

FREDERIC BEASLEY

PAPERS FROM
OVERLOOK-HOUSE

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Casper Almore

Papers from Overlook-House

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Overlook House, October 10, 1864.

My Dear Friend: – At last, as if borne to you by some scape-grace of a messenger, these papers, copied from the time-discoloured manuscripts, so carefully preserved in the old book-case, which with its dark lustre, its bright brass ornaments, is still the prominent object in our library, are destined to reach the hands into which they should long ago have been placed.

I well remember the evening on which you first heard of them, and listened to my attempt to read them to you; perplexed as I was with the faded lines, traced by fingers which can write no more.

You will not forget our drives, previously, during the day, and late in the afternoon, in consequence of my week-day service in the old church. Perhaps the ancient edifice would need the excuse of days of architectural ignorance, but no Cathedral on earth can surpass it, in its claim to occupy a place amid scenes of surpassing beauty and sublimity. There it stands alone, on the slope of an immense hill, with the whole range of the mountains

from the water-gap to the wind-gap full in view – glorious walls to sustain the great blue dome of heaven! The great solitude of the road that winds along the grave-yard, has often caused me to think of distant friends, and has riveted them to my soul with still more indissoluble bonds. And the Great Friend has been the great relief from oppressive loneliness, as I thus stood in one of the beautiful gates of the Eternal Temple. As to that quiet grave-yard itself, the "rhetoric of the dead" is there well spoken, and they whose ashes are here deposited, do not find "second graves" in our short memories.

You will tell me that all connected with my church is not always solemn. Your perverse memory will never forget the leader of the choir; nay, the useful man who was often choir itself. He sang at least with energy. Unfortunately – oh well do I remember my fearful victory over my features, when I first became cognizant of the fact; a victory at a time when a smile had endangered my claims to due ministerial sobriety; unfortunately he had the habit of marking time emphatically, by raising himself on his toes, and simultaneously elevating his hand, his chin, his eyes, and his hair. Yet that was but a slight trial to us both. The man was better than either of us; and the first impression having subsided, we found that he did well in calling forth the voices of the congregation. You will recollect our return home, as we refused all offers of hospitality, although the snow was falling, and we were warned not to risk the drifts, promised by the rising wind. We would not be detained, as we had set our hearts on

passing the evening together in the old mansion of my fathers. On we drove, the sound of the bells sweeping in wild merriment over the great fields of snow, or rising to a louder chime as we passed through the forest, under a thousand triumphal arches, of boughs laden with white honors. Only once, and where the road was in a ravine, was I afraid that you would be exposed some hours to the storm, until we should hear the voices of hunters, and the bay of their dogs, sent to seek us, after our custom, when any one is lost in the snow. Happily we extricated ourselves, and soon saw the lights gleaming from the windows of the house upon the hill.

How pleasant the welcome of our good old Cæsar, the man of dark hue, who had no desire to be the first man in the village, nor the second man at Rome; but was all eagerness to have a place, however lowly, in the Eternal City! Another glad welcome in the hall; a net-work of questions from little threads of voices, and the seats before the great wood-fire, one of the few remaining representatives of the profuse customs of the fathers; one witness that our forests are not yet all swept away. Did we not give ample tributes to the repast prepared by Cæsar's wife! Two hungry men rescued from snow waves, we proved that one could feast on Dinah's poetry of food, and yet, in the ensuing night, behold no magnificent bandit, with a beard that would have done credit to a Roman Centurion, and a dagger that honored the sense of sublime danger, by the assurance that if it was to give us our death-blow, it was no coarse weapon; the grand villain peering over you with an eye in which the evil fires take refuge when

conscience is in ashes. You know that in that coming night, you did not even see the "fair ladie," now your wife, borne away from you, in a mysterious coach, by some ruffians clad in splendid mantles, while you were palsied, and could not move to seize the sword, or gun, or could not call for aid. How pleasant was that evening! From your weed rose the cloud that no counterblast, royal or plebeian, has ever yet been able to sweep away from the lips of men. Knitting by her little stand, sat one, whom to name is to tell, in a word, the great history of my best earthly happiness. I am sure her sweet thoughts, when spoken, were as the fragrance of flowers over our homelier fields; while her gentle sympathy added to our strength, and her instinctive and pure impressions, aided our conceptions, as gentle guides, and taught us how wisdom was linked to minds swayed by goodness. What a bond has she been of our long-enduring friendship! We talked of the old times – of the ancient famed hospitality of the house. We spoke of those who came there at Christmas – when the hymn of Milton seemed to be read in a grand audience chamber – at the Spring when the world seemed again so young – at Autumn where the mountains and hills were all a glow, as if angels had kindled them with a fire, burning, but not consuming them, turning them into great altars, by which man could stand, and offer his adoration. Then we spoke of the papers that had been read among the assembled guests. I told you their history; a history further recorded in the fourth chapter; the last of the four chapters preliminary. These were written by my

grandfather. As your curiosity was awakened, I drew forth some of these, from the old book-case in the library, and read them as I could. You insisted that I should decipher them, and let you send them to the press; send them to some one of your honorable publishers, so that many eyes could read, what few eyes have rested on, in this distant solitude. Julia seconded the proposition. What had I to do, but to obey! Some years have passed, and you have often complained of my procrastination. Shall I make excuses? Excuses are the shadows which the irresolute and idle, the evil, keep ever near, as their refuge from just accusation. The moment you feel the least loss of self-respect in seeking them, the moment you have to search to find them, take heed of them. Those formed to be giants, often live in them, and then life is consequently the life of the dwarf. I knew that I could have sent the papers long ago, had I written two or three lines each day, since I gave my promise. Julia, who, woman-like, always convicts me when I excuse myself, and consoles me, and defends me, when I am in the ashes, and contrite with self-upbraiding, who is never severe with me, but when I spoil the children by keeping them up too late at night, says, that I never allow a literary effort to encroach on my great duties; that I have had so much to do, that I could not sooner perform my promise. She laughs, and says that the dates I annex to my papers, during my progress in this work, show how I was interrupted, and that if the histories of intermediate parochial work were given, the book would be a strange record. Often the sick and suffering

have caused long intervals to elapse in these labors. When I could attempt the work, the change in the current of my associations has been a relief. Julia has wished me to write histories of the lives of some of those, who composed various papers in the old case. Of course, some of the authors have been passing utterly from the minds of a race, that cannot remember, but the least remnant of those who have gone before. We lament the ravages of time. Multitudes are forgotten on the earth, whom it would be a blessing to have in perpetual remembrance. Alas! we have also to confess, that time conceals the story of innumerable others, when it is well that it should be buried in its deepest oblivion.

I hope that I have copied these papers with commendable accuracy. We trust that they will add to the happiness of those who read them, and prove at the same time to be profitable. May they increase kind impressions! May they sow seeds that shall have the sun and dew that never falls on growth that is evil! Man has tablets in the heart, for inscriptions greater, and more enduring, than those of the great ledges of rock in the far East.

As one would hesitate to write the outlines of his coming destiny, if such a pen of Providence could be ready for his hand, so he, who has any love for others, would pause before he would carve, even in faintest letters, one word on these, which could sully the surface, where the indestructibility warns us, that all is an eternal record with Him, whose eye is too pure to look upon iniquity. I need not attempt, like authors of a former age, to solicit a favorable criticism, from the "gentle reader." If I say, here, that

the hall has rung with peals of laughter, as some of the papers of the old book-case have been read, that some have shed tears over the Ghost of Ford Inn, and said, it is too sad, these assurances will not predispose one who shall open the proposed volume, to utter a favorable opinion. These waifs must be cast on the waters, like all other similar ventures. We must wait, and learn where Providence shall waft them.

Will these papers outlive this decaying house? Will men love us because we have sent them forth? Will we, because of them, be grasped with a kindlier hand? Will they soften hearts in this trying world, and aid men to a greater charity?

But I must pause. Lamps will grow dim. Warnings will come, that letters may attain to too great prolixity. Readers are often not sufficiently sagacious, to know that when Homer nods, he has a design. Can I apply, what old Dr. South, the great and witty preacher said, when he printed the sermon at the Royal mandate, that the Majesty of the Realm must excuse the length of the discourse, inasmuch as he had not had time to make it shorter? Or, shall I remember the severe speech, doubtless a dutiful necessity, a knife to remove such a miserable vanity as often makes men worse than useless; the severe speech of an Eastern Divine, who, when the young preacher waited all day in vain for a compliment, to his morning's discourse, and said, in desperation, as the evening waned in the study, "Doctor, I hope that I did not weary your people with the length of my discourse," had for reply the quiet answer, "No, sir; nor by the depth of it."

So, as you have the infirmity of going to sleep over the most interesting discourse, as the lamp is going out, as I am nervous, sitting up at such a late hour, as the paper is all written over, and I have none other near at hand, I release you. Go to sleep, but wake the world to-morrow, and then say that I am your friend.

A friend of many years,

Caspar Almore.

CHAPTER I.

ARRIVAL AT THE VILLAGE

I stepped from the stage-sleigh, in the village of Overlook, at the post-office: for there the driver stopped to leave his mail-bag. That important article, which, as a boy, I used to regard with undefined dread, for I associated it with a poor wretch, who was hung for laying villanous hands upon one, in a desolate road, was the old-fashioned leather sack, full of iron rivets.

Perhaps at the time when this writing may reach the press, such a contrivance may have become antiquated; and therefore I had better add to my description, that a weighty chain passed through iron rings, to secure the opening; and finally, there was the brass padlock, at which the Indian gazed with such contempt, when he said, "Brass lock upon leather! that makes my knife laugh." I stepped from the heavy stage-sleigh into the one sent for me by Judge Almore, and it was like passing from a heavy craft on the waters, into one of lesser make, and lighter burden. John Frake, the farmer at Overlook Manor, had driven over for me. His horses seemed exhilarated by the bells, and we dashed forward in splendid style. John Frake was a character; a real man in energy, work, and talk; frank, and good-hearted.

As we drove along, in a loud voice, that permitted not a word to be lost by the melody of the bells, he made his comments upon

all things, and especially on the inhabitants along the streets of the village.

"Dr. Norkin lives there," he said, pointing with his whip to a comfortable house. And then as if pondering the beginning of a long train of thought, he added,

"Those Yankees are unaccountable smart people."

"The doctor is a Yankee, then?"

"Oh no! there aint enough Yankee in him to make a spot on the map of Massachusetts. Not but that the doctor has lots of common sense, and keeps all that he has got ready for use, when wanted, as ready as my plough to go through the ground. But those Yankees have the most uncommon ways of putting things together; just as if you took something out of the middle of the earth, and made it fit something on the top of a mountain."

"Yes, but I don't see what Yankees have to do with the doctor."

"I'll tell you what I was thinking about. I was once at the mountains, forty miles off, where there is a mineral spring. There is where ladies and gentlemen go to drink water, eat all manner of things at the tavern, and get well, when they never have been sick. Iron in the water at the springs! Bless you; it would not divide the nails in a horse-shoe in a month, to the whole army of the Revolution, if they had drunk of nothing else. Well our judge and the family followed the fashion. Fashion is a runaway horse that carries a great load of straw behind him, and sometimes he has after him things much better than straw. I drove up to bring them home. But the judge was taken sick just before I got there,

and sent for our doctor here, to come up and cure him. In the night, after I got there, one of your uncommon Yankees, who seemed to be well off, and to do fifty things, from what I could gather, to make money, had a bad attack; unlike anything I ever heard of around here. He was awful bad. I heard the racket, and went into his room.

"My friend,' says I, 'you do look awful bad' – for I always speak my honest sentiments, in a sick-room, or out of it. 'I thank you for your sympathy,' says he – and yet somehow it sounded as if he didn't. I presumed he didn't want any one to talk to him. 'Send down for Dr. Norkin,' says the landlord. 'He is here;' this is what he said to the sick man. 'He lives forty miles off – at Overlook. But he is here, attending on Judge Almore – who has been ill.'

"The sick man, after a groan or two, raised himself up in his bed. It was as good as the best apple, to see how quickly he seemed to ungear his mind from his sick body. He gave a long thought. Then he said,

"Did the judge send for that doctor, because he was in the house at the time when he was taken sick? Or did he send all the way to Overlook for him to come here to him?"

"He sent for him to Overlook,' says the landlord, before I could put in a word.

"Then I'll see him,' says he – speaking quickly out, and firm like, as if he was a king. Now wasn't that cute? I tell you such men think faster, and a great way before other people. Well; it's a free

country, and all people aint bound to do their thinking alike."

We now came to the entrance of the lane, that led up to Overlook House.

Two large cherry trees stood on either side of the gate. I drew the attention of my companion to them. They were very venerable, and their winter boughs showed some signs of decay.

"Them big trees," – said he. "Either of them, I'll engage is as old as three average men. They say a man averages thirty years of life. Now they are full ninety years old, and big at that."

"You have lived long with the judge?"

"Bless your heart, sir, long indeed. But he's a good man. There's few that don't say so – well, thank God, it is those kind of people that don't. When he speaks and acts, you feel that our Lord has taught him his religion – just as we know it is Sunday, when we wake and hear the church-bells ringing, and all the sunlight seems full of the sweet sound, and all the sound as if it had gone through the bright sun. I do love Sunday."

Here we were close to the house. "Come and see me," he said, "down at my house there. It is not as big as the judge's, but then there is room in it for a hearty welcome. I will give you a glass of good cider, or two, or three, for that matter. As for wine, I never keep any. It seems to me to be poor stuff, as if it was trying to be brandy, and couldn't." The mission of the sleigh was now over. I and my trunks were at the porch of the house. So the worthy farmer and I parted for the present.

CHAPTER II.

THE WELCOME AT OVERLOOK-HOUSE

A colored servant man, of most respectable appearance, and of quiet manners, evidently glad of my arrival ushered me into the house, saying that Judge Almore would be home in a short time, as he had gone but a little distance on the farm; and that his good lady would come down stairs in a few minutes. The hall of the house was large, and decorated with Indian relics; with long deer-horns, also, and other trophies of the hunting ground. I was hastened into an adjoining room, which I had scarcely entered, before I felt the invigorating heat from the great fire-place. There the hickory logs seemed doing their best, with their immense flame, to make me feel as if I was cared for, a stranger from a distance. On the hearth there was a small mountain of glowing coals. How pleasant it is to sit before such a fire, and to think that our interminable forests, will supply abundant fuel, for the inhabitants of our cities for hundreds of years to come. Even when New York, and Philadelphia, Trenton, and Boston, may, two or three centuries hence, have each two or three hundred thousand inhabitants, and that expectation of their increase in population, is not so chimerical as it seems, and when the country round them, may be so cleared and cultivated, that in

a circle of fifteen or twenty miles in diameter, the farm-houses may generally be in sight of one another, it is probable that the decrease of our woods will scarcely be perceptible.

But as I gazed into the flames which soon removed all chilliness from my frame, I had no time for lengthened speculations on the future of our land; for Mrs. Almore entered the room, and greeting me with great cordiality, assured me of my welcome. As I was engaged in conversation with this most estimable lady, I found myself called on to regret her visitation with a great affliction. Her cheerful countenance and manner, however, proved that she had not permitted it to hang over her as a cloud, to darken her days, or to make her selfish in her expectation of attention. The affliction was a great deafness, one evidently of long duration, and incurable; so I judged from the evidence of her loud tones, almost shouting when she addressed me. I flatter myself that I can cause any one to hear me speak, who has the ability to know, that a pistol is discharged not far from his ear. And I always feel great commiseration for those who hear with difficulty. Meeting with such, I regard the power of my lungs, as a gift, particularly designed for their service and enjoyment. Indeed I undesignedly secured a legacy from an aged aunt, by the assiduity I exhibited in informing her of what was said around her, when others neglected her, as she thought, because it was so difficult to make her to hear. Trained as I had been in the past, I have to confess, that my powers of loud speech, were never more taxed than on the present occasion.

The loud tones in which we commenced our conversation, were gradually increased; I perceived that as she raised the pitch of her voice, it was a delicate intimation to me, that I must speak with increased effort, if I would secure a perfect hearing. As we were engaged in this polite rivalry, each being, not only a diligent hearer, but a good speaker, a most comfortable-looking African woman, of very dark hue, entered to receive the orders of her mistress. She desired to know, as it soon appeared, some particulars concerning the approaching meal; and also to receive some orders which pertained to the room I was to occupy. The good mistress then stepped aside and drew near to the swarthy domestic. To my surprise, the lady dropped her voice to a good undertone, and gave her directions, as it were, "aside." She is one of those deaf persons, I said to myself, who can understand what others, with whom they are familiar, have to say when they see the motion of their lips. I once met with a man who had this singular gift. He possessed it to such an extent, that strangers, who conversed with him, never knew that he did not hear a word which they spoke. Yet what could I do now! I was compelled to hear what was said. How strange it was, that the good lady overlooked the fact, that I must hear all that could be heard by Dinah. And this Dinah was now informed what set of china should be placed on the table for my special benefit. From what she hinted, I inferred, that there was some special honor in this arrangement; as it proved to her that the Holemans, who took tea with them the night before, having made use of

a decidedly inferior service, were some grades less respectable than myself – though the mistress, when the insinuation was made, peremptorily declared, that the aforesaid Holemans were very worthy people, and should always be treated with great respect, as valued friends, in her house. An occasion was also taken, on the mention of the white and gold china, to administer a cutting reproof to Mrs. Dinah, for a nick in the spout of the teapot, – which circumstantial evidence, clearly and hastily summed up, proved to be the result of carelessness in the kitchen. To this attack, Dinah, as I must honestly testify, made persistent defense, and gave some most curious rebutting testimony. And I am also under obligation to state, that even when most excited by the charge, she never even made the most distant allusion, to the possibility that the cat had anything to do with this domestic calamity. Such was the honor of the kitchen in the good old times. I also learned, incidentally, some curious information concerning the comparative ages of some chickens, which had lately been cooped up and fattened.

I gleaned besides, some antiquarian lore concerning a venerated "comfortable," that was intended for my bed, – and a hint that some portion of its variegated lining had been the valued dress of a grandmother, worn by her on some memorable occasion, – a proud record in the family history. Some very particular directions were also given for my comfort, so that my ideas on the art of house-keeping, were greatly expanded; and I was ready to look on each lady, who ruleth over a house, as a

minute philosopher.

Dinah was also informed, that she was forbidden to act on a speculative principle, which she advanced, with great assurance; namely, that bachelors did not see, or know anything; that it was only married men who did; being set up to it by their wives, who made a mighty fuss in another house, when all the time they knew things wasn't as tidy at home. She was told not to act on any such miserable sophistry – that things were to be done right, and kept right – no matter whether any one noticed them, or not. In the course of conversation, my having come from New York was the subject of an allusion; whereupon the dark woman slipped in the observation, that she did wish she could get to that place, for she "was afraid that she should die, and have nothing to tell."

After all this important business was transacted, there was a hasty, and sudden digression for a moment, in the shape of a kind inquiry into the present state of the health of the hopeful heir of the said Dinah, who was spending the chief portion of his days in a cradle. I was, I must confess it, very much astonished to learn, from the reply and descriptions of the mother, that there is such a wonderful sympathy, between the teeth which are trying to make their way into the world, and the mechanism of a juvenile which is concealed from human sight in his body. It seemed to me a marvellous proof of the manner in which such little creatures maintain their hold on life, that he could possibly have endured such astonishing internal pains; and, also, that all the world ought to know the sovereign virtues of an

elixir, which was compounded at Overlook House. Its virtues, unlike the novel devices that are palmed on the public with such pretentious certificates, have been tested by the infants of several generations.

All cabinet meetings must have an end. So Dinah disappeared, after a furtive glance at my person; drawing her conclusions, I am assured, whether I would be a suitable husband for Miss Meta.

Soon after the hall door opened, and this young lady entered. Her mother introduced me to her in the same high pitch of voice, in which she conducted her conversation with strangers.

She said a few kind and pleasant words to me; and with a voice raised to an imitation of the maternal precedent, though without the loss of its indescribable sweetness. She was evidently anxious, that her mother should feel, that she was to be a party in our brief conversation.

As I looked at her, I thought that a sweeter, more ethereal form, a face more radiant with affections pure as the air over the snow, an eye to rest on you, as if it said, that every one on whom it fell was a new object for sympathy, had never met my view, and I thought then, and think now the more confidently, that I have made a good use of my eyes during my pilgrimage in the world. After the interchange of the few words to which I have alluded, she was about leaving us; but before she reached the door, her mother called to her, and arrested her steps. The good lady addressed her, in the same low tones in which she had formerly conversed with Dinah.

As I looked at her again, I felt that I repressed the exhibition of signs of unrestrained admiration. She seemed, indeed, as if she had grown up in the midst of the beauty of the natural world, and had been moulded to a conformity with all that we witness of grace in the field, or in the forest. The mother spoke in a manner half playful, half serious. "So Miss Meta this is the old way. You expected the arrival of this young gentleman, quiet, good-looking, evidently a person of good sense, and your father says, of most estimable character. And there you have on your old shawl, your old bonnet, and your hair blown about in the wind as if it had never had a brush applied to it. You are so careless about your appearance! You know that I have often spoken to you on the subject. And yet, on the most important occasions, you neglect all my advice. You will be laid upon the shelf yet. You will die an old maid. But do not blame me. Do go, and brush your hair, and put on another frock, and make yourself presentable. And after that, go and see that Dinah arranges everything right. I will give you credit for order, and expertness as a house-keeper. Old maids, however, are often very good house-keepers. So go, and do as I tell you. I don't mean to say that you are a dowdy, but I want to see you more particular."

"My revered mother," said Meta, with a most grave inclination of the head, and with a slight pomp of declamation, "your will is law. My dress, for the next two or three weeks, shall be a grand deceit, as if it was my habit to be as particular as the young Quakeress, who once visited us, and who was as exact

in arranging her robes, as the snow is, in taking care, that there shall be grace in its unblemished drifts. I intend, in fact, to be irresistible. Henceforth let all young men, quiet, respectable, who have not cross eyes, and who fascinate a mother, and give occasion to all her sanguine hopes of matrimonial felicity for a daughter, beware of Meta. They are as sure of being captives, as the poor little rabbits I so pity, when once they unwisely venture, to nibble at the bait in one of Peter's celebrated traps. So, best of mothers, forgive the past. Wisest of counsellors, for a brief space, farewell."

After the retreat of the daughter silence endured for a little while, while I walked to the window, and enjoyed the extensive and beautiful view. The residence of the Judge was on a hill, overlooking a picturesque village, and hence the name of the mansion which in time dispelled a very ugly name, from the small town, and gave its own designation to the place – the name of such a collection of dwellings generally becoming permanent when the post-office is established in its limits. After this I was engaged in the survey of some fine old plates upon the wall, and the picture of a portly old gentleman, whose dress indicated that he had lived in the olden time. I was seeking to find some clue to his character and history in his face, when Mrs. Almore rose, and crossed the room and joined me.

It was evident that the picture was too important for me to look upon it and not know what was due of admiration for him, of whom this uncertain resemblance was all that remained on

earth, – the frail shadow of a shadow. I saw at once that she had a formidable history to relate, and that she had often told it to those who gazed on the form on the wall. I suspected that some family pride was gratified by the narrative; and prepared myself for some harmless amusement, as I was to watch and observe how the vanity would expose itself. But she had not got beyond some dry statistics, the name, the age, the offices held in the State in the good olden time, when such honors were always a pledge of merit in the possessors, before the Judge entered the room, without our observing it. He drew near, heard for a moment, with the greatest astonishment, the loud tones of the lady, who now addressed me.

He extended his hand to me, with very kind, but dignified, courtesy, and, after giving the assurance that I was most truly welcome on my own account, and for the sake of my father, who had been a fellow-student with him at Princeton College, and almost a life-long friend, he turned to the lady by us, his honored wife, and exclaimed, —

"My dear, I heard your elevated voice outside of the house, and in the extreme end of the hall. You really alarmed me. At first I could not imagine what had occurred in the room. Why do you speak in such tones of thunder to my young friend? Is this a new style of hospitality for Overlook-House?"

"You told me that our guest, Mr. Martin, was deaf." So spoke the good hostess, with a look of frightened inquiry, a perturbed glance at myself, – with a countenance that expressed a desire

for relief, – while her tone was expressive of a great misgiving.

"I beg your pardon," said the Judge; "you are under an entire mistake. I told you that he wrote to me, some time ago, that he had met with an accident and become very lame. But when I told you this I remember that you were very much abstracted. I presume that you were deeply absorbed in some new order for your household, or in the state of Dinah's noisy heir. I never heard that Mr. Martin was deaf for a moment in his life. I told you that he was lame."

"Are you sure – are you sure that he is not deaf?"

"I am sure that he hears as well as either of us. And, – at least as far as you are concerned, that is to say that he could not have a better sense of hearing. He might possibly, it is true, be abstracted, when any one spoke to him, and imagine that he said 'deaf,' when in reality the speaker said 'lame.'"

"Dear me! my future peace is destroyed. It is worse than if a ghost intended perpetually to haunt me – for the ghost would come only in the dark; but this disaster will torture me day and night. I have buried myself under a mass of ruins from which I cannot extricate myself." And the lady looked as if an anaconda was threatening to creep in among us.

"I am sure that Mr. Martin will forgive you. He has only been annoyed by a loud conversation for a short time. It will be a pleasing variety to hear you address him in a gentle voice. Since he had such evidence of the pains you have taken to entertain him when you thought him deaf, he is assured that you will not

change your desire to make him feel at home and to know that he is among friends, now that you hear so well."

"Judge, you have no sympathy. You should have taken care that I did not fall into such a terrible mistake. I often notice that you speak to me, and turn and go away, as if you never watched to observe whether I understood you or no. I have often felt it, Judge, often felt it, – although I kept my feelings on the subject to myself. And now you see the consequences. You see where you have landed me. And I am the one to suffer all the evil that results from such indifference. What shall I do? Here is Meta. Meta, what shall I do? Mr. Martin is not at all deaf. Somehow, your father did not impress what he said on my mind. I am sure that this is not the first time that I have misunderstood him, and I never have any desire to fall into error. People that are so accurate and so careful as he is, not to be guilty of any mistake in their professional duties, so accurate as they say he is when on the bench, are often careless of smaller matters at home. Meta, Mr. Martin can hear. My dear, he can hear as well as you or I."

"Let me, my dear mother, enter into your Christian joy, now that your sorrow over his supposed affliction is relieved. You know that it is an unmingled pleasure to you to learn that he is not afflicted with so great a calamity as you supposed."

"Very well, Meta."

"And then, mother, as far as I am involved in the consequences of your mistake, he knows that I appear in my present fascinations; see my smooth hair, and this frock almost new, not

in my own will, or in accordance with my usual habits, but solely from a sense of filial duty. I am so charming, because of my reverential regard for the injunctions of my mother."

"Meta, can you never be still?"

"And then, mother, if there be a little art in my dress, if snares lurk around me to secure those who come near me, this does not proceed, in the least possible degree, from any guile in me. It is the mere expression of the anxiety of a mother that her daughter should not attain the condition of some of the best people on the earth. I allude to a class of my sex who are ignorantly, I will not say uncharitably, supposed to make the world uncomfortable through their inflexible devotion to minor morals."

"Meta, unless you are silent I shall have to leave the room."

"Well, mother, then I am mute. How fortunate it was that I was the only person with whom you conversed in the hearing of Mr. Martin!"

"Meta, you drive me mad. I did have another conversation, which he heard."

"Oh, do tell us! What happened? It could not have been as interesting to him as the one which you held with me. I shall not use my brush for some time without thinking about it. Do tell us. As Nancy often says, I am dying to hear all about it."

"Oh," said I, "Miss. Meta, all that your mother said was of no importance. She cannot care, when she reflects upon it, whether I heard it or no."

"But, Mr. Martin, then tell us what she said. It put my father

and myself under a lasting obligation."

"Mr. Martin can be more considerate than you are."

"Yes, madam, because he has heard all. I will be as considerate as you please, if I can only acquire the same information. Well, walls have ears. And if ever walls heard anything, I am sure ours have heard to-day. They will speak in due time. Father, who has been in the room with mother since Mr. Martin arrived? I must ask Ben."

"Meta, I take my departure. If nothing is heard of me to-day or to-morrow, search the mill-pond. Oh, what a difference there is between being lame, or deaf! I cannot forgive your father. Really, he ought to be more cautious. I cannot forgive him."

CHAPTER III.

THE CHRISTMAS LOG

IN THE KITCHEN

The day after my arrival, Miss Meta and I were returning home, after we had driven several miles over the country in a sleigh. Our nearest conception of the ecstasy of those who shall hereafter have wings, with which they can fly over earth and sea, on a bright morning, racing with the larks, or some ambitious hawk, or, on some most fortunate hour, even with the eagle, is attained when we glide thus over the snow. But far above all the other pleasure of the time, was the sweet companionship of her whose laugh was merrier than the bells, which Cæsar had hung around the horses with a profuse generosity. I have wondered at the mysterious manner in which some of the loveliest beings with which God enriches this earth are developed before our view, on occasions when we might expect that we should obtain the least insight into their character.

How is it that the ineffable purity of a woman, her depth of affection, her capacity for sympathy, which even in its lesser degrees renders her such a blessing in a world of so much trial, can, in some instances of great perfection, appear with such evidence in a few words, in an act which requires but little self-denial, in a tone of sorrow for small suffering, or of joy for

some one who is happy! There are some men in whom you place perfect confidence as soon as you once behold the eye kindled with an earnest expression, and hear their voice. After all the disappointments one endures in life from misplaced trust one may freely confess that if we have spent many years on the earth, and at last say in our hearts there are none in whose professions we can repose, the fault is in ourselves. We judge ourselves to be true men, and we cannot be a miracle, standing alone as such, amid all the rest of the human family. But if we can assuredly pronounce of some men that they are worthy of our utmost confidence as soon as we become acquainted with them, much more can we confide in our impressions, thus quickly formed, of some of the gentler portion of our race. How many years have passed since I formed my first impressions of Meta! and how true they were! Quickly, inaudible prophecies, in their silence arresting your mind and eliciting homage, were made known in her presence, and gave promise of endless charities to adorn her daily life. There was an imperious necessity in her noble nature, elevated as no power of earth could accomplish, to perform with strict exactness even the least duties, as one who heard him say that the least of his commandments can by its observance aid us to the attainment of the true life.

An enthusiast might have said that her very laugh was too pure for earth. All pure influences, too good for us, are needed by our necessities. It is well for earth that we have not only those among us who, though not criminal in human estimate, are of

the earth earthy, and of whom the world is worthy. Her joy always proclaimed the freedom given the blest here below, and that it never could subvert the deep gravity of her nature – as the bark that moves so gaily in the sun and wind, by a sudden check reminds us that it cannot drift into danger, but is secure; for the hidden anchor holds in its just bounds.

We had crossed a stream upon the ice, and were now ascending the hill from whose summit we could see Overlook-House in the distance. The great forest was on either side of the way. Suddenly we espied three men holding a consultation over an immense log. It had just been severed from a huge tree, which the saw and axe had laid low, the great branches sweeping the snow as they came crushing down into heaps, and here and there revealing the dead leaves and the wintry grass.

Near them stood – models of patience – four oxen, looking as if the cold air could never discompose them, and attached to a sled whose strong runners seemed to defy any weight that could be heaped upon them. I recognized the men as servants belonging on the estate of the Judge. They were negroes, slaves, – slaves in name, awaiting a near year of emancipation fixed by the law of the State. They were perfectly aware that they could have their freedom at any time from their master, – freedom in name; for they now possessed it in reality.

Nothing could be more comfortable than their general appearance. Their dress was warm, and such as any laboring man could desire. At the present moment their happiness seemed

perfect. They surrounded the log with an exhibition of exuberant animal spirits, with transport in such excess that it never could have been crowded into the frame of a white man.

As we drew near, one was demanding attention, in a most triumphant manner, to sundry vast knots which protruded from the log. Then the trio made the wood ring with shouts of merriment, and threw themselves into inimitable contortions.

"What causes all this excitement?" I asked. "Why should that log cause all the effect which the greatest wit could hope to produce?" "They are preparing," was the answer, "a back-log for the kitchen chimney. It is to be put in the fire-place this evening, the night before Christmas, after all the fire has burnt down required for an evening meal. As long as any portion of it lasts, they have holiday. In winter they have so little to do, that it would puzzle them to say what change the holiday makes in their labor. Their imagination acts on a traditionary custom. Hence they take it for granted that they have an easier time than in the month before or after. They go into the wood and select the largest tree and the one which can afford the log most likely to last. Before they retire to rest, they take great care to arrange the brands and coals so that it shall not burn during the night. They often throw water upon it when it seems to burn too rapidly. And as to their wisdom, I think that on the present occasion they have made an admirable choice."

We now drew near, and spoke to the Africans. They eagerly called the attention of their young mistress to the wonderful

qualities of the severed trunk. Assertions were made concerning fabulous quantities of buckwheat-cakes, that would be eaten before that vast cylinder would be reduced to ashes. There was not the slightest idea that any member of the family of the Judge would feel the least interest different from their own. In fact they felt that all joined them in their conspiracy against – they knew not what, – a conspiracy for some great imaginable benefit unknown.

"You had better hasten," I said, observing their oblivion as to the work before them; "for the sun is sinking, and the night will soon be upon us. There is no moon to-night."

"Master," said one, "what is the reason why the moon always shines on bright nights, when we do not want him, and not on dark nights, when we can't see where we go?"

Happily, before I could summon my philosophical knowledge for practical use, and deliver then and there, from my oracular sleigh, a lecture which would do honor to my Alma Mater, while I, in a lucid manner, removed the perplexity of my inquirer, he was called away to make diligent use of one of the great levers provided for the occasion. The rolling of the log on the sled was hard work, – so hard that I gave Meta the reins, and volunteered my assistance. I did well as to the physical application of power. Yet I found these men, in this instance, possessed of more practical natural philosophy than myself. The toil was seasoned with much wit, – that is to say, wit if the laughter was to be the test. And there is no epicure who can exceed the African in

enjoyment when he is feasting on his own witticisms.

Meta told me that I must by all means be a witness to the process of rolling the log on the kitchen hearth. So we led the way home, our fleet horses leaving the oxen, with their vast and important load, far behind us. On our arrival home, we found the wife of the doctor, with the Judge and his good lady. She was a pleasant person, and added to the conversation of the evening the remarks of an acute and cultivated mind. She had one protruding weakness. It was her pride in her family, which was a very respectable one in the part of the country from which she came. She had been educated in the idea, that they were the greatest people in the world, – a wide-spread delusion in the land. This led her to assure me, at least a dozen times in the evening that her family were very "peculiar." "This tea very fine! Yes, it is remarkably good. I am sure that it cannot be excelled. And I must say to you, that my family are very peculiar. They are very peculiar in their fondness for excellent tea."

"The Judge's family not exclusive! No; certainly they are very much beloved, and, mingling with others, have done great good to our community. But I must say that my family are, perhaps, too exclusive. They are peculiar, very peculiar. They do not like to associate with uncongenial persons."

"What a grand Christmas fire! Well I suppose I inherit the love of such a blaze. How cheerful it is! Well my family are peculiar, very peculiar; they always like to have a cheerful, a good warm fire. They are peculiar." So "peculiar" I soon discovered meant

that they were very remarkable, very distinguished people. It was to be supposed that all that they did, indicated that they were made of clay finer than all the rest used in the formation of other people. Common things touched by their hands became gilded and refined. Wherever they were, there was a pyramid above the common elevation, and on its summit was their appropriate place. Was the doctor on that platform? Or was he only holding to it by his elbows and yet with his feet far above the earth on which common men had their place where they could stand?

With the exception of this folly the lady was, as I have said, an acquisition to our evening party. She was evidently one who had a kind heart, and devotedly attached to her Lord and Master. In after days I found her to be one of my most valued friends and advisers. As respects their ability to become such true friends, an ability which truly ennobles man, I have no doubt that her family were peculiar, very peculiar indeed.

The evening was quickly passing away when we were summoned, according to the order which Meta had given, to the wing of the house where was the kitchen, that we might see the great log rolled into the fire-place. The kitchen was a very large room, such as were built of old by prosperous settlers in our land, when they had acquired enough of this world's goods, to make such additions to the log cabin in which they began their farming life, as they in their full ambition of space could desire.

How often are the dwelling-houses in our country a curious history of the gradual increase of a family in prosperity!

The kitchen of the Judge was evidently designed by a frontier architect, as a great hall of refuge for a large family. The windows were planned when there need not be loop-holes where Indians prowled around, and might need the admonition of a rifle-ball to teach them to keep at a respectful distance. The glasses in them were small, and the pieces of wood in which they were inserted would have been strong enough for the rounds of a ladder. There was room for all things. One could churn, another spin, another mend a net; children could find appropriate nooks where they could con the spelling-book and study the multiplication table in times when the rod was not spared; neighbors making a friendly call could find a vacant space where they could sit and partake of cider and homely cakes, and if they had any special business, which a citizen would settle in two minutes, could spend an hour in preliminaries of a very vague kind, in generalities not glittering, and coming to the subject, only when they were farthest from it, and all could be transacted without any one being in the least degree incommoded.

One of the prominent objects in the kitchen at Overlook-House was the rafters above you. The ceiling was resting upon them, in the form of thick boards, which were the floor of the rooms above. From these guns were suspended on wooden forks, just as they were cut from the tree and stripped of their bark. Fishing rods were hung there in the same manner. In some places parcels of dried herbs were tied to large nails driven into the timbers. Here and there a board was nailed to the rafters, forming

a shelf. On one side of the room was a great bench with a board back much higher than the head of any person who could sit upon it, – which back by an ingenious device could be let down and make a table, – the rude sofa beneath answering for solid legs.

Near this useful combination was a box on rockers – as a cradle. There lay the heir of Dinah. Its little dark head on the white pillow was like a large blackberry, could it have existed out of its season and fallen on the pure snow. Dinah, who was near it, was a character. Her sayings were memorable. One day she was speaking of a bad man who had found his way for a brief season to Overlook, and said in a state of great indignation, for he had cheated the people by some act of bare-faced villany, "Master, if the devil doesn't get that man I want any of the folks to tell me what is the use of having a devil?"

But the most singular portion of the room was the great fire-place and the arrangements connected with it. It was a structure perfectly enormous, and the stones required for its erection must have made a large opening in the quarry. It was deep and high. An ox could easily have been roasted whole before it. Over it was a shelf which no one in these degenerate days could reach. On either side were two small closets, – made in the deep wall, – the door of each being made from a wide plank, and secured by a large wooden button. In the back of the fire-place, on one side of it, was the door of a great oven, – rivalling in size, I presume, the tomb of the ancient grandee in the east – where the traveler slept, perhaps on some of the very dust of the proud

man who gloried in the expectation of a kingly sepulchre. On either side of the room on a line with the vast fire-place were two doors opening into the air, and exactly opposite to each other. The broad hearth extended from door to door, being flagged with large smooth stones. Each door was framed of heavy oaken timber, – the boards in consequence of the depths of the frame being sunk as deep panels. Each had a heavy wooden latch, and a vast curved piece of wood was the handle by which it was to be opened.

On the great pavement in front of the fire-place stood Cæsar, a man with a frame finely developed. His twin brother Pompey dwelt on an adjoining farm, – so resembling him as one of the colored people said that you could "scarcely tell them apart, they were so like one another, especially Pomp." He had a rough coat thrown over him, – a fur-cap on his head, and he held in one hand an iron chain that trailed on the stone hearth and in the other a lantern emitting a blaze of light.

When we were all in our places Cæsar directed one of the boys to open the door on the right hand. There on the snow revealed by the light of his lantern, was the famous log on a line parallel with the stone paving that crossed the end of the room. Around this log, he with the help of the boy fastened the iron chain, securing it with a spike partially driven into the wood with a heavy hammer. The door on the left was then thrown open, and we saw by the lights borne by several of the laborers, that the oxen which had drawn the great segment of the trunk from the forest

were standing there upon the snow waiting to complete their labor for the evening. The long chain extending across the whole width of the room was drawn through the door and fastened to the yokes of the oxen.

Then came the chief excitement of the time. A quantity of snow was thrown down at the entrance where the log lay in ponderous quiet, and beaten down with spades and the heavy boots of the men. All were now directed to stand some distance from the chain for fear of any accident. Then Cæsar gave the order. There was a sudden movement without. The words of command which oxen are supposed to know, were spoken to put them in motion. There was a loud snapping of whips. The chain was heaved in the air and rose and fell. The huge log was drawn forward. It passed the door and glided along on the stone pavement, like a great ship moving through the water after its sails have suddenly been lowered, and it proceeds by its acquired impulse. When it had reached the front of the vast aperture where it was to be slowly consumed, Cæsar gave his prompt order. It was immediately obeyed, and the oxen were brought to a pause in their exertions. It was evident from the absence of explanation to those without, and from the perfect composure of the master of the ceremony, that similar scenes were of frequent occurrence.

The chain being removed and the oxen led away, the log was rolled by the application of the levers to its place. There it lay, the crushed snow melting and falling on the hot hearth, the singing sound of the steam rising from the stones.

So there was the measure of the fancied increase of freedom from labor during the Christmas season. Nothing now remained but the gathering of all the household to the evening devotions. The Judge read the Scriptures, and after the singing of a hymn offered up the prayers. There was an indescribable reality in the attention, and a fervor in the kneeling church in the house. It led you to reflect how One who came down from above and took our nature upon him has taught man how to make his life on earth the dawn of an eternal day. I had felt the presence of God in the shades of the great mountain forest during past hours. But here in the stillness of this evening worship, as the light of the Redeemer revealed the grandeur of all that is immortal in men, of all that stands ever so near the portal of endless glory, as all earthly distinctions faded away among those who to the eye of faith, were now the sons of God, – distinctions overlooked at this hour, as the last fragment of the moulted plumage is unknown to the eagle soaring in its strength, no words could better express the sentiment of the time than those noble ones of old, – "This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

CHAPTER IV.

HOW THE OVERLOOK PAPERS CAME TO BE WRITTEN

"I believe," said the Judge one morning shortly after my arrival, "that I must supply you with pen and paper, and assign to you a task."

"What can I do? Tell me how to be useful."

"Do not offer too hastily. Let me inform you of a custom which is observed here like the laws of the Medes and Persians.

"All our guests, at our festival seasons, and I hope that whenever it can be in your power you will be present, are most seriously enjoined to bring with them a contribution to our Overlook Papers. From each is demanded a story, a poem, or an essay. In the evening these are read. And indeed, I require from each of my friends who receives an invitation, if he cannot accept it, still to transmit his paper.

"These or copies of them are preserved in the huge book-case in the library. We sometimes draw upon the old collection, and it is pleasant to revive the old associations as they are again read to a happy circle. I ought to have sent you word, and told you to prepare your paper. It is an unusual thing for me to be guilty of such an omission. As I have been negligent I must now enjoin you to prepare to do your part with the others."

"My dear sir, has ever any guest written a paper after his arrival here?"

"Come! come! I have never asked any guest to do it after he came, who could probably accomplish it more easily than yourself."

"What shall I write?"

"Whatever you please. A Poem if you will."

"I might make the attempt. But will poetry come 'under compulsion?' Surely not 'under compulsion.' Shall I cudgel my brains? Will Pegasus go at my will when I smite him with my staff? How long might I sit here, the image of despair, and what despair on monumental marble, as desolate as the poet with fixed eye, unable to indite a line? How long might I be like the hopeless bird – all promise, but not one unfolded gleam of beauty? In this free air am I to find the poetic pressure of a prison? In this old cheerful home, a poet's garret? With your abundant and hospitable board before me, can I write as famous men of old, when they wanted a dinner? Am I to sit here, as one has said, waiting for inspiration as a rusty conductor for a flash of lightning? My dear sir, I surely can plead exemption. Let me come here, if we live, next Christmas season or at the early spring or autumnal gathering. I will provide two if you please. If the first should weary, then the circle can hope that I have kept the best for the last."

"I do not think that it will answer for one to be a hearer who has no paper of his own. So let me insist on your compliance."

"Well sir, if you insist on it, I must see what I can do. Would you object to my producing a poem already published by me in a New York paper?"

"I am sorry to say that would not be in accordance with our rules. The piece must be composed for our social gathering."

"Well I must then make the attempt. I would weave a short romance out of some story I have heard in my travels. But I am always afraid of the sad being who, searching to the fag-end of memory says, after hearing you, and approving, let me see, I have heard that, or something like it, before! I once learned a lesson and received a nervous shock which easily returns, as I was about to address a meeting, and under a sudden impression asked the most knowing inhabitant of the village, 'Did any of the speakers who have addressed you ever tell such a story?' 'Oh! yes,' said he, with sudden alarm, 'Every one who has been here has told that story.' Yet that was my main stay, argument, illustration, eloquence. I had to do the best I could without it. Since then I am in a trepidation lest I fall into the pit from which I kept my feet at that time."

"Well so much the better. Such caution will insure variety."

"Do not be too sure of that. Excessive care often leads us to the very errors it would avoid."

So our conversation closed. The paper was written and read. I looked some time ago in vain for my piece among the Overlook papers. Strange to say, it was not there. I saw the Judge originally endorse it and tie it up in the collection. Meta told me when I

expressed my surprise that the document was missing, that she must confess that when she was younger and more silly, and had her taste less cultivated, she took it one day, after I had left her father's, secretly from the pile. Regarding it as of such small consequence, she had not put it back in its place; and as it was also particularly weak in having a few sentences evidently meant for her to understand as no one else could. She will find it, she says, when she next examines her old papers and letters. And she assures me that it must be safe, because the old house would not trouble itself to destroy it; the Overlook moths would not dare to touch it, and that it is destined to outlive its author, even if he had brass enough in him to make a monument.

I.

DR. BENSON, OR THE LIVING MAN EMBALMED FOR TWENTY YEARS

The United States is the oldest country in the world. Many of its institutions are of a venerable antiquity which cast those of Europe into the shade. By their side those of Great Britain, France and Germany seem but of yesterday. The honest impressions of each man substantiate these assertions so clearly that all argument on the subject would be as great a work of supererogation as that of carrying shade to a forest. Ages, countless ages, as all reflecting men are aware, have been requisite for the development of man into the highest type of civilization. Not less, it is obvious, than five thousand years could elevate any human being into a genuine Yankee. Such an immense space of time must have elapsed before man, passing through each primeval epoch, could have worn away on Plymouth Rock the caudal appendages that impeded the progress of humanity.

We have such remarkable institutions among us, such progressive theorists upon all possible subjects, that the foundations of our cities must have been laid simultaneously with those of the Pyramids.

A like conviction arises as we compare our accomplished

financiers who can raise up in any plain, mountains of gold, and turn little streams of promise into seas of bank notes, with the Indian magician whose alchemy transmuted mutterings and strange figures in the ashes into comfortable fires, venison, bear's meat, and a variety of comforts for his terror-striking wigwam. Are there not noted streets in our cities where some men have discovered the philosopher's stone?

And then look on the systems of our modern politics. Each man can see what glacier periods have been over the land, what thickness of ice impenetrable to pure rays from above, melted from beneath, ice which has ground down to dust the ancient heights of honor, of modest nature distrusting itself. Yes, we are the oldest people in the wide world.

Even the little village where my history directs our attention has one savor of dignified antiquity. It has had a long series of names in no rapid succession. Our antiquarians have not paid sufficient attention to this subject of the succession of such names borne by our villages and towns. One cause is our nervous apprehension, that such a study will reveal a former state of society which people of strong prejudice may not mention to our honor. Citizens who have long purses acquired in the sale of farms divided into town lots, who have highly educated and refined children, do not wish any one to contradict them while they intimate their illustrious descent, by saying that they remember when their father or grandfather dwelt at Scrabbletown, Blackeye or Hardcorner. The honest truth is that

these names of these rural towns do indicate the transmigration of the souls of the places into different social forms. They often tell of the original solitude, the cluster of poor dwellings of men a little above the Indian, of small taverns springing up as the devil has sown the seed, of the free-fights, of the loose stones in the roads, the mud immeasurably deep, of the reformation with the advent of the itinerant preacher, of the church, of the school-house, of the rapid progress in general prosperity. In place of yielding to the seductive influence of the disquisition which offers itself to my toil, I shall consider it sufficient to say of our village that it was honored by becoming the residence of Dr. Benson. It is sufficient for me to inform my reader that at the time when my history commences his fame and occupation gave the title to the place. Indeed, in his honor it bore successively the names of Pill-Town, and Mortar and Pestle city.

His general history was not one that is uncommon in our land. Many a man of small education, but who has had a natural turn for the study of simple means for the cure of ordinary diseases in a country neighborhood has acquired considerable skill, and done more good, and far less evil, than could have been anticipated. In fact the ignorant often lean on such a man with special confidence. They prefer his services to those of the well-taught and meritorious physician. For they think it easily explicable, that the learned doctor should often cure the diseased. Books have taught him what medicines are needful for those who are sick. But around the quack there is a delightful cloud of

mystery. His genius was surely born with him. He has stumbled on his remedies by some almost supernatural accident. And then there is the exciting and most pleasant doubt whether he has not had some dealings with the devil. You have moreover this advantage, that you acquire all the benefit of his compact with the evil one, without any guilt on your part. All that is evil lies on the head of the practitioner.

How noble the calling of the true physician! What more need we say of his office than that in every sick-room he can look to the Redeemer, and feel that he employs him to do, what he was continually doing by his own words when he was on the earth? "Without the power of miracles," – I quote from memory words that fell from the lips of one very dear to me whose voice is no more heard on earth, and I fear I mar the sentence, – "Without the power of miracles, he goes about doing good, the blessed shadow of our Lord; and by him God gives sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, enables the lame to walk and raises up those almost fallen into the sleep of death."

As I write, the manly form of our family physician, the form that we laid in the grave a few years ago, rises before me. Oh! what unselfishness, what high sense of honor and professional duty, what compassion for human infirmities, what a grand and enduring perception of the brotherhood of man, of the one family of rich and poor, learned and ignorant, didst thou then learn, our dear kind friend, in thy innumerable ministrations! Literary men have too often indulged in cheap humor at the

cost of the physician. It is easy to caricature anything grand and sacred. It is easy to cure in the pages of the novel the sick man who plays his pranks at the expense of the doctor, and eats his meat, and drinks his wine when the medical advice assures him that he must fast or die. Just imagine one of these literati to send for his physician in haste.

"Doctor," he exclaims, "it is well you have come! Do give me some relief."

"Wait a moment," exclaims the physician! "I have something to read to you."

"Read to me, doctor! Why I am ill, – alarmed. Depend upon it, I am very sick. Prescribe for me at once."

"Prescribe for you! Why hear what you wrote concerning physicians. If they are what you describe, you should never ask them to come near your sick bed."

"But I wrote only in jest. I described the pretender."

"No, my dear sir, your assault is without limitation. Your attack is against all men of my profession. Your words were adapted to aid the ignorant popular prejudice against our art. I will read to you."

I cannot but think that, in such a case, there are not a few writers of light literature, who would be forced to perceive the meanness of their assault on a noble profession.

Our hero commenced his public career in a blacksmith's shop, where he gave assistance in the useful work done by his master on the anvil. There he displayed a curious talent for healing the

diseases of the horses, which the farmers brought to the place. This gave him some notoriety. And he never was sent for to heal as a veterinary doctor, on any occasion, when he did not have the confidence of a man whose eyes pierced far through the skin, and saw the secret causes of disease.

A change in his fortunes occurred, when a skilful physician, who fled from France in a time of great political trouble, came to reside in his neighborhood. All the spare time that our hero could command he spent in serving him in his fishing excursions – rowing his boat for him, and pointing out the best places where he could cast his hook – an act that seemed to be his best solace as an exile. The good stream or lake that well repaid his skill and patience in the use of his rod, was almost to him for a season, a Lethe between him and beautiful France.

The amiable Frenchman was not destined long to endure any sorrows on our soil. At his death, Benson became the possessor of his few books, his few surgical instruments and some curious preparations. He rented a small house near the blacksmith's shop and tavern, and placed his books, the instruments, some strange bones, a curious stuffed animal, and some jars and bottles prominently in the window. He also had some unaccountable grandeur of scientific words, understood by all to be French – a public supposition in evidence of his having been a favorite pupil of the doctor. And then, as he was a capital fellow at a drink, it is no marvel that he acquired practice with rapidity. And as money flowed into his pocket, unhappily the whisky, in a proportionate

manner, flowed down his throat. But as he had an established reputation, he of course received the compliment: "I would rather have Benson to cure me if he was drunk than to have any other doctor to cure me if he was sober." Such was the confidence of the men of Pill-Town in his skill.

Oftentimes when his brain was excited by his potations, he would wander off into the woods and seek roots and plants, talking to himself in strange words, and bent, apparently, on some great discovery. He began to throw out vague hints to some of his companions that he knew of some strange secret, and could perform a work more wonderful than he had ever before done in all his practice. But as his associates never dreamed that any one would make experiments on the bodies of men, and as his talk of philosophy seemed to be in the clouds, they, more akin to the clods of earth, heard him with blank minds, so that when he had done talking, there was no more impression left, than the shadows of passing birds left on their fields.

Once as he sat with a friend over a bottle of famous whisky, which is your true leveler, placing the man of science on a level with the ignorant boor, he gave him a full account of a singular adventure which he had with an Indian physician. It was a peculiarity of the doctor that his memory and power of narration increased, as he imbibed increasing quantities of his primitive beverage. He said that he had wandered away from home one fine morning, and been lost in the distant forest. He became very weary and fell asleep. His slumbers were broken by some

sounds that were near to him, and looking through the bushes he saw a majestic Indian who was searching with great diligence for some roots, whose use he had imagined no man knew but himself. The doctor said that he rose, and approaching him with due professional dignity, informed him that he supposed he was one of the medical fraternity. His natural conjecture proved to be very correct. They soon became very sociable, and pledged each other in several good drinks from a flask which the white man fortunately carried in his pocket. The savage M. D. finally took him to his laboratory, and in return for some communications from one well versed in the modern state of medical science in France, which the red man listened to with the most intense admiration, he disclosed a variety of Indian cures. Above all he told of a marvelous exercise of his power, and related the secret means employed under the assurance of the most solemn promise that it should not be divulged. Dr. Benson told his friend that this great secret was in his mind morning and evening; that when he waked at night it haunted him, and that he could not cease to think of it if he would make every attempt.

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