; “we never have these fears about our soul’s salvation if there is no chance for us to be saved; it is only when we cease to feel that there is danger.”

They parted at the fence, Robbie going home wondering at his Master’s gracious approval of his newly begun work; Dick to the silent barn, there, alone, to pour out his soul in agonizing petitions for mercy. Before this he had set his own time to come to Jesus. Secure as he felt himself in youth and health, now he must wait God’s time.

For several days he carried his burden. Robbie prayed and reasoned with him all in vain, the plan of salvation through faith in Christ was so simple he failed to see the wonderful ease with which he might find pardon.

In the Wednesday evening prayer-meeting he stood up and told, as simply as a little child might have done, through what he had passed.

"I do not know," he said, with frank simplicity, "what else may avail, but perhaps God would help me if you would all unite in asking him."

They all did, or so it seemed from the influence instantly pervading the house, but before a single prayer had been audibly uttered, peace, a great peace, was filling the boy's glad heart.

Henceforth Robbie had one to encourage and assist him whose whole heart was in the work.





## CHAPTER IX.

### CHANGES.

**I**N the quiet country hamlet the time passed uneventfully by. There was little to break the monotony. An occasional death, a still rarer wedding, and the birth record slowly filling up, these were the most marked epochs to engross the thoughts and conversation of Robbie's neighbors.

Three years thus passed away, and then changes began to come. During that time he had faithfully endeavored to make the very most of his few opportunities; scarcely an hour was suffered to run to waste. His minister's library,  
(115)

as well as help, were freely offered, and a use made of them that might have shamed many a university student.

The winter evenings were his richest harvest time. History and poetry, travels, essays and biographies, were all read with avidity, and copious notes taken in the boy's own untutored fashion, while the mysteries of the Greek and Latin languages were being gradually unfolded, with several of the natural sciences.

Robbie believed it to be but a smattering of each that he was acquiring, but he was surprised in after years at the amount of knowledge he had gained in those formative days.

The gaunt shadow of their early poverty was no longer hanging over them. Helen, although still very young, had become fitted for a teacher, and was now more than able to support herself; while Robbie found no trouble in making both ends of the year meet comfortably. No debts troubled them, and the book account had long since closed at Phalen's store.

Three cows ruminated contentedly in the pasture lot, and Mary seemed capable of developing into a womanhood equal to the task of attending a dozen cows.

Helen could not imbue her with her own ambitious notions about teaching school, and so rising in the world. With a careless independence she maintained that helping her mother and Robbie on the farm, or even working it herself, was fully as respectable as dress-making or school-teaching. "Besides," she would add, "I like it better, and I am far more my own mistress, and that is worth a good deal."

She reserved all her ambitious plans for Robbie; unlike as the two were in their tastes, there was yet a strong affection between them, and perhaps no one knew the cherished hopes of the quiet lad better than his healthy, impulsive sister. She hoped one day, and that no very distant one, to take charge of the farm herself and support the little mother, and keep the home together, letting Robbie go out into the world unfettered



to seek the education he could never gain at home.

Robbie had several times been amused by grave hints as to her future plans. She was now no longer kept at home for want of suitable habiliments to appear at Sunday-school and church.

Spare hours were diligently employed in manufacturing yarn into garments that found ready purchasers in the nearest town. In this way their unassuming wardrobe was kept amply supplied.

No wonder the little mother looked upon her children, clever in their several ways, with all a fond parent's pride.

Robbie and Dick still held their little prayer-meeting in the old red school-house; and as the years went by they had cause for encouragement in seeing that their efforts were not lost. Dick had confided to Robbie his ardent longing to give his life and talents, if he had any, to the service of the Lord.

"I should like best of all," he would say, "to

be a missionary ; but if I am not clever enough for that, if I could just work for Christ and poor souls in the humblest way I should be satisfied."

Robbie urged him to study something useful every spare moment, and, if he could get his father's consent and help, go to college and get the best possible preparation for the work of the ministry.

Dick could not find courage to tell his father his wish, so one day Robbie spoke for him.

"Would you be willing," he asked, "for Dick to be a minister?"

"To be a minister! Why, what put that in your head?"

"Because he would rather be that than anything in the world, if you would give your consent and help to get him fitted."

With eyes in which a strange moisture glistened, the kind old man fervently answered:

"If God will honor me enough to ask my boy for his work, I will give all I am able to prepare him for it; you may tell him so if he don't want

to talk with me about it."

"Oh, he was afraid for fear you would not be willing, he will be very glad to talk to you about it now."

The next week Dick's studies commenced; he went with Robbie to his pastor's study, where he continued taking lessons until the opening of another academical year in the college, whither his father purposed sending him.

"Wouldn't you like to preach, too, Robbie?"

Dick inquired of him one day after lessons.

"Yes, if the Lord called me, but maybe there is something else for me to do. I mean to get all the knowledge I can, and then be ready as far as possible for whatever my life-work may be."

When Mary discovered that Robbie could get through college on account of the advanced state of his studies a year sooner than Dick, her determination was taken that he should go. She knew they could manage without him, and perhaps be able to help him, too.

If he were only going to preach, she regret-

fully thought, the church would help him, as there was provision made in the institution for indigent students.

She said to him one day :

“Why can't you be a minister, too, Robbie, and then you could get through college?”

“What if the Lord does not wish me to preach? Besides, we have been helped so much in the past, I could not think of being indebted to others for my education, not while I can get it myself.”

Mary knew it would be no use to reason with him, so she said :

“Couldn't you teach school, then, and earn the money?”

“But what would you do without me at home?” Robbie looked into those fearless brown eyes that often shone so grandly when some difficulty was in her path.

“Oh! if you and mother would only let me try, I know we could make a living here alone ;

you could help us in the holidays ; and see how much butter and cloth I can make, more than enough to buy all we need and pay for hired help too."

"I should be ashamed to lay such<sup>†</sup> a burden on a young girl's shoulders."

"But it would be a pleasure, Robbie. You do not know how glad I should be if you would only let me try, and if I fail, you can come home and there would not be much lost."

Robbie did not reply, but Mary could not but see the eager look in his face as he turned thoughtfully away.

The next step would be to gain her mother's co-operation, then success would be certain. In this she succeeded beyond her expectations. Her mother she found fully as anxious as herself to have Robbie go ; and when the plan was mentioned in the letter immediately dispatched to Helen, the latter gladly offered to make every sacrifice to help Robbie on.

Farmer Williams also volunteered every assistance in his power. "I will take charge of your women folks," he said, "and if I think they are doing too much, I will send for you to come home."

Surely the way was getting very plain before Robbie. That spring he worked harder than ever. A large grain crop was put in, this he might be able to get stored himself, and if not, Mary would be obliged to hire help. As for roots, he was pretty certain she would store them unaided.

She wondered at the narrow strip of potatoes and the slim vegetable garden. It did not occur to her that Robbie had a purpose in sowing the acres of wheat and barley, and that it was to save her he planned so well.

It proved an early season that year, providentially so to Robbie, for he was able to get the hay and grain harvested, and only lost a week or two at the beginning of school. To be sure his

face was as brown as a nut, so at least Mary told him, and his hands hard with honest labor; but the light in those soft gray eyes was just as bright as if he had not faced the summer's heat in the meadow lands about his home.





## CHAPTER X.

### GOING TO COLLEGE.

**T**HE day came at last when Robbie must leave the quiet, happy home and the little mother, who seemed to take, as yet, all the room in that still boyish heart.

The day before he was to leave, it had been raining, a gentle, steady, down-dropping from the leaden skies, and so, instead of going to say good-by to his neighbors as he had purposed, Robbie had all the day at home with his mother.

They were packing his clothes, not a very heavy task it must be confessed, but Mrs. Meredith and Mary had done their best to make him decently comfortable; and of one portion of his wardrobe Robbie would certainly have no cause



to be ashamed,—the snowy shirts with the neatly stitched linen fronts.

“No one need know,” Mary said, consolingly, “but what they are all linen.”

“I do not wish any one to think so, if they think about it at all,” Robbie replied; “for a boy who has to work his way at school should not indulge in such extravagance.”

Mary had manufactured him a suit of gray homespun; it was fine and smooth, and when it was ready for him to wear she thought her tall broad-shouldered boy looked his very best in it. It was to be his every-day suit.

“You need not be very careful of it,” she said to him before leaving, “for I have saved wool enough to make you another suit by Christmas; and if you see any poor fellow there short of socks, you may share with him, for there are more than enough to last you a year,” and she pointed to a goodly heap of soft white wool ones.

His books he packed himself, and then sat watching while his mother and Mary laid his gar-

ments, one by one, carefully within the large old-fashioned trunk that had belonged to his father.

At last everything was done, Robbie did not know how lingeringly, as well as lovingly, his mother had loitered over that task. There seemed so little now that she could do for her boy; a mother's heart generally prophesies truly, and she knew in her own heart that he would no longer be all her own as he had in those precious years now gone forever. She knew he would never cease to love her, but still he could not need her in the prosperous busy future she believed to be before him, as he had done in the pinched, oftentimes sorrowful past, that now seemed so blessed.

The evening wore on, and still the rain-drops were pattering against the old, gray shingles that did not turn the dampness as once they did.

"How lonely we shall be when you are away, and we here listening alone to the summer rains and winter storms," Mrs. Meredith said, with a quiver in her voice.

"Oh, mother, that is what makes me feel more sad than glad to-night, the thought of your loneliness," Robbie sadly replied. "Sometimes I wish I had never thought of going, we were just beginning to get so comfortable, and now there will be nothing but pinching and starving just like it has been for years."

"Never mind, Robbie, we may have a pleasant home again some time. I know I shall be happy if that good time ever comes."

"I need not stay very long away if you find it too hard and lonely getting on here. I can easily come, and maybe it's as much my duty to stay and make you comfortable and happy, as to go to college to try and fit myself to do some great work that, after all, may never come to me to get done."

Mary had not spoken. Her good, healthy, common sense view of the matter set both the mother and her son in a happier mood.

"Don't let us look at the gloomy side any longer," she said, cheerily; "if every one gave

way so easily, the world would soon be going backward. Of course it seems hard to-night to have Robbie leave us, but we shall be looking soon for his letters, and then better still to see him home again in our old house a gentleman. You will forget, mother, all your present sorrow and loneliness in the pride you will take in the handsome, clever man who will still honor you as the best little mother in the wide world."

"Well done, Mary! What a sunbeam you are in the gloom we were straying into; if I could only have you with me when I get discouraged as I am certain I shall!"

"Well, you see, mother needs me most, but if you don't get a wife too soon we will go and live with you, won't we, mother?"

"Perhaps so, Mary."

"Ah, Mary! I fear I need never promise myself much pleasure from having you in my home; some lucky fellow will rob me of that, I am certain."

"There is a possibility," was the half saucy answer. But there did not seem to be, for the

light, brave-hearted girl did not take so kindly to beaux as the generality of her sex at her age, much to poor Dick's disappointment, who truly loved the noble girl.

They did not get to talking so gloomily again, but the next morning, when the wagon came to drive Robbie to the station with his luggage, Mrs. Meredith broke down. Robbie could not help seeing that the breakfast she pretended to eat, and which was so daintily prepared by his loving sister's hands, was scarcely touched, while his own appetite was not much better. She could not speak the good-by, but the soft blue eyes that had rarely looked upon him but in love were overflowing, while the gentle face, paler than usual, was sadly watching the last of her boy.

Mary brushed away a few tears in her matter of fact way, as though it were quite a usual circumstance for her to weep, and said good-by as calmly as if he were a stranger about to leave their fireside.

But neither Robbie nor his mother dreamed how

sad a look her face wore as she drove the cows to pasture, nor heard the low sobs that could not be restrained now that she was alone. She had made light of the burden she had assumed as though it were mere child's play, but when Robbie was really gone, no wonder the scarcely more than child should shrink from the care of house and farm with a momentary terror.

The long, cold winter lay before her, with the work outside and in the house to be attended to, through cold and storm; and what she dreaded more than this was the solitude and loneliness of their secluded home.

The cows were a long time getting settled to their grazing lot, or so it might have seemed to Mrs. Meredith had she not been oblivious to everything but Robbie's departure.

Mary came home at last; she had bathed her hot face first in the brook that skirted the farther side of the meadow, and when she entered the clean well-ordered kitchen, whom should she see but Nancy, with her bonnet off and laid away

with her shawl and parasol on the front room table.

Nancy could afford now to indulge in those feminine bits of adornment so dear to her heart, but which had hitherto been a coveted pleasure. Once Nancy's Sunday best bonnet could hang becomingly on a peg in Mrs. Meredith's kitchen, but times were changed now, those gay flowers and feathers would ill become the kitchen wall.

Mary felt greatly relieved when she saw her mother would be comforted better by that kind old maiden than by any one, her own heart was full, and it probably was that which made her so demonstrative, for she surprised Nancy by going directly to her side, and with the plump fair arms about the wrinkled neck, gave the homely mouth an affectionate kiss, saying as she did so:

"You are more welcome than violets in spring. I am so glad your things are off, can't you stay a few days with us?"

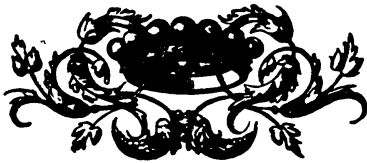
"Yes, and longer, if you care to have me."

Mary gladly extended an indefinite welcome,

inly wishing she would make her home with them. Her heart was overjoyed before night to hear Nancy make the proposal to her mother that she should come and board with them.

“Oh, say yes! won't you, mother?” Mary eagerly exclaimed without giving her mother time to reply.

“Of course I would gladly have her come if she can content herself where it is so lonely,” was the pleased reply. So it was settled, and before another week Nancy was quite domesticated in her new home.







## CHAPTER XI.

### VACATION.

**T**O-DAY the last term ends." This was Mrs. Meredith's first thought, one bright June morning, when she awoke; they were the first words she heard from Mary's lips, as that delighted damsel came in from the clover and scented, dewy air, with overflowing buckets of foamy milk.

How those two loving hearts had counted the days, and even hours, to this bright day when school would be done, and then another day or two and Robbie would be with them.

It had seemed to Mrs. Meredith that the slow-

moving hours of childhood had returned, so slowly did the days and weeks roll round. Every week there had been letters from Robbie; long, complete ones, but they only increased the longing to see the writer.

She had had the satisfaction of knowing that he took more than his share of school honors. This she had learned through Dick's letters to his father. His friend and school-mate seemed as proud of Robbie's success as if they had been brothers.

That day wore slowly away to Mrs. Meredith, but not so to Mary. Such a scouring and cleaning; arranging and re-arranging of their house and its furnishings, had never been. Home must look its brightest, or Robbie might feel the contrast too strongly between the poor little cottage and the fine college and finer homes surrounding it, to which the poor farm-lad had now become a welcome visitor.

But when all her genius and strength, too, had been exhausted, a look of dissatisfaction clouded

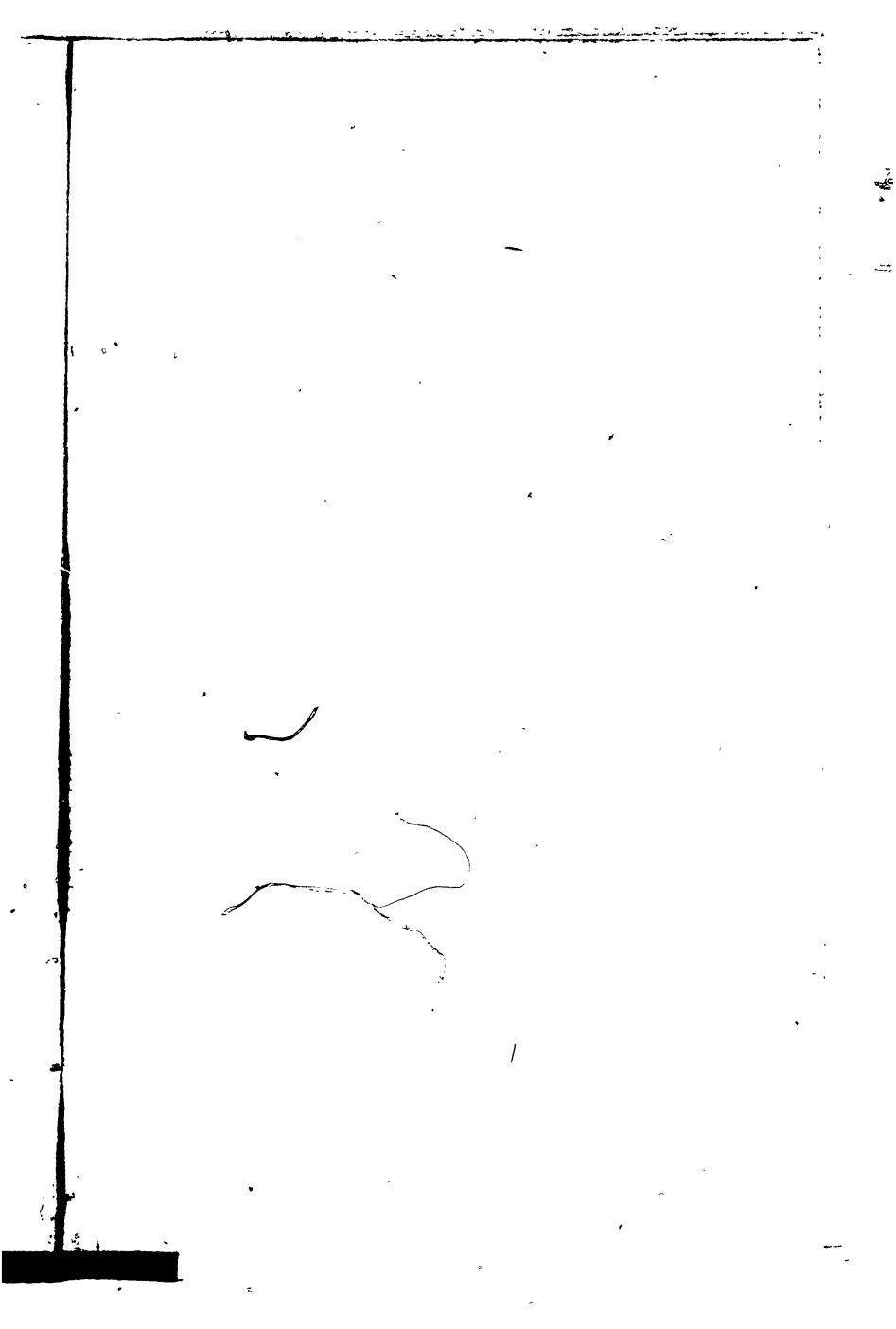
the brave, hopeful face, the house was so bare and poor.

She had painted the parlor floor, together with the faded wood-work, while she had decorated the walls with a pretty light bit of papering; but the curtains, older than she was, were sadly faded, and the darns were multitudinous, while the rest of the furniture was equally shabby.

Robbie's bed-room, though, was a perfect little conservatory. She had gathered vines from the wood, and robbed her own little flower-plot, to decorate it.

The evening of his expected arrival came at last. All the house was redolent of soap-suds and cleanliness, while the pantry had not so overflowed with delicacies since Mary's earliest recollection. Her mother had been dressed long ago, and watching through the open door, where Mary had carried her easy chair, for the carriage that was expected to bring the boys home from the station.

Mary had so many finishing touches to add to





Mary and the cows. Page 137.

parlor and kitchen that her mother at last began to worry lest Robbie should come and find her in soiled wrapper and tumbled hair, and it was only in obedience to her mother's command that she left her imaginary work to make herself presentable.

There was plenty of time, however, for the train was unusually late that evening, and at last Mary decided to drive home the cows and get her milking done. Soon old White-face and her companions saw their mistress at the pasture bars, and sauntered leisurely down in answer to her call through the perfumed sunset air.

It was a pretty picture, or at least so Dick thought, as he crossed the lots from Mrs. Meredith's to his own home, when he saw the brown-haired maiden leaning against the bars, waiting for the cows who were coming at her call. She did not know he was there, nor did he make her aware of his presence. It was only when she had finished milking and gone into the house that she found that Robbie had come.

How he had grown, and how handsome he was, she thought as she saw him through the door. He did not hear her enter the room. He was sitting on a low stool at his mother's side, her thin white hand stroking the thick clustering curls. She went softly behind him, and before he was aware of her presence, her arms were folded about him, and between laughing and crying she was giving him his welcome home.

They had not much appetite for Mary's carefully provided tea, and after they arose from the table, Robbie proposed that they take a stroll through the fields.

"I want to see how you are getting on as a farmer," he said to Mary; but he was more surprised than pleased when he saw the potato patch and field of grain, especially when his mother told him how much of the former had been performed by Mary, and how small a debt now remained for hired help in getting the grain sowed.

"She has been at the spinning-wheel before

sunrise nearly every morning this summer, and has paid for the work done in that way," Mrs. Meredith said.

"I am sorry to hear that," Robbie replied.

"Why, she was anxious to please you by having a good crop in, Robbie."

"She has more than pleased me, mother. I do not like to think my sister is working like a slave, while I am doing next to nothing with my hands, only using my brain a little."

"It has not hurt me, Robbie, and there is no disgrace in honest labor. When we get richer it may not be too late for me to begin studying too."

"She has been studying every spare moment, Robbie," her mother said fondly.

"Your time shall come sooner, perhaps, than you think for, my brave little sister," Robbie said tremulously.

Before they reached the house they were joined by Dick. He, too, had greatly changed, and when Mary looked into that bright, pleasant



face, over which there had somehow come an indefinable change that caused a feeling of shyness to which she had hitherto been a stranger, she inly wondered how he could ever have fancied a careless, fun-loving hoyden like herself.

The evening was short. It was past their usual bed-time when the lamp was lighted, so that midnight was not very far distant when Dick arose to go.

"Shall we have prayers first?" Robbie asked. "Your folks will be in bed long before this."

Dick complied, and taking the Bible, read a Psalm, and then, in a few simple words, thanked the Father in heaven who had been with them through the departed year, and had spared them to meet again.

Mrs. Meredith and Mary were now no longer in doubt as to Robbie's plans for the future. During their walk through the meadow that evening, in the misty gloaming, he had told them what he hoped to do the coming year.

"I shall work at home during the holidays,"

he said, "and when school begins, return and take a different way of living. I can get a room very cheaply, and board myself, while Mary, I know will supply me with a bed."

"Yes, and nearly all your provisions, too, Robbie, if it don't cost too much to get them there," was the hearty reply.

"Ah, Mary, you are determined on making me bankrupt. I shall never be able to do as much in return for you."

"I do not like to hear you talk in that way, Robbie; you will forgive me if I tell you that it sounds childish to me."

"Never mind, then, I won't do so any more."

"But how will you clothe yourself and pay the college fees, Robbie?" his mother anxiously inquired. She knew that Mary, with all her energy and thrift, could not quite support their young collegian.

"I have not told you yet that the Board have offered me a situation as under tutor. I think I am indebted to Mr. Carthen for this, you know

he is a city preacher now, and his church is quite convenient to the college, so that I see him oftener than when he was here. He is just the same kind friend as ever."

"I hope the Lord will bless him wherever he may go," Mrs. Meredith fervently exclaimed.

"But what will be your salary?" his practical sister eagerly asked.

"I cannot say what, but it will, I know, be sufficient to help me greatly in my economical way of living. But, mother, I am planning all this so smoothly, and I have not asked you yet if you are willing I should return. Do you not find the task a heavy one, getting along without my help?"

"We find it lonely, Robbie; but I should far sooner have you go; and if Mary does not get wearied you need not be troubled; for, after all, the whole burden comes on her young shoulders."

"Never fear for me, Robbie. I believe I can get on finely and help you, too."

And so, before Dick came in and told the proud little mother, and equally proud sister, how nobly their boy had passed his examination, and how much the teachers expected from him, they had cheerfully consented to another year's loneliness.

And so the short vacation passed. Robbie scarcely looked inside a book, except to give Mary her daily lessons, but devoted all his time to working on the farm, and patching up the house and barn, both of which sorely needed thorough repairing; or better still to be pulled down and rebuilt, but probably for years this could not be done.

Dick's evenings were spent mostly with Robbie. The latter shrewdly guessed that he was not the magnet attracting his friend so frequently to the old brown farm-house.

Mary had lost much of her free, playful manner when in Dick's society. Only now and then did she indulge in those mischievous gleams of wit that made her company so attractive to

both old and young. From the sparkle of his eyes, and the merry dimples that played about his face at such rare seasons, Mrs. Meredith imagined that all the fun had not been absorbed in his nature by hard study, and the solemn life-work to which he had devoted himself.

"I should not admire and like him half so well if he were all the time grave," Robbie said, in answer to a somewhat troubled remark of his mother's one day respecting their young friend. "He can be just as good and earnest as if he didn't enjoy Mary's droll humor; and I only hope he will get her to brighten all his life some day when he gets ready to take a wife."

"Oh, Robbie! our little girl would never do for a minister's wife; how could you think such a thing?"

"Why not, mother?"

"She is too lively. I am afraid she would shock her husband's people with her quaint sayings."

"She never says anything but what is honest

and pure. It is just what the world needs, more happy and unselfish works like her."

"But she is not educated."

"I cannot agree with you there, mother. Highly cultured she certainly is not; but, with her few advantages, she is rarely intelligent. I believe she is by far the cleverest of the three, which, perhaps, is not saying much for her; and for a poor man's wife, such as a majority of the ministers are, she has the very best education. Give her the materials and she will cook a dinner fit for a bishop. She has learned the sternest economy, and she is certainly a good house-keeper, as our poor, shabby home hourly testifies. Why, mother, when I begin to enumerate her splendid qualities, I am led to think her almost perfect."

"Who is that Robbie is waxing so eloquent over?" Mary asked, as she came into the room.

"I was only telling mother what a happy fellow he will be that will carry you away to make a home for him some day."

“Mother don't want any one to carry me away.”

“I could not say that I wanted you to remain single always, Mary. Every true man and woman should have a mate and nest of their own.”

“Ah! that means you, too, Master Robbie. I see the dove-cote we have planned for some bright coming day is to be invaded by strangers; and, after all, our ideal home has been in the past, not future.”

“I had rather not hear you talk that way, my child,” her mother said. “I must believe that sometime we shall all be together again, as we have been in the past.”

“Not here in the old weather-beaten house. I cannot realize that Robbie will ever make the little farm and the quiet village his home after he becomes a college graduate.”

“It is not wise, Mary, to think or plan very much about so distant a future as that. I have not begun to think what I may do, but I trust to Him who has guided me thus far, and if it is my

duty to come back here, I believe I should be more glad than sorry. To-day I can dream of no quieter and perhaps happier home than we might have here together, with the poverty and care forever banished."

"Wouldn't you want another woman beside the three who have always been here?" Mary asked.

Robbie smiled, while a flush, not of shame, flitted over his fine face.

"I might care, some day, to have that golden-haired girl who gave me the candies in Phalen's store so long ago," he frankly replied.

"Why, Robbie! do you ever see her?" Mary eagerly asked.

"Sometimes," was the quick answer.

"Where?"

"I have seen her in church a few times."

"You do not like to be questioned, I know; but will you not tell us if you are acquainted with her?"

"It seems to me, Mary, I was always ac-



quainted with her. I do not know if she remembers me, but I shall never forget her, even if I should not exchange a word with her while I live. Are you satisfied now, little girl?"

"No," was the half regretful answer. "I should like to hear ever so much more."

"Well, I have no more to tell, and I should not have told you so much, only you questioned me so closely. I shall ask the same frankness in return from you some day."


Mary did not reply. It seemed so strange to hear Robbie speak so quietly about his love affairs, — they had seemed to forget their mother's presence. She, perhaps, was thinking of a long ago, when one so like her son had told her of his love, and of the days so full of sweet, strange joy that were now only like a dream, whose memory seemed to bless.

Many suns rose and set, and many times the harvest home was sung, before Mary heard Robbie mention the dream child of his boyhood, for such she always seemed to the practical, yet imaginative girl.



## CHAPTER XII.

### HOME AGAIN.

T last the day came when Robbie was to graduate. He had been a year longer than he had at first planned. It was to help lighten the burden resting on the dear ones at home, that he had taken the other year, and also to gain a thorough groundwork for the culture which he had felt would but begin when his college training ceased. He was thus enabled to devote more time to each study that came in the course, and also the easier to earn the money necessary to pay his expenses.

By looking for it, various ways for doing this were presented. He was not above performing any kind of work, providing it were honest, and this when he was taking the lead of his classes and occupying the position given him as the cleverest student in the institution.

Someway he managed to impress his companions with his own just ideas of labor, to such an extent that it was seldom he was sneered at for his poverty, and the comparatively menial position he was obliged occasionally to assume.

Mary struggled on bravely through her self-imposed duties, firmly resisting Robbie's oft renewed entreaties that they should dispose of the farm and come to the city where she might the better gain the coveted training for which they were mutually anxious.

Dick had added his influence, but all to no purpose.

"I could not think of it in our circumstances," she had said to Robbie during the previous holidays. "I can work, and study, and read here,

and there will be found for me a work to do somewhere, even if I am uneducated, after you and mother cease to need my help."

"I did not mean to pain you," Robbie replied; "but I can't half enjoy my advantages away at school while I remember how few you have here."

"I have health, and the pure air, and sunshine, and the happy thoughts that come of my free mode of life. I doubt if any of those highly educated ladies you so much admire hold any gladder intercourse with nature than I do. Remember, Robbie, if I have not been trained in the schools, and God has seen fit to withhold that blessing from me, I have not been quite excluded from the world of thought; but have managed, not quite unintelligently, I hope, these last few years, to wade through quite a goodly number of your best classical writers. I have nearly every day some very happy thoughts, when I forget all about my straightened life, and our humble surroundings, and the doings of our neighbors,

while I seem to hold communion with that which is above me. You may smile at me as romantic, but you know that you often find fault with me for my prosiness."

"I may be mistaken, Mary; there is, perhaps, a truer wisdom than what is gained from schools; I believe I have erred by thinking you could not improve unless associated with the refined and cultured."

"The world may be vastly different outside our country village, but since I have been, on your account, invited among the richer families, and also since I have attended the Sewing Circle, I have come to think it is not such a very desirable thing to get with those whose social position is so much better than our own."

"I hope our independent little girl is not growing censorious."

"I hope not, too, Robbie; but I have heard you say 'facts are stubborn things.' I have come home from those gatherings very often possessed with the desire to be just as rich and aris-

tocratic as they, and a little more so, I fear, and far less happy than I am when sitting with mother in our old bare kitchen, reading those grand, helpful thoughts of the authors whose works you have wished me to study. Indeed, I have felt myself to be nearer what is pure and lovely while I have watched the morning stars fade away in the blue of heaven, as I drove home the cows to their peaceful grazing grounds on a summer's morning."

"It is no use, I see, for me to reason with you, Mary. Of course you will find human nature defective everywhere, but we must be content to take the bitter with the sweet."

"I had rather, then, take the sweet alone here at home, with the healthful labors of the farm, and the restful companionship of books that never give me unkind words. Besides, you need not hope to transform your little country girl into a brilliant city woman. Homespun must be homespun."

"Ah, Mary! I look for the homespun to be

smoothed so beautifully one day that we shall think it the finest damask."

"It will be, then, when I get on the angel's robe."

"No, before that time; and you will be all the sweeter for coming to that rare perfection in your own way."

"Thank you, Robbie, for that pretty speech. You will leave me to do as I think best, now, won't you, my brother?"

"Yes; I believe your views are correct, much as I should like to have you and mother with me this year."

And so the year had passed away, the last of four. What Robbie was to do after this they did not know. He was not quite certain, himself. Several plans were forming in his brain, he scarcely knew which was best for him to take. He did not suffer himself to grow anxious; the same Hand that had guided him hitherto, he believed, would, when the time came, point out the path for him to take.

Again the moment of his return was eagerly awaited by his mother and sisters, for Helen was now with them; her teaching days probably ended for life.

She had not found teaching such joyous work, after all. The little mother, in her inmost heart, could not help thinking Mary had taken the wiser course, as she contrasted the healthy, cheery appearance and manner of the one, with the weary, almost listless way of the other.

Mary was busier than ever, now, refurnishing the old house for Robbie's home-coming, and Helen's home-leaving, for the wedding was to be quite a grand affair for them.

She had spun, and woven, and knitted, so busily and to such a purpose that she was now able to brighten up the parlor with new carpet, curtains and chairs. Possibly the adorning of many a stately home had brought less pleasure than the few dollars she had expended with so much planning and frugality.

They had not yet seen Helen's affianced, but



of his wealth they could have little doubt, from the rich presents that found their way to the old gray farm-house.

Mary sometimes suppressed a sigh, as she saw how eagerly Helen looked forward to the luxurious home awaiting her. It was not that she envied her sister's good fortune, but she felt that the gulf, at first almost imperceptible, that had been widening between them, on account of their difference of taste and pursuit, would not be lessened in the coming time. Occasionally the painful impression presented itself that she had erred by her unfeminine employment; but she was generally comforted by the reflection that it was only to benefit others that she had done so.

Robbie and the little mother had been made happier by her labors, while Helen, after the first few months, had been relieved of all anxiety or expense on their behalf.

The summer evening came, at last, when the mother sat in her easy chair by the open door, awaiting her boy. The hair, so smoothly shading

the placid brow, was more silvery than on that long ago day when Robbie bought the pretty gray dress, he thought so strangely matched his mother's hair, but the face was otherwise unchanged. She had reached another of those epochs when life, for years, seems to stand still, and time, for awhile, forgets to leave the impress of his unkind hand as he rushes by.

Helen was sitting near her mother, nervously toying with some bit of work.

Mary again was busy with household duties and not, as on that other evening years ago, imaginary ones either.

Mr. Walters, Helen's affianced, was expected that evening with Robbie, and in a few days she would leave the old home forever.

Mary inly wondered as she passed to and fro at her work, if Helen noticed the wistful look in her mother's patient eyes as they followed her continually.

As the carriage drove to the gate, and the two expected ones ran up the grassy walk to meet

and greet their loved ones, Mary felt a sob rising in her throat. She had lived all her life nearly for others, and yet she was not first in any human being's heart.

Dick had months ago grown tired waiting for her to return the love he had so long hoped to gain. It was no fault of hers that she could not give him her heart. Robbie would have been glad, too, as well as the little mother, but somehow it could not be; and it was with a feeling half regretful, half glad that she heard he was engaged to another.

For awhile she loitered in the kitchen, waiting until the greetings were ended between her mother and Robbie, and the lovers; but it was not for long, she was anxious to see her brother; if possible, still more eager to see the new brother Helen was bringing to them.

Robbie came in search of her. When he met her at the door she felt ashamed to think that but a moment before she had almost murmured because her share of love was so meagre in com-

parison with what others possessed. Surely it were enough to take the third place in a heart like his; if only the girl with the golden hair were worthy of such love.

Helen introduced Mr. Walters. Mary had not been able to divest herself of the idea that she would not be greatly pleased with him. The first look into those eyes, honest and true as her own, convinced her that she had been mistaken.

Robbie, it must be confessed, had expatiated much more eloquently upon the nobility of character of his younger than his eldest sister, so that Mr. Walters was prepared to see a strong-minded, serious looking woman, whom he might respect but could never love.

When the rosy, brown-eyed little maiden gave him her hand, and welcomed him so cordially to their home, he felt at once that they should be friends for life. Her frankness and simplicity changed him, and the anticipation instantly became a pleasant one of having her with them; for Helen, all unknown to her family, had stipu-

lated that her mother and sister should share their home until Robbie could provide comfortably for them.

It was a happy company that evening that surrounded Mary's well-spread board.

Robbie had changed so marvellously, at least so his proud little sister thought, as she admiringly watched him while he led the conversation from one subject to another. It seemed sometimes that the deep-toned, splendid-looking man could not be their Robbie who had planted the potatoes, and almost fainted under the August suns in the sweltering hay-fields.

He, looked older than he really was, but no wonder; care had early pressed heavily upon him, and his short life had not been unfruitful of events, sad and depressing.

While the others partook of her viands, it was treat enough to Mary to listen to a conversation that seemed to open up to her mental gaze a world quite different from any she had ever known outside of books. As she listened to the

pleasant flow of thought from the two clever, highly cultured men at her side, she imagined that the coming years would not be, after all, so very dreary if she could but occupy ever so humble a place in their esteem.

The twilight hour was still as long, and the sunset sky as golden, as on that other evening when Robbie came home for the first time from college. He soon followed Mary to the pasture lots whence she was driving home the cows. Was she thinking of that evening three years ago when Dick was with them, and was there regret mingled with the remembrance?

Robbie wondered if it were so as he glanced down at the brave, silent girl at his side. The admiration and love she gave to him, returned with unstinted measure, but he hoped that she, the best and most unselfish of the three, might one day be as Helen was to-night; as he was himself for was not the picture of a beautiful face, crowned with golden hair, nestling somewhere near his heart? The boyish romance had

not wholly given place to love of knowledge.


He did not ask her if there were regrets mingled with that first memory, but he told her of his own expected happiness. He fancied he could see a wistful look in the rare brown eyes that made them more beautiful than ever.





## CHAPTER XIII.

### DESIRE TO STUDY.

ELEN was married that same week. Dick reached home in time to be at the wedding.

Perhaps there was still a lingering tenderness for his old fancy ; at least, Robbie feared there was, and it seemed as if Dick, too, shared his fears, for he appeared rather to avoid than seek Mary's society.

Mrs. Meredith watched her daughter's departure with more of pain than exultation at the brilliant match she had made. She felt now that



the home-circle was broken, and perhaps, before long, her tender care would be no longer needed.

She did not yield to the almost tearful entreaties of her daughter, nor the added pleadings of her new son that she and Mary should live with them, while Mary was equally firm in refusing. So that it was not an unmixed joy to Helen, this long anticipated bridal day.

Again the little household settled back in its everyday routine as of yore. Robbie busied himself about the farm, not Micawber like, waiting for something to turn up, but earnestly performing whatever he could find to do either for himself or others.

The little mother fondly believed that she would have her boy with her now until death should dissolve their union. All unconscious was she that her proud young eaglet was already anxious to plume his flight from the home nest on a longer voyage of discovery than he had ever before essayed.

Mary was first apprized of his ambitious plans.

Dismay, rather than delight was written on her face when Robbie revealed to her the longing with which he was possessed.

"But do you not know enough now, Robbie, to get through life comfortably?" she said in answer to his question if she could be willing for him to take a higher course of study at some of the renowned old world universities.

"It seems to me, Mary, that I am only beginning to learn. I cannot tell you how painful the thought is that I must stop now, with all these mysteries unexplored."

"Didn't mother tell you years ago that may be you could go on studying in heaven?"

"Yes, but if all were satisfied to wait for that where would the world be now? I believe it to be as much my duty to go on with my studies as it is for Dick to begin his work as a minister. I can glorify my Father in heaven more in that way than in any other, I firmly believe."

"But, Robbie, will your little golden-haired girl be willing to wait?"

“She is willing, Mary.”

“And so shall I, my brother, she shall not be more generous than I.”

“Well done, my true, brave girl. I hope you will someday get your thousand fold reward.”

“And when shall you go?” Practical and undemonstrative as ever, Mary abruptly terminated his heartfelt expressions.

“That is the question puzzling me. I have my fellowship, with that I can manage to pay my way easily enough, but what troubles me is leaving you to work alone. It seems so selfish, I almost loathe myself when I think how I have been depriving you of getting an education, and now to leave you for two or three years longer, shut up here where you can have no pleasure nor learn anything.”

“Don’t trouble about me, Robbie. My case is not nearly so dark as you paint it. I am happy here, and do not look upon my life as wasted, so I am helping you ever so little, and making mother comfortable; beside, I can study every

day as much as I wish, and get through in the course of a year almost acres of reading. Surely my mind won't quite rust out when used to that extent; and more than that, it is certainly far wiser for you to be thoroughly educated than for both of us to get just a smattering, and then I am content to wait for my knowledge until I get to a world where our minds will develop faster than on earth."

"You have a truly regal way of conferring your favors, Mary," Robbie said, soberly. "You not only give up your life to others, but you try to do it in such a way as to make them think it is nothing after all that you are sacrificing to make them happy."

"And why should it be?" she asked, while there was just a little quiver of the lip that revealed to Robbie it was not the light thing she would fain have him think, this long separation, and the loneliness only too sure to be her coming lot for the next few years.

"Will you ask mother for me?" Robbie asked.

She paused a moment, and then bravely swallowing down a rising sob, she said quite calmly:

“I will do all I can for you, Robbie. I think I can get her to consent.”

They had been walking home from a small party in the village, conversing as they came, when Robbie, just before they reached the gate, broached this subject which he had hitherto found too uncomfortable to speak about; they had seemed so happy to have him with them, their protector and head once more.

On their long moonlight walk through the quiet lanes that evening, he had been answering Mary's questions about his own sweet story of love, and waiting while she had been telling him how Helen met her lover months ago, up among the lakes, where she had been teaching, and whither he had come on a fishing excursion, and lodged in the same quiet farm-house where she was boarding. It was a pretty story, full of love and romance to the unsophisticated girl who was telling it to her brother as they wandered along

in  
tifu  
rie  
Et  
of  
du  
co  
pe  
qu  
ti'  
ac  
st  
h  
y  
n  
l  
s  
a  
r

in the misty moonlight; rarely sweet and beautiful it seemed to her from her own slender experiences of life's crowning gift.

Robbie told her how he had accidentally met Ettie Sundon at the literary reunion at the house of one of their professors, and had been introduced to her, and with what pleasure he had discovered that she was as charming in mind as person. How, after once they had become acquainted, an intimacy gradually was formed, until one day he had dared to tell her of the kindly act she had performed years ago in Phalen's store, and which had caused him to remember her with gratitude ever afterward.

"And you were not ashamed to tell how poor you were!" Mary said, half pityingly.

"No, when I told her that it seemed too much to dream, even, that I could ever win her love, but she must have been pleased, for she said, gently: 'And so you have remembered me all these years for that simple little act.' I could not help the words forcing their way from my

heart then as I said: Yes, and shall remember it always, as the one brightest memory I ever dare hope to have."

"What did she say then?" Mary asked, after a long pause.

"Ah! little sister, I have told you enough now. Someday I hope a nobler man than has now my Ettie's love may tell you the same story I told her."

Mary did not reply, but the world just then did not seem the same as when, a few moments after, Robbie told her of his desires to go from them again for years.



by  
ac


ar  
th  
th  
F

s



## CHAPTER XIV.

### RETURN.

THER days and years of waiting for Robbie's return passed. The two years went by slowly enough; and an additional two were added, and still they had not seen him.

The mother's hair was growing more snowy, and the patient eyes were losing something of their old-time lustre, while Time, remembering that years were swiftly multiplying, began to place more carefully the impress of his hand.

Mary, too, had changed, from a pretty impulsive girl, to a charming woman with a dignity of manner that might have graced a palace. The



change could only have come through the fashioning impress of a beautiful soul. Her mother sometimes wondered at the quiet, self-contained grace that marked her daughter's intercourse with both rich and poor.

Mr. Walters thought that the finishing touches of the most polished masters could not have added to the rare dignity with which she moved among them, day by day, always the same, gentle, self-forgetful and pure.

Those who knew her best believed that only the love of Christ, and following the example he has set for us all, could have made so perfect a character.

Robbie was sometimes astonished at the rare thoughts that seemed unconsciously expressed in her letters, and exerted himself all the more, so that he might one day introduce her into those circles where she could not only receive benefit, but would also confer it.

The shadow of their early poverty had quite been banished from their home. Robbie's checks,

after he had graduated from Jena, whether he had gone in search of further culture, were much in advance of their utmost need, while Helen found her heart grown no harder by her rich marriage, and was always glad to make presents, much more generous than her sister was willing to accept.

The mother and daughter also made an occasional visit to Helen's luxurious home, always a season of real enjoyment to them all, especially to Mary. The persons she met and the privileges thus obtained served her as food for thought and instruction until a repetition of the visit; while Helen, with her husband and baby Robbie, always spent a few brief weeks of summer at the farm-house, which had recently undergone quite extensive repairs.

And so the years had drifted past, quietly, not inharmoniously, and then the changes again began to multiply.

Robbie was coming home; already a tinted note, containing the wedding invitation, which

had been gazed at, time and again, with varying emotions, lay in Mary's writing desk. Would the golden-haired Nettie absorb all the love in Robbie's heart, or was that time past forever, when she should be to her brother what she had been for years. A fear troubled her sometimes lest it might be so, but then she had her mother still; the best, truest mother in all the world, she believed.

- And more than love of friend and brother, she had the love of Christ, and in temptation and trial she had found in him a friend able to help, and strong to deliver.

Robbie was expected in a few days. Again the old house was in exquisite order for his home-coming; while Helen and her husband were there to meet him.

It came at last, the day when he expected to be with them. It was not unlike that day so many years ago which was Robbie's last in the old farm-house, before he started out in the great world in search of an education. There

was a steady down-dropping from the leaden skies, with occasional gusts of wind that made the little mother draw closer to the fire Mary had kindled in the parlor, hoping thereby to drive away the shadow she saw stealing over the patient face.

So eager were they to see Robbie they could not think of him being detained by a storm when so near them. A twenty-mile drive through such a storm was not to be thought of, Helen had said over and over again, but still his mother fully expected him that night, notwithstanding the oft expressed doubt to the contrary.

Mary did not hazard an opinion, but her mother was comforted by seeing all the preparations being made, as if he were certainly coming, but the evening came and the twilight faded quite away from the gray heavens, while the wing of night was folding down over field and hill, but still no sound of glad voice or step was heard coming up the grassy walk.

Robbie had written that it was possible he

might bring a college friend with him ; that was all he said, but Mary had got her own room in readiness for Robbie in case it should be needed.

All the household tasks were finished for the evening, and Mary's eyes were beginning to ache with the long-continued watching. Helen proposed after the lamp had been lighted that they should have tea.

"May be if we sit down it may bring him," she said. Mary complied, and soon the summons to tea came, and with it came a ringing voice at the door. Mary was the first to open it. Through the misty air she saw two shadows, and a moment after was enfolded by two damp arms and a bearded mouth was pressed close to her own.

"Oh, Robbie! I am so glad!" was all she said, but Robbie was satisfied.

In a second or two the others were giving him his welcome home, his mother's a tearful one, but none the less glad.

The wet wrappings were soon removed from Robbie and his friend, who was duly introduced after the excitement had somewhat subsided.

"Mr. Stuart will excuse our eager joy, I am sure," Mrs. Meredith said, in answer to Robbie's playful allusion to their unrestrained expressions of delight at seeing him once more.

"I can only envy my friend his happiness," was the hearty reply. "I do not wonder at his anxiety to get home."

Soon they were seated around the tea-table. Mary could scarcely believe that her brother had so changed in those few years. Brown and bearded he certainly was, more so than she had expected to see him, but her keen eyes detected a change still more marked. As she watched him the thought occurred that after all Ettie Sundon might be proud of her lover, and the alliance would not, in reality, be unequal. Such a brother as hers was, might claim a wife almost anywhere.

Was the sister's pride unreasonable, after what Robbie had accomplished, and the noble future which was opening out before him, through his own, almost unaided exertions, was it surprising,

with her limited knowledge of the world that she should think he had few peers?

The evening sped quickly away, while but slightly did they heed, under their sheltering roof that night, the rising storm and increased fury of the gale.

Mr. Walters was so anxious to hear from his old professors at Jena, where he had passed many years of college life, that Robbie found little time for further conversation, but it was enough for Mary and her mother to listen to the tones of his voice, no matter what the topic.

Perhaps Mr. Stuart was amused at the eager look upon the bright young face, but before the evening was ended he felt repaid for coming. He was to be Robbie's groomsman, and it was for that he was delayed on his way home, if home that might be called where only a house and servants awaited him.



## CHAPTER XV.

### UNIONS.



FANCY is living now in the old farm-house, where once the Merediths struggled so courageously with what seemed to them an unfriendly fate.

Robbie spent a few days with his mother before his marriage. Very happy days to them all; strangely happy days to Mary. A new experience was beginning to illumine her hitherto neutral tinted life. It might not have been merely for securing his services on his wedding day that Robbie had urged Mr. Stuart to make the wide *detour* to the out-of-the-way farm-house, among

(179)



his native hills. Helen shrewdly thought that Robbie had been planning a match between Mr. Stuart and Mary, one that she felt assured would give him the utmost satisfaction.

Mary was very busy those few days, making her guests comfortable, at the same time attending to the farm and household duties as of yore ; but, probably, this only proved a stronger attraction in the eyes of the observing, quiet man, whose experience, hitherto, of the female sex had not embraced one capable of performing her duties in kitchen and parlor equally, with so much grace and sweetness, at least in his half-blinded eyes.

That first evening, when Mary met Robbie in the half-lighted door-way, had possibly paved the way better than any other circumstance could have done to the easy entrance she unconsciously made in his heart.

He had been alone since childhood, with no one to give him the unselfish love he saw bestowed on his friend, while the loneliness that

had often embittered his solitary moments seemed now to be greatly intensified.

It was a joyous party that set out from Mrs. Meredith's on the gay October morning when Robbie went to claim his bride. Mrs. Meredith with Nancy staid at home while the others went.

It seemed like a dream to Mary, that marriage ceremony in the beautiful church. She had not seen her future sister until that morning, when, in all her bridal beauty, she stood before the altar at Robbie's side, her pretty brides-maids with her, not one of whom seemed half so beautiful in the partly dazzled eyes of the unsophisticated girl.

A few of the guests, who knew her to be the bridegroom's sister, wondered, when they saw tear-drops quivering on the long-fringed lashes of those brave, brown eyes; the one or two who understood her best knew it was gladness at her brother's joy that caused them.

She only had time for a few formal words with Robbie's wife after the wedding breakfast, before

they left on their bridal tour; but she felt that this widening of their family circle would only make them the richer in their loved ones, as did Helen's marriage.

Mr. Stuart looked his best as groomsman; unromantic to an unusual degree though she was, yet Mary found herself wondering what the bride would be like whom he would one day stand beside at the altar, and wondering also if he would ever find a woman worthy of him.

Robbie had chosen his life-work, or what would probably be such. A mathematical professorship had been offered him at Jena, which he had accepted, hoping one day to be able to wield an influence for good in that far-famed seat of speculative philosophy and rationalism.

Free from self-assertion to an unusual degree, and with sufficient modesty to disarm unkind criticism, he was yet conscious of being in possession of talents of no mean order, which he had the noble ambition of using, not for his own aggrandizement, but for the Master whom he still

tried to serve as faithfully and lovingly as when he and Dick used to meet in the old red school-house those long years ago.

Mary and her mother never shared Robbie's home with him. Mrs. Meredith would willingly have followed her son to Germany, but Mary was unwilling to be separated from her mother.

With her usual self-forgetfulness she would not consent to lay the additional burden of their support upon Robbie, just when he was beginning the world for himself. Beside, she believed both he and his wife would be happier commencing their wedded life alone.

"By and by, when you are richer, and may need us more," she said in reply to his entreaties, "we may go."

"But I am afraid, if I do not take you now, I shall not be able to get you by and by. Some one else will have a better claim than I before long."

"Do you mean that I shall marry?"

"I do, little sister."

"How ridiculous, when I have never had a lover in my life but Dick, and he was married long ago. I do not think you need fear such a catastrophe."

"You will not be able to make that boast long, Mary. Stuart will have you secured long before I shall be fully settled in my new home, if he can have his way."

He looked down at the little woman by his side, and his keen eyes did not fail to see the sudden dropping of the long lashes on the brightly coloring cheeks.

"Ah, little sister, you have been snared at last," he gladly thought.

It had for a long time been a cherished wish of Robbie's that his friend and school-mate should one day claim a brother's relationship with him.

He was at home now, with his bride, spending a few weeks with his mother ere he again should leave them for another long period of separation.

His wife, already, was beginning to seem like

a child to Mrs. Meredith. The same kindness of heart that had prompted her when a child to give Robbie the candies in Phalen's store was still a marked feature in her character, so that she generally found her way to the hearts of those around her.

A few evenings after his conversation with Mary, they were surprised, while sitting around the fire, to hear a knock at the front door; when farmer Williams or any of their neighbors came in, they did not usually enter by that door.

"It must be our minister coming to see you, Robbie," Mary said as she arose to admit their visitor.

Mrs. Meredith was placidly counting the stitches on a sock she was knitting for Robbie, when an exclamation of surprise from Mary caused her to look up, when she heard Mr. Stuart's voice at the door.

It was her turn then to be surprised, but when Mary had ushered him into the room, and the little mother saw the look of pleasure in her

daughter's eyes, the expression of mysticism faded from her face, as the possible reason for his coming dawned upon her.

As she sat busily knitting in her quiet corner that evening, listening to the pleasant flow of conversation, and watching the happy faces of her children, her thoughts wandered back to those days when poverty and hunger were their frequent guests, and when the promise of such a future would have appeared, both to herself and children, almost like heaven itself.

Mr. Stuart only staid one day with them, but before he left, Robbie's prophecy had come true; his brave little sister was the betrothed wife of his friend. Mr. Stuart plead hard, and his suit was eloquently aided by Robbie and his wife, that their marriage should take place before Robbie left home.

And so it was settled, leaving Mary scarcely a month's betrothal before she became a wife. But they were not troubled with fears, lest when they became better acquainted, their esteem should be lessened.

Nancy keeps the old farm-house always in readiness for the home-coming of the now widely divided family. Occasionally they meet there for a few days of happy intercourse; at such times they frequently recall the days of childhood.

The little mother meets with them, every year growing more gentle and saintly, as she approaches the better home towards which she now looks longingly, as she sees her work on earth drawing to an end.

Farmer Williams is an old, white-haired man now, proud of the boys, as he calls Robbie and Dick. He lives more for the better world than this. Coming late into Christ's school, he has yet been a rapid learner and loving disciple. Dick is a faithful and successful minister; not uncommonly brilliant, but, what is better, exceptionally devoted to his Master's work.

Phalen still keeps the village store; rapidly becoming a rich man he has the same kind heart yet, and is ever ready to lend the helping hand.



Robbie reckons him among his chief friends, and hopes some day, through Phalen's boys, to repay the father for the many kind acts done to him and his in other years.

The story of Robbie's triumph now is ended.

**THE END.**

# POPULAR BOOKS.

BY "PANSY."

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| ESTER REID, . . . . .   | \$1.50 |
| JULIA REID, . . . . .   | 1.50   |
| THREE PEOPLE, . . . . .   | 1.50   |
| THE KING'S DAUGHTER, . . . . .  | 1.50   |
| WISE AND OTHERWISE, . . . . .   | 1.50   |
| HOUSEHOLD PUZZLES, . . . . .  | 1.50   |
| THE RANDOLPHS, . . . . .  | 1.50   |
| FOUR GIRLS AT CHAUTAUQUA, . . . . .   | 1.50   |
| CUNNING WORKMEN, . . . . .  | 1.25   |
| GRANDPA'S DARLINGS, . . . . .   | 1.25   |
| JESSIE WELLS, . . . . .   | .75    |
| DOCIA'S JOURNAL, . . . . .  | .75    |
| BERNIE'S WHITE CHICKEN; to which is added,<br>THE DIAMOND BRACELET, . . . . . | .75    |
| HELEN LESTER; to which is added, NANNIE'S EX-<br>PERIMENT. . . . .            | .75    |
| A CHRISTMAS TIME, . . . . .   | .15    |

BY "PANSY" & "FAYE HUNTINGTON."

|                            |        |
|----------------------------|--------|
| MODERN PROPHETS, . . . . . | \$1.50 |
| DR. DEANE'S WAY, . . . . . | 1.25   |

BY "FAYE HUNTINGTON."

|                             |        |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| THOSE BOYS, . . . . .       | \$1.50 |
| MRS. DEANE'S WAY, . . . . . | 1.25   |

D. LOTHROP & CO., Publishers.

---

## WIDE AWAKE NOTICES.

---

**WIDE AWAKE.** It is, as usual, handsomely illustrated. A charming magazine for the young. One of the best Boston notions we know of.—*The Christian Advocate.*

Every number commends it more and more to public patronage; indeed, it is very emphatically the children's book of the period.—*The Farmer's Cabinet.*

That charming new magazine for girls and boys, the **WIDE AWAKE** for January is full of fascinating pictures and reading matter. Among the articles are, "Piano Fortes," "The Cooking Club of Tu-Whit Hollow," "My Lady's Christmas," "Grim Grendel," "The True Cinderella," "Little Wooden Two Shoes," and a host of other good things. Talk about the youth-giving springs to which Ponce de Leon devoted his life in finding! If he had lived in these days, he would have found them in the boys' and girls' magazines, like the **WIDE AWAKE**.—*The Green Bay Advocate.*

**WIDE AWAKE** is well-named, for it is certainly all attention to the needs of its readers. There is a brilliant list of contributors, and an equally brilliant line of engravings. It is very bewitching in its manifold appeals to eye and sentiment. Messrs. Lothrop & Co., Boston, the publishers, have hit the young taste exactly in their judicious arrangements for issuing this serial.—*The Commonwealth.*

The **WIDE AWAKE**, the new illustrated magazine for young people, published by D. Lothrop & Co., Boston, is the very best publication in our country, as well as the cheapest.

## WIDE AWAKE NOTICES.

---

During the next year the readers are promised an entertainment of wit, and wisdom, and song, and poem, and picture, and story, illustrated by the best artists. The contributors to the WIDE AWAKE are some of the most popular writers of the day. We know of no way parents could expend two dollars more profitably than by subscribing for this first-class magazine; and we think that they will be surprised at the amount of reading received for their money.—*The Evangelist*.

The WIDE AWAKE has entered on its second year with ever-brightening prospects. Its success has proved our theory correct, that children like better to read of something like real life—of boys and girls like themselves—than about fairies and prodigies such as never had an existence on this earth. The list of contributors to the WIDE AWAKE numbers many names among authors best loved by children, and the contents of each number evidence in editor and writers a just estimate of the wants of young readers, and remarkable skill in catering to them.—*The Literary World*.

WIDE AWAKE was a good name for it, and the children love it. All the other publications for children are too old. Now while WIDE AWAKE is pleasing in the highest degree to the four-year-old, it is read with just as much interest by the eight-year-old, and grandma insists that no other book was ever made like it, and grandma knows what she is saying.—*The Journal*.

FOR CHRISTMAS, 1876.  
JUST READY.

---

*Wide Awake Pleasure Book.*

ENTIRELY ORIGINAL.

By Popular American Authors.

More than 400 pages.

Nearly 400 Illustrations.

Incomparably the best and most popular Christmas Book for  
Young People ever issued in this or any country,

AT SO LOW A PRICE.

Elegant black and gold back die. Boards. Chromo side. . . . . \$1.50  
Full extra cloth binding. . . . . \$2.00

---

Pictures for Our Darlings.

*Charming Large-Print Stories.*

With beautiful large Pictures. Very handsomely bound in extra cloth, black and gold die and chromo.

LARGE QUARTO, \$1.25.

---

PANSY'S PICTURE BOOK.

BY "PANSY."

A new, large, and very beautiful Picture Book. 4to. Printed on extra calendered paper, large clear type, and 100 illustrations, in extra cloth binding with handsome black and gold dies. \$2.00.

D. LOTHROP & CO., Publishers, Boston.

