VARIOUS

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Содержание

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RHODA

Uncle Bradburn took down a volume of the new Cyclopædia, and placed it on the stand beside him. He did not, however, open it immediately, but sat absorbed in thought. At length he spoke:—"Don't you think a young girl in the kitchen, to help Dorothy, would save a good many steps?"

"I don't know," replied Aunt Janet, slowly. "Dorothy has a great deal to do already. Hepsy is as good and considerate as possible, but Dorothy won't let her do anything hardly. Hepsy says herself that within doors she has only dusted furniture and mended stockings ever since she came."

"Can't you find sewing for Hepsy?"

"She ought not to do much of that, you know."

"Very true; but then this girl,—she will have to go to the poor-house if we don't take her. She has been living with Mrs. Kittredge at the Hollow; but Mrs. Kittredge has made up her mind not to keep her any longer. The fact is, nobody will keep her unless we do; and she is terribly set against going back to the poor-house."

"Who is she?" asked Aunt Janet, a little hurriedly. She guessed already.

"Her name is Rhoda Breck. You have heard of her."

"Heard of her! I should think so!"

"If I were you, Oliver," said grandmother, who sat in her rocking-chair knitting, "I would have two or three new rooms finished off over the wood-shed, and then you could accommodate a few more of that sort. Just like you!"

And she took a pinch of snuff from a little silver-lidded box made of a sea-shell. She took it precipitately,—a sign that she was slightly disturbed. This snuff-box, however, was a safety-valve.

Uncle Bradburn smiled quietly and made no reply.

"We will leave it to Dorothy," said Aunt Janet. "It is only fair, for she will have all the trouble."

Uncle Bradburn regarded the point as gained: he was sure of Dorothy. But he added by way of clincher, "Probably the girl never knew a month of kind treatment in her life, and one would like her to have a chance of seeing what it is. Just imagine a child of fifteen subjected to the veriest vixen in the country. There is some excuse for old Mrs. Kittredge, too, exasperated as she is by disease. No wonder if she is not very amiable; but that makes it none the less hard for the child."

So the upshot of the matter was, that Rhoda Breck was installed nominal aid to Dorothy.

Uncle brought her the next day in his sulky,—a slight little creature, with a bundle as large as herself.

Presently she appeared at the sitting-room door. She was scarcely taller than a well-grown ten-years child. She wore a dress of gay-hued print, a bright shawl whose fringe reached lower than the edge of her skirt, and on her head an old-world straw bonnet decorated with a mat of crushed artificial flowers, and a faded, crumpled green veil. The small head had a way of moving in quick little jerks, like a chicken's; and it was odd to see how the enormous bonnet moved and jerked in unison. The face and features were small, except the eyes, which were large and wide open, and blue as turquoise.

She took time to look well around the room before she spoke:—"Well, I'm come; I suppose you've been expecting of me. See here, be I going to sleep with that colored woman?"

It was not possible to know from her manner to whom the query was addressed; but Aunt Janet replied, "No, Rhoda, there is a room for you. We never ask Dorothy to share her room with any one." Then, turning to me, "Go and show Rhoda her room, my dear."

I rose to obey. Rhoda surveyed me, as if taking an inventory of the particulars which made up my exterior; and when I in turn felt my eyes attracted by her somewhat singular aspect, she remarked, in an indescribably authoritative tone, "Don't gawp! I hate to be gawped at."

"See what a pretty room Dorothy has got ready for you," said I,—"a chest of drawers in it, too; and there's a little closet. I am sure you will like your room."

"No, you ain't sure neither," she replied. "Nobody can't tell till they've tried. Likely yourn has got a carpet all over it. Hain't it, now?"

"It has a straw matting," I answered.

"And it's bigger'n this, I'll bet Ain't it, now?"

"It is larger; but Louise and I have it together," said I.

"Yes, I've heard tell about her," said Rhoda. "Well, you see you and her ain't town-poor. If you was town-poor you'd have to put up with everything,—little room, and straw bed, and old clothes, and everything. I expect I'll have to take your old gowns; hain't you got any? Say, now."

"Yes," I said, "but I wear them myself. Surely, that you have on is not old."

"Well, that's because I picked berries enough to buy it with. My bundle there's all old duds, though. It takes me half my time to patch 'em. You'd pitch 'em into the rag-bag. Wouldn't you, now?"

"I have not seen them, you know," I replied.

"More you hain't, nor you ain't agoing to. I hate folks peeking over my things."

"Well," said I, "you may be sure I shall never do it. I must go back to my work now."

"O, you feel above looking at town-poor's things, don't you? Wait till I've showed you my new apron. I didn't ride in it for fear I'd dust it. It's real gay, ain't it, now?"

"Yes," said I; "it looks like a piece of a tulip-bed. But I must really go. I hope you will like your room."

When I went back into the sitting-room, grandmother was wiping her eyes. She had been laughing till she cried at the new help Uncle Oliver had brought into the house.

"No matter, though," she was saying; "let him call them help if he likes. If Dorothy will put up with it, I am sure we ourselves may. He says Hepsy more than pays her way in eggs and chickens. Just as if he thought about the eggs and chickens! Of course, if persons are really in need, it always pays to help them; and I guess Oliver has about as much capital invested that way as any one I know of, and I'm glad of it. But it's his funny way of doing it; it's all help, you see." And she laughed again till the tears came.

In half an hour, during which time grandmother had a nap in her chair and Aunt Janet read, the little apparition stood in the doorway again. She had doffed the huge bonnet; and in her lint-white locks, drawn back from her forehead so straight and tight that it seemed as if that were what made her eyes open so round, she wore a tall horn comb. Around her neck, and standing well out, was a broad frill of the same material as her dress, highly suggestive of Queen Elizabeth.

"You hain't got any old things, coats and trousers and such, all worn out, have you? 'Cause if you have, I guess I'll begin a braided rug. When folks are poor, they've got to work, if they know what's good for 'em."

"They'd better work, if they know what's good for 'em, whether they're poor or not," said grandmother.

"There's a pedler going to bring me a diamond ring when I get a dollar to pay him for it."

This remark was elicited by a fiery spark on grandmother's finger.

"You had better save your money for something you need more," said grandmother.

"You didn't think so when you bought yourn, did you, now?" said Rhoda.

Meantime Aunt Janet had experienced a sense of relief at Rhoda's suggestion, by reason of finding herself really at a loss how to employ her. So they twain proceeded at once to the garret; whence they presently returned, Rhoda bearing her arms full of worn-out garments which had been accumulating in view of the possible beggar whose visits in that part of New England are inconveniently rare.

"Those braided rugs are very comfortable things under one's feet in winter," said grandmother. "They're homely as a stump fence, but that is no matter."

"I hardly knew what you would do with her while we were away," said Aunt Janet. "But it would kill the child to sit steadily at that. There's one thing, though,—strawberries will soon be ripe, and she can go and pick them. You may tell her, Kate, that I will pay her for them by the quart, just as any one else does. That will please and encourage her, I think."

I told her that evening.

"No, you don't," was her answer. "Nobody don't pay me twice over. I ain't an old skinflint, if I be town-poor. But I'll keep you in strawberries, though. Never you fear."

I quite liked that of her, and so did grandmother and Aunt Janet when I told them.

Uncle and Aunt Bradburn were going to make their yearly visit at Exeter, where uncle's relatives live. The very day of their departure brought a letter announcing a visit from one of Aunt Janet's cousins, a Miss Lucretia Stackpole. She was a lady who avowed herself fortunate in having escaped all those trammels which hinder people from following their own bent. One of her fancies was for a nomadic life; and in pursuance of this, she bestowed on Aunt Janet occasional visits, varying in duration from two or three days to as many weeks. The letter implied that she might arrive in the evening train, and we waited tea for her.

She did not disappoint us; and during the tea-drinking she gave us sketches, not only of all the little celebrities she had met at Saratoga, but of all the new fashions in dresses, bonnets, and jewelry, besides many of her own plans.

It was impossible for her to remain beyond the week, she said, because she had promised to meet her friends General and Mrs. Perkinpine in Burlington in time to accompany them to Montreal and Quebec, whence they must hurry back to Saratoga for a week, and go thence to Baltimore; then, after returning for a few days to New York, they were to go to Europe.

"But you don't mean to go with them to Europe, Lucretia?" said grandmother.

"O, of course, Aunt Margaret," for so she called her,—"of course I intend to go. We mean to be gone a year, and half the time we shall spend in Paris. We shall go to Rome, and we shall spend a few weeks in England."

"I cannot imagine what you will do with six months in Paris,—you who don't know five words of French."

"I studied it, however, at boarding-school," said Miss Stackpole; "I read both Télémaque and the New Testament in French."

"Did you?" said grandmother; "well, every little helps."

"I think I should dearly love to go myself," said Louise.

"One picks up the language," said Miss Stackpole; "and certainly nothing is more improving than travel."

"If improvement is your motive, it is certainly a very laudable one," said grandmother. "But I should suppose that at your age you would begin to prefer a little quiet to all this rushing about. But every one to his liking."

Now it is undeniable that grandmother and Miss Stackpole never did get on very well together; so it was rather a relief to Louise and myself when Miss Stackpole, pleading fatigue from her ride, expressed a wish to go to bed early, and get a good long, refreshing night's sleep, the facilities for which, she averred, were the only compensating circumstance of country life.

Immediately afterwards, grandmother called Louise and myself into her room, to say what a pity it was that this visit had not occurred either a few weeks earlier or a few weeks later, when uncle and aunt would have been at home; but that, as it was, we must make the best of it, and do all in our power to make things go pleasantly for Miss Stackpole. It was true, she said, that Lucretia was not so very many years younger than herself, and, for her part, she thought pearl-powder and rouge and dyed hair, and all such trash, made people look old and silly, instead of young and handsome. It did sometimes try her patience a little; but she hoped she should remember, and so must we, that it was a Christian duty to treat people hospitably in one's own home, and that it was enjoined upon us to live peaceably, if possible, with all men, as much as lieth in us. Lucretia's being a goose made no difference in the principle.

So we planned that we would take her up to Haverhill, and down to Cornish, and over to Woodstock,—all places to which she liked to go. And Dorothy came in to ask if she had better broil or fricassee the chickens for breakfast, and to say that there was a whole basketful of Guinea-hens' eggs, and that she had just set some waffles and sally-lunns a-sponging. She was determined to do her part, she said: she should be mighty glad to help get that skinchy-scrimpy look out of Miss Lucretia's face, just like a sour raisin.

Grandmother said every one must do the best she could.

There was one topic which Miss Stackpole could never let alone, and which always led to a little sparring between herself and grandmother. So the next morning, directly after breakfast, she began,—"Aunt Margaret, I never see that ring on your finger without wanting it."

"I know it," grandmother responded; "and you're likely to want it. It's little like you'll ever get it."

"Now, Aunt Margaret! you always could say the drollest things. But, upon my word, I should prize it above everything. What in all the world makes you care to wear such a ring as that, at your age, is more than I can imagine. If you gave it to me, I promise you I would never part with it as long as I live."

"And I promise you, Lucretia, that I never will. And let me tell you, that, old as I am, you are the only one who has ever seemed in a hurry for me to have done with my possessions. If it will ease your mind any, I can assure you, once for all, that this ring will never come into your hands as long as you live. It has been in the family five generations, and has always gone to the eldest daughter; and, depend upon it, I shall not be the first to infringe the custom. So now I hope you will leave me in peace."

Miss Stackpole held up her hands, and exclaimed and protested. When she was alone with Louise and me, she said she could plainly see that grandmother grew broken and childish.

When we saw grandmother alone, she said she was sorry she had been so warm with Lucretia; she feared it was not quite Christian; besides, though you brayed a fool in a mortar with a pestle, yet would not his foolishness depart from him.

The visiting career, so desirable for various reasons, was entered upon immediately. To Bethel, being rather too far for going and returning the same day, only Miss Stackpole and Louise went. They rode in the carryall, Louise driving. Though quite needlessly, Miss Stackpole was a little afraid of trusting herself to Louise's skill, and begged Will Bright, uncle's gardener, to leave his work, just for a day, and go with them. But there were a dozen things, said Will, which needed immediate doing, so that was out of the question. Then it came out that a run-away horse was not the only danger. In the country there are so many lurking-places, particularly in going through woods, whence a robber might pounce upon you all of a sudden and demand your life, or your portemonnaie, or your watch, or your rings, or something, that Miss Stackpole thought unprotected women, out on a drive, were on the whole forlorn creatures. But in our neighborhood a highwayman was a myth,—we had hardly ever even heard of one; and so, after no end of misgivings lest one or another lion in the way should after all compel the relinquishment of the excursion, literally at the eleventh hour they were fairly on their way.

A room with a low, pleasant window looking out on the garden was the one assigned to Rhoda. In the garret she had discovered a little old rocking-chair, and this, transferred to her room, and placed near the window, was her favorite seat. Here, whenever one walked in the back garden, which was pretty much thickets of lilacs, great white rose-bushes, beds of pinks and southern-wood, and rows of currant-bushes, might be heard Rhoda's voice crooning an old song. It was rather a sweet voice, too. I wondered where she could have collected so many old airs. She said she supposed she caught them of Miss Reeney, out at the poor-house.

When one saw Rhoda working away with unremitting assiduity, day after day, it was difficult to yield credence to all the stories that had been current in regard to her violence of temper and general viciousness. That was hard work, too, which she was doing; at least it looked hard for such little bits of hands. First, cutting with those great heavy shears through the thick, stiff cloth; next, the braiding; and finally, the sewing together with the huge needle, and coarse, waxed thread.

One afternoon I had been looking at her a little while, and, as what uncle said about her having never had fair play came into my mind, I felt a strong compulsion to do her some kindness, however trifling; so I gathered a few flowers, fragrant and bright, and took them to her window.

"Rhoda," said I, "shouldn't you like these on your bureau? They will look pretty there; and only smell how sweet they are. You may have the vase for your own, if you like."

She took it without a word, looked at it a moment, glancing at me to make sure she understood, and then rose and placed it on the bureau, where it showed double, reflected from the looking-glass. She did not again turn her face towards me till she had spent a brief space in close communion with a minute handkerchief which she had drawn from her pocket. Clearly, here was one not much wonted to little kindnesses, and not insensible to them either.

The visit to Bethel had resulted so well, that Woodstock and Cornish were unhesitatingly undertaken. Nor was it misplaced confidence on Miss Stackpole's part. With the slight drawback of having forgotten the whip on the return from Woodstock, not the shadow of an accident occurred. Nor was this oversight of much account, only that Tim Linkinwater, the horse, whose self-will had increased with his years, soon made the discovery that he for the nonce held the reins of power; and when they reached Roaring Brook, instead of proceeding decorously across the bridge, he persisted in descending a somewhat steep bank and fording the stream. Half-way across, he found the coolness of the water so agreeable that he decided to enjoy it *ad libitum*. No expostulations nor chirrupings nor cluckings availed aught. He felt himself master of the occasion, and would not budge an inch. He looked up stream and down stream, and now and then sent a sly glance back at Miss Stackpole and Louise, and now and then splashed the water with his hoofs against the pebbles. Miss Stackpole's distress became intense. It began to be a moot point whether they might not be forced to pass the night there, in the middle of Roaring Brook. By great good fortune, at this juncture came along in his sulky Dr. Butterfield of Meriden. To him Louise appealed for aid, and he gave her his own whip, reaching it down to her from the bridge. Tim Linkinwater, perfectly comprehending the drift of events, did not wait for the logic of the lash, which, nevertheless, Miss Stackpole declared that he richly deserved, and which she would fain have seen administered, only for the probability that his homeward pace might be thereby perilously accelerated.

That night we all went unusually early to bed and to sleep. I remember looking from the window after the light was out, and seeing, through a rift in the clouds, the new moon just touching the peak of the opposite mountain. A whippoorwill sang in the great chestnut-tree at the farther corner of the yard; tree-toads trilled, and frogs peeped, and through all could just be heard the rapids up the river.

We were wakened at midnight by very different sounds,—a clattering, crushing noise, like something failing down stairs, with outcries fit to waken the seven sleepers. You would believe it impossible that they all proceeded from one voice; but they did, and that Rhoda's. We were wide awake and up immediately; and as the screams ceased, we distinctly heard some one running rapidly

down the walk. As soon as we could get lights, we found ourselves congregated in the upper front hall; and Rhoda, when she had recovered breath to speak, told her story.

She did not know what awoke her; but she heard what sounded like carefully raising a window, and some one stepping softly around the house. At first she supposed it might be one of the family; but, the sounds continuing, it came into her head to get up and see what they were. So she came, barefooted as she was, up the back way, and was just going down the front stairs, when a gleam of light shone on the ceiling above her. She moved to a position whence she could look over the balusters, and saw that the light came from a shaded lantern, carried by a man who moved so stealthily that only the creaking of the boards betrayed his footsteps. At the foot of the stairs he paused a moment, looking around, apparently hesitating which way to go. He decided to ascend; and then Rhoda, bravely determined to do battle, seized a rocking-chair which stood near, and threw it downward with all her force, lifting up her voice at the same time to give the alarm.

Whether the man were hurt or not, it is certain that he was not so disabled as to impede his flight, and that he had lost his lantern, for that lay on the floor at the foot of the staircase; so did the rocking-chair, broken all to pieces.

When we came to go over the house, it had been thoroughly ransacked. Every bit of silver, from the old-fashioned tea-pot and coffee-pot and the great flat porringer which Grandmother Graham's mother had brought over from Scotland to the cup which had belonged to the baby that died twenty years ago, and which Aunt Janet loved for his sake, the spoons, forks, all were collected in a large basket, with a quantity of linen and some articles of clothing.

If the thief had been content with these, he might probably have secured them, for he had already placed them on a table just beneath an open window; but, hoping to gain additional booty, he lost and we saved it all,–or rather Rhoda saved it for us. We were extremely glad, for it would have been a great mischance losing those things, apart from the shame, as grandmother said, of keeping house so poorly while uncle and aunt were away.

Will Bright thought, from Rhoda's account, that the man might be Luke Potter; for Luke lived nobody knew how, and he had recently returned from a two years' absence, strongly suspected to have been a resident in a New York State-prison. His family occupied a little brown house, half a mile up the road to uncle's wood-lot.

So Will went up there the next day, pretending he wanted Luke to come and help about some mowing that was in hand. Luke's wife said that her husband had not been out of bed for two days, with a hurt he got on the cars the Saturday before. Then Will offered to go in and see if he could not do something for him; but Mrs. Potter said that he was asleep, and, having had a wakeful night, she guessed he had better not be disturbed.

Will felt sure of his man, and, knowing Potter's reckless audacity, made extensive preparations for defence. He brought down from the garret a rusty old gun and a powder-horn, hunted up the bullet-moulds, and run ever so many little leaden balls before he discovered that they did not fit the gun; but that, as he said, was of no consequence, because there would be just as much noise, and it was not likely that any thief would stay to be shot at twice.

So, notwithstanding our great fright, we grew to feel tolerably secure; but we took good care to fasten the windows, and to set in a safer place the articles which had so nearly been lost. Moreover, Will Bright was moved into a little room at the head of the back stairs.

It was to be thought that Miss Stackpole would be completely overcome by this midnight adventure; but she averred that, contrariwise, it had the effect to rouse every atom of energy and spirit which she possessed. She had waited only to slip on a double-gown, and, seizing the first article fit for offensive service, which proved to be a feather duster, she hurried to the scene of action. She said afterwards, that she had felt equal to knocking down ten men, if they had come within her range. I remember myself that she did look rather formidable. Her double-gown was red and yellow; and

her hair, wound up in little horn-shaped *papillotes*, imparted to her face quite a bristly and fierce expression.

Evidently, Rhoda was much exalted in Will Bright's esteem from that eventful night.

"She's clear grit," said Will. "Who 'd have thought the little thing had so much spunk in her? I declare I don't believe there's another one in the house that would have done what she did."

The next forenoon, while Louise and I were sewing in grandmother's room, Miss Stackpole came hurriedly in, looking quite excited.

"Aunt Margaret,—girls," said she, "do you know that, after all, you've got a thief in the house? for you certainly have."

"Lucretia," said grandmother, "explain yourself; what do you mean now?"

"Why, I mean exactly what I said; there's no doubt that somebody in the house is dishonest. I know it; I've lost a valuable pin."

"How valuable?" said grandmother, smiling,—"a diamond one?"

"You need not laugh, Aunt Margaret; it is one of these new pink coral pins, and very expensive indeed. I shall make a stir about it, I can tell you. A pity if I can't come here for a few days without having half my things stolen!"

"And whom do you suspect of taking it?" said grandmother, coolly.

"How do I know? I don't think Dorothy would touch anything that was not her own."

"You don't?" said grandmother, firing up. "I am glad you see fit to make one exception in the charge you bring against the household."

"O, very well. I suppose you think I ought to let it all go, and never open my lips about it. But that is not my way."

"No, it is not," said grandmother.

"If it were my own pin, I shouldn't care so much; but it is not. It belongs to Mrs. Perkinpine."

"And you borrowed it? borrowed jewelry? Well done, Lucretia! I would not have believed it of you. I call that folly and meanness."

"No," said Miss Stackpole, "I shall certainly replace it; I shall have to, if I don't find it. But I will find it. I'll tell you: that girl that dusts my room, Hepsy you call her, I'll be bound that she has it. Not that she would know its value; but she would think it a pretty thing to wear. Now, Aunt Margaret, don't you really think yourself it looks—"

"Lucretia Stackpole," interrupted grandmother, "if you care to know what I really think myself, I will tell you. Since you have lost the pin, and care so much about it, I am sorry. You can well enough afford to replace it, though. But if you want to make everybody in the neighborhood dislike and despise you, just accuse Hepsy of taking your trinkets. She was born and bred here, close by us, and we think we know her. For my part, I would trust her with gold uncounted. Everybody will think, and I think too, that it is far more likely you have lost or mislaid it than that any one here has stolen it."

Miss Stackpole had already opened her lips to reply; but what she would have said will never be known, for she was interrupted again,—this time by a terrible noise, as if half the house had fallen, and then piteous cries. The sounds came from the wood-shed, and thither we all hastened, fully expecting to find some one buried under a fallen wood-pile. It was not quite that, but there lay Rhoda, with her foot bent under her, writhing and moaning in extreme pain.

We were every one assembled there, grandmother, Miss Stackpole, Louise, and I, and Hepsy, Dorothy, and Will Bright. Dorothy would have lifted and carried her in, but Rhoda would not allow it. Will Bright did not wait to be allowed, but took her up at once, more gently and carefully than one would have thought, and deposited her in her own room. Then, at grandmother's suggestion, he set off directly on horseback for Dr. Butterfield, whom fortunately he encountered on the way.

The doctor soon satisfied himself that the extent of the poor girl's injuries was a bad sprain,—enough, certainly, but less than we had feared.

It would be weeks before she would be able to walk, and meantime perfect quiet was strictly enforced. Hepsy volunteered her services as nurse, and discharged faithfully her assumed duties. But Rhoda grew restless and feverish, and finally became so much worse that we began seriously to fear lest she had received some internal injury.

One afternoon I was sitting with her when the doctor came. He spoke cheeringly, as usual; but when I went to the door with him, he said the child had some mental trouble, the disposal of which would be more effective than all his medicines, and that I must endeavor to ascertain and remove it.

Without much difficulty I succeeded. She was haunted with the fear, that, in her present useless condition, she would be sent away. I convinced her that no one would do this during the absence of Uncle and Aunt Bradburn, and that before their return she would probably be able to resume her work.

"I know I'll sleep real good to-night," said Rhoda. "You see I'm awful tired of going round so from one place to another. It's just been from pillar to post ever since I can remember."

"Well," said I, "you may be sure that you will never be sent away from this house for sickness nor for accident. So now set your poor little heart at rest about it."

The blue eyes looked at me with an expression different from any I had seen in them before. They were soft, pretty eyes, too, now that the hair was suffered to lie around the face, instead of being stretched back as tightly as possible. One good result had come from the wood-shed catastrophe: the high comb had been shattered into irretrievable fragments. I inly determined that none like it should ever take its place.

Since Miss Stackpole said it was impossible for her to remain till the return of Uncle and Aunt Bradburn, I cannot say that, under the circumstances, we particularly desired her to prolong her visit. It may be that grandmother had too little patience with her; certainly they two were not congenial spirits. However, by means of taking her to see every relative we had in the vicinity, we disposed of the time very satisfactorily. She remained a few days longer than she had intended, so that Dorothy, who is unapproachable in ironing, might do up her muslin dresses.

"I have changed my mind about Hepsy," said she the night before she left. "I think now it is Rhoda."

"What is Rhoda?" asked grandmother.

"That has taken the coral pin."

Grandmother compressed her lips, but her eyes spoke volumes.

"Miss Stackpole," said I, "it is true that Rhoda has not been here long; still, I have a perfect conviction of her honesty."

"Very amiable and generous of you to feel so, Kate," said Miss Stackpole; "perhaps a few years ago, when I was of your age, I should have thought just the same."

"Kate is twenty next September," said grandmother, who could refrain no longer. "I never forget anybody's age. It is quite possible that she will change in the course of twenty-five or thirty years."

We all knew this to be throwing down the gauntlet. Miss Stackpole did not, however, take it up. She said she intended to lay the circumstances, exactly as they were, before Mrs. Perkinpine; and if that lady would allow her, she should pay for the pin. She thought, though, it might be her duty to talk with Rhoda; perhaps, even at the eleventh hour, the girl might be induced to give it up.

"I will take it upon me, Lucretia," said grandmother, "to object to your talking with Rhoda. Even if we have not among us penetration enough to see that she is honest as daylight, it does not follow that we should be excusable in doing anything to make that forlorn orphan child less happy than she is now. You visit about a great deal, Lucretia. I hope, for the sake of all your friends, that you don't everywhere scatter your suspicions broadcast as you have done here. I am older than you, as you will admit, and I have never known any good come of unjust accusations."

After Miss Stackpole went up stairs that night, she folded the black silk dress she had been wearing to lay it in her trunk; and in doing that, she found the missing pin on the inside of the waist-

lining, just where she had put it herself. Then she remembered having stuck it there one morning in a hurry, to prevent any one being tempted with seeing it lie around.

And Rhoda never knew what an escape she had.

"I do wish there was something for me to do," said Rhoda; "I never was used to lying abed doing nothing. It most tuckers me out."

"Cannot you read, Rhoda?" I asked.

"Yes, I can read some. I can't read words, but I can tell some of the letters."

"Have you never gone to school?"

"No; I always had to work. Poor folks have got to work, you know."

"Yes, but that need not prevent your learning to read. I can teach you myself; I will, if you like."

"I guess your aunt won't calculate to get me to work for her, and then have me spend my time learning to read. First you know, she'll send me off."

"She will like it perfectly well. Grandmother is in authority here now; I will go and ask her." This I knew would seem to her decisive.

"What did she say?" said Rhoda, rather eagerly, when I returned.

"She says yes, by all means; and that if you learn to read before aunt comes home, you shall have a new dress, and I may choose it for you."

Now it was no sinecure, teaching Rhoda, but she won the dress,—a lilac print, delicate and pretty enough for any one. I undertook to make the dress, but she accomplished a good part of it herself. She said Miss Reeny used to show her about sewing. Whatever was to be done with hands she learned with surprising quickness. Grandmother suggested that the reading lessons should be followed by a course in writing. Before the lameness was well over, Rhoda could write, slowly indeed, yet legibly.

I carried her some roses one evening. While putting them in water, I asked what flowers she liked best.

"I like sweetbriers best," said she. "I think sweetbriers are handsome in the graveyard. I set out one over Jinny Collins's grave. For what I know, it is growing now."

"Who was Jinny Collins, Rhoda?"

"A girl that used to live over at the poor-house when I did. She was bound out to the Widow Whitmarsh, the spring that I went to live with Mrs. Amos Kemp. Jinny used to have sick spells, and Mrs. Whitmarsh wanted to send her back to the poor-house, but folks said she couldn't, because she'd had her bound. She and Mrs. Kemp was neighbors; and after Jinny got so as to need somebody with her nights, Mrs. Kemp used to let me go and sleep with her, and then she could wake me up if she wanted anything. I wanted to go, and Jinny wanted to have me come; she used to say it did her lots of good. Sometimes we'd pretend we was rich, and was in a great big room with curtains to the windows. We didn't have any candle burning,—Mrs. Whitmarsh said there wa'n't no need of one, and more there wa'n't. One night we said we'd take a ride to-morrow or next day. We pretended we'd got a father, and he was real rich, and had got a horse and wagon. Jinny said we'd go to the store and buy us a new white gown,—she always wanted a white gown. By and by she said she was real sleepy; she didn't have no bad coughing-spell that night, such as she most always did. She asked me if I didn't smell the clover-blows, how sweet they was; and then she talked about white lilies, and how she liked 'em most of anything, without it was sweetbriers. Then she asked me if I knew what palms was; and she said when she was dead she wanted me to have her little pink chany box that Miss Maria Elliot give her once, when she bought some blueberries of her. So then she dozed a little while; and I don't know why, but I couldn't get asleep for a good while, for all I'd worked real hard that day. I guess 'twas as much as an hour she laid kind of still; she never did sleep real sound, so but what she moaned and talked broken now and then. So by and by she give a start, and says she, 'I'm all ready.' 'Ready for what, Jinny,' says I. But she didn't seem to know as I was talking to her. Says she, 'I'm all ready. I've got on a white gown and a palm in my hand.' So then I knew she was wandering like, as I'd heard

say folks did when they was very sick; for she hadn't any gown at all on, without you might call Mrs. Whitmarsh's old faded calico sack one, nor nothing in her hand neither. So pretty soon she dropped to sleep again, and I did too. And I slept later 'n common. The sun was shining right into my eyes when I opened 'em. I thought 't would trouble Jinny, and I was just going to pin her skirt up to the window, and I see that she looked awful white. I put my hand on her forehead, and it was just as cold as a stone. So then I knew she was dead. I never see her look so happy like. She had the pleasantest smile on her lips ever you see. I didn't know as Mrs. Kemp'd like to have me stay, but I just brushed her hair,—'t was real pretty hair, just a little mite curly,—and then I run home and told Mrs. Kemp. She said she'd just as lives I'd stay over to Mrs. Whitmarsh's as not that day, 'cause she was going over to Woodstock shopping. So I went back again, and Mrs. Whitmarsh she sent me to one of the selectmen to see if she'd got to be to the expense of the funeral, 'cause she said it didn't seem right, seeing she never got much work out of Jinny, she was always so weakly. And Mr. Robbins he said the town would pay for the coffin and digging the grave. That made her real pleasant; and I don't know what put me up to it, but I was real set on it that Jinny should have on a white gown in the coffin. And I asked Mrs. Whitmarsh if I mightn't go over to Miss Bradford's; and she let me, and Miss Bradford give me an old white gown, if I'd iron it; and Polly Wheelock, she was Miss Bradford's girl, she helped me put it on to Jinny. And then Polly got some white lilies, and I got some sweetbrier sprigs, and laid round her in the coffin. I've seen prettier coffins, but I never see no face look so pretty as Jinny's. Mrs. Whitmarsh had the funeral next morning. She said she wanted to that night, so she could put the room airing, but she supposed folks would talk, and, besides, they didn't get the grave dug quick enough neither. Mrs. Kemp let me go to the funeral. I thought they was going to carry her over to the poor-house burying-ground, but they didn't, 'cause 't would cost so much for a horse and wagon. The right minister was gone away, and the one that was there was going off in the cars, so he had to hurry. There wa'n't hardly anybody there, only some men to let the coffin down, and the sexton, and Mrs. Whitmarsh and Polly Wheelock and I. The minister prayed a little speck of a prayer and went right away. I heard Mrs. Whitmarsh telling Mrs. Kemp she thought she'd got out of it pretty well, seeing she didn't expect nothing but what she'd got to buy the coffin, and get the grave dug, and be to all the expense. She said she guessed nobody'd catch her having another girl bound out to her. Mrs. Kemp said she always knew 't was a great risk, and that was why she didn't have me bound.

"That summer, when berries was ripe, Mrs. Kemp let me go and pick 'em and carry 'em round to sell; and she said I might have a cent for every quart I sold. I got over three dollars that summer for myself."

"What did you do with it?"

"I bought some shoes, and some yarn to knit me some stockings. I can knit real good."

"How came you to leave Mrs. Kemp."

"Partly 't was 'cause she didn't like my not buying her old green shawl with my share of the money for the berries; and partly 'cause I got cold, and it settled in my feet so's I couldn't hardly go round. So she told me she'd concluded to have me go back to the poor-house. If she kept a girl, she said, she wanted one to wait on her, and not to be waited on. She waited two or three days to see if I didn't get better, so as I could walk over there; but I didn't. And one day it had been raining, but it held up awhile, and she see a neighbor riding by, and she run out and asked him if he couldn't carry me over to the poor-house. He said he could if she wanted him to; so I went. I had on my cape, and it wa'n't very warm. She asked me when I come away, if I wa'n't sorry I hadn't a shawl. I expect I did catch cold. I couldn't set up nor do nothing for more 'n three weeks. When I got so I could knit, my yarn was gone. I never knew what become of it; and one of the women used to borrow my shoes for her little girl, and she wore 'em out So, come spring, I was just where I was the year before, only lonesomer, cause Jinny was gone."

"And did you stay there?"

"To the poor-house? No; Betty Crosfield wanted a girl to come and help her. She took in washing for Mr. Furniss's hands. She said I wa'n't strong enough to earn much, but she would pay me in clothes. She give me a Shaker bonnet and an old gown that the soap had took the color out of, and she made a tack in it, so's it did. And I had my cape. When strawberries come, the hands was most all gone, and she let me sleep there, and go day-times after berries, and she to have half the pay. That's how I got my red calico and my shawl."

"Who made your dress, Rhoda?"

"Miss Reeny, I carried it over to see if she'd cut it out, and she said she'd make it if they'd let her, and they did. And I got her some green tea. She used to say sometimes, she'd give anything for a cup of green tea, such as her mother used to have."

"Who is Miss Reeny?"

"A woman that lives over there. Her father used to be a doctor; but he died, and she was sickly and didn't know as she had any relations, and by and by she had to go there. They say over there she ain't in her right mind, but I don't know. She was always good to me. There was an old chair with a cushion in it, and Miss Reeny wanted it to sit in, 'cause her back was lame; but old Mrs. Fitts wanted it too, and they used to spat it. So Miss Holbrook come there one day to see the place, and somebody told her about the cushioned chair, and, if you'll believe it, the very next day there was one come over as good again, with arms to it, and a cushion, and all. Miss Holbrook sent it over to Miss Reeny. None of 'em couldn't take it away."

"And is she there now?"

"Yes, she can't go nowhere else. One night Betty Crosfield said I needn't come there no more; she was going to take a boarder. Berry-time was most over, so then I got a place to Miss Stoney's, the milliner. She agreed to give me twenty-five cents a week, and I thought to be sure I should get back my shoes and yarn now. But one morning the teapot was cracked, and she asked me, and I said I didn't do it,—and I didn't; but she said she knew I did, because there wasn't nobody but her and me that touched it, and she should keep my wages till they come to a dollar and a half, because that was what a new one would cost. Before the teapot was paid for I did break a glass dish. I didn't know 't would hurt it to put it in hot water; and everything else that was broke, she thought I broke it, and she kept it out of my wages. I told her I didn't see as she ought to; and in the fall she said she couldn't put up with my sauce and my breaking no longer. Mrs. Kittredge wanted a girl, and I went there."

"And how did you find it there?"

"I think it was about the hardest place of all. I'd as lives go back to the poor-house as to stay there. Sally Kittredge used to tell things that wa'n't true about me. She told one day that I pushed her down. I never touched my hand to her. But Mrs. Kittredge got a raw hide up stairs and give it to me awful. I shouldn't wonder if it showed now; just look."

She undid the fastening of her dress and slipped off the waist for me to see. The little back —she was very small—was all discolored with stripes, purple, green, and yellow. After showing me these bruises, she quietly fastened her dress again.

Now there was that in Rhoda's manner during this narration which wrought in my mind entire conviction of its verity. By the time of Uncle and Aunt Bradburn's return, she was growing in favor with every one in the house. She was gentle, patient, and grateful.

The deftness with which she used those small fingers suggested to me the idea of teaching her some of the more delicate kinds of fancy-work. But it seemed that she required no teaching. An opportunity given of looking on while one was embroidering, crocheting, or making tatting, and the process was her own. Native tact imparted to her at once the skill which others attain only by long practice. As for her fine sewing, it was exquisite; and in looking at it, one half regretted the advent of the sewing-machine.

The fall days grew short; the winter came and went; and in the course of it, besides doing everything that was required of her in the household, keeping up the reading and writing, and

satisfactory progress in arithmetic, Rhoda had completed, at my suggestion, ten of those little tatting collars, made of fine thread, and rivalling in delicate beauty the loveliest fabrics of lace.

Because a project was on foot for Rhoda. A friend of mine going to Boston took charge of the little package of collars, and the result was that the proprietor of a fancy-store there engaged to receive all of them that might be manufactured, at the price of three dollars each. When my friend returned, she brought me, as the avails of her commission, the sum of thirty dollars.

But here arose an unexpected obstacle. It was difficult to convince Rhoda that the amount, which seemed to her immense, was of right her own. She comprehended it, however, at last; and thenceforth her skill in this and other departments of fancy-work obtained for her constant and remunerative employment.

It was now a year since Rhoda came to us, and during this time her improvement had been steady and rapid. And since she had come to dress like other girls, no one could say that she was ill-looking; but, as I claimed the merit of effecting this change in her exterior, it may be that I observed it more than any one else. Still, I fancy that some others were not blind.

"Where did you get those swamp-pinks, Rhoda?" for I detected the fine azalia odor before I saw them.

A bright color suffused the childlike face, quite to the roots of the hair. "Will Bright got them when he went after the cows. You may have some if you want them."

"No, thank you; it is a pity to disturb them, they look so pretty just as they are."

Troubles come to everybody. Even Will Bright, though no one had ever known him to be without cheerfulness enough for half a dozen, was not wholly exempt from ills. With all his good sense, which was not a little, Will was severely incredulous of the reputed effects of poison-ivy; and one day, by way of maintaining his position, gathered a spray of it and applied it to his face. He was not long in finding the vine in question an ugly customer. His face assumed the aspect of a horrible mask, and the dimensions of a good-sized water-pail, with nothing left of the eyes but two short, straight marks. For once, Will had to succumb and be well cared for.

In this state of things a letter came to him with a foreign postmark. "I will lay it away in your desk, Will," said uncle, "till you can read it yourself; that will be in a day or two."

"If you don't mind the trouble, sir, I should thank you to open and read it for me. I get no letters that I am unwilling you should see."

It was to the effect that a relative in England had left him a bequest of five hundred pounds, and that the amount would be made payable to his order wherever he should direct.

"You will oblige me, sir, if you will say nothing about this for the present," said Will, when uncle had congratulated him.

"I hope we shall not lose sight of you, Will," said uncle, who really felt a strong liking for the young man, who had served him faithfully three years.

"I hope not, sir," replied Will. "I shall be glad to consult you before I decide what use to make of this windfall. At all events, I don't want to change my quarters for the present."

About the same time, brother Ned, in Oregon, sent me a letter which contained this passage:—

"We are partly indebted for this splendid stroke of business to the help of a townsman of our own; his name is Joseph Breck. He says he ran away from Deacon Handy's, at fifteen years old, because the Deacon would not send him to school as he had agreed. Ask uncle if he remembers Ira Breck, who lived over at Ash Swamp, near the old Ingersol place. He was drowned saving timber in a freshet. He left two children, and this Joseph is the elder. The other was a girl, her name Rhoda, six or eight years younger than Joseph; she must be now, he says, not far from sixteen or seventeen. Joe has had a hard row to hoe, but now that he begins to see daylight he wants to do something for his sister. He is a thoroughly honest and competent fellow, and we are glad enough to get hold of him. He told me the other night such a story as would make your heart ache: at all events it would make you try to ascertain something about his sister before you write next."

I lost no time in seeking Rhoda.

"Yes," said she, in reply to my inquiries, "I did have a brother once. He went off and was lost. I can just remember him. I don't suppose I shall ever see him again. Folks said likely he was drowned."

"Was his name Joseph?"

"It was Joe; father used to call him Joe."

I read to her from Ned's letter what related to her brother.

"I'm most afraid it's a dream," said Rhoda after a brief silence. "Over at the poor-house I used to have such good dreams, and then I'd wake up out of them. After I came here I used to be afraid it was a dream; but I didn't wake out of that. Perhaps I shall see Joe again; who knows?"

From this time a change came over Rhoda. She begged as a privilege to learn to do everything that a woman can do about a house.

"I do declare, Miss Kate," said Dorothy one day, after displaying a grand array of freshly baked loaves, wearing the golden-brown tint that hints at such savory sweetness, "that girl, for a white girl, is going to make a most a splendid cook. I never touched this bread, and just you see! ain't it perfindiculur wonderful?"

Soon after, I found Rhoda, with her dress tidily pinned out of harm's way, standing at a barrel, and poking vigorously with a stick longer than herself.

"What now, Rhoda! what are you doing there?"

"Come here and look at the soap, Miss Kate. I made it every bit myself; ain't it going to be beautiful?"

"Why do you care to do such things, Rhoda?"

"I'll tell you," in a low voice; "perhaps when Joe comes home, some time he'll buy himself a little place and let me keep house for him; then I shall want to know how to do everything."

"Rhoda, I believe you can do everything already."

"No, I can't wring," looking piteously from one little hand to the other. "I can iron cute, but I can't wring. Dorothy says that is one thing I shall have to give up, unless I can make my hands grow. Do you suppose I could?"

"No; you must make Joe buy you a wringer. Can you make butter?"

"O yes, when the churning isn't large. Likely Joe won't keep more than one cow."

I looked at the eager little thing, wondering if her hope would ever be realized. She divined my thought, and glanced at me wistfully. "You think this is a dream; you think I shall wake up.

"No, no," I answered; "I wonder what Joe will think when he sees what a mite of a sister he has. He'll make you stand round, Rhoda, you may be sure of that."

"May be he isn't any larger himself," she responded, with a ready, bright smile.

Brother Ned's next letter brought the welcome tidings that he hoped to come home the ensuing August, and that Joseph Breck would probably come at the same time.

June went, and July. Rhoda grew restless; she was no longer constantly at work; she began to listen nervously for every train of cars. I was glad to believe that the brother for whom she held in readiness such lavish love was deserving of it. She grew prettier every day. The uncouth dress was gone forever, the hideous bonnet burned up, and the gay shawl made over to Miss Reeny, who admired and coveted it. Hepsy herself was not more faultlessly quiet and tasteful in her attire. I was sure that Joe, if he had eyes at all, must be convinced that his sister was worth coming all the way from Oregon to see.

At last, one pleasant afternoon, there was a step in the hall that I recognized; it was Ned's! I reached him first, and felt his dear old arms close fast about me; and then, for Louise's right was stronger than mine, I gave him over to her and the rest. My happiness, though it half blinded me, did not prevent my seeing a pallid little face looking earnestly in from the back hall door. Then Joe had not come! I felt a keen pang for Rhoda.

"Ned," said I, as soon as I could get a word with him, "there is Joe Breck's sister; where is Joe?"

"Where is Joe?" said Ned; "why, there he is."

Sure enough, there above Rhoda's—a good way above—was a dark, fine, manly face, all sun-browned and bearded.—"Rhoda!"—He had stolen a march upon her. She turned and saw him. A swift look of glad surprise, and the brother and sister so long separated had recognized each other. He drew her to him and held her there tenderly as if she were a little child.

So Joe bought "a little place," and I believe he would fain have had his sister Rhoda for its mistress. But then it came out that Will Bright, that sly fellow had been using every bit of persuasion in his power to make her promise that she would keep house for him. Nay, he had won already a conditional promise, the proviso being, of course, Joe's approval. Will's is not a little place, either. With his relative's legacy he purchased the great Wellwood nursery; and so skilled is he in its management that uncle says there is not a more thriving man in the neighborhood. And Rhoda, of whom he is wonderfully proud, is as content a little woman as any in the land. Whenever I go to Uncle Bradburn's,—and few summers pass that I do not,—I make a point of reserving time for a visit to Rhoda. The last time I went, I encountered Will bringing her down stairs in his arms; and she held in her arms, as something too precious to be yielded to another, what proved on inspection to be a tiny, blue-eyed baby. It was comical to see her ready, matronly ways; and it was touching, when you thought of the past, to witness her quiet yet perfect enjoyment.

And I really know of no one in the world more heartily benevolent than she. "You see," she says, "I knew once what it is to need kindness; and now I should be worse than a heathen if I did not help other people when I have a chance."

I suppose Hepsy pitied Joe for his disappointment. In any case, she has done what she could to console him for it. On the whole, it would be difficult to say which is the happier wife, Hepsy or Rhoda.

PASSAGES FROM HAWTHORNE'S NOTE-BOOKS

XI

Concord, 1843.—To sit at the gate of Heaven, and watch persons as they apply for admittance, some gaining it, others being thrust away.

To point out the moral slavery of one who deems himself a free man.

A stray leaf from the Book of Fate, picked up in the street.

The streak of sunshine journeying through the prisoner's cell,—it may be considered as something sent from Heaven to keep the soul alive and glad within him. And there is something equivalent to this sunbeam in the darkest circumstances; as flowers, which figuratively grew in Paradise, in the dusky room of a poor maiden in a great city; the child, with its sunny smile, is a cherub. God does not let us live anywhere or anyhow on earth without placing something of Heaven close at hand, by rightly using and considering which, the earthly darkness or trouble will vanish, and all be Heaven.

When the reformation of the world is complete, a fire shall be made of the gallows; and the hangman shall come and sit down by it in solitude and despair. To him shall come the last thief, the last drunkard, and other representatives of past crime and vice; and they shall hold a dismal merrymaking, quaffing the contents of the last brandy-bottle.

The human heart to be allegorized as a cavern. At the entrance there is sunshine, and flowers growing about it. You step within but a short distance, and begin to find yourself surrounded with a terrible gloom and monsters of divers kinds; it seems like hell itself. You are bewildered, and wander long without hope. At last a light strikes upon you. You pass towards it, and find yourself in a region that seems, in some sort, to reproduce the flowers and sunny beauty of the entrance, but all perfect. These are the depths of the heart, or of human nature, bright and peaceful. The gloom and terror may lie deep, but deeper still this eternal beauty.

A man in his progress through life may pick up various matters,—sin, care, habit, riches,—until at last he staggers along under a heavy burden.

To have a lifelong desire for a certain object, which shall appear to be the one thing essential to happiness. At last that object is attained, but proves to be merely incidental to a more important affair, and that affair is the greatest evil fortune that can occur. For instance, all through the winter I had wished to sit in the dusk of evening, by the flickering firelight, with my wife, instead of beside a dismal stove. At last this has come to pass; but it was owing to her illness.

Madame Calderon de la Barca (in "Life in Mexico") speaks of persons who have been inoculated with the venom of rattlesnakes, by pricking them in various places with the tooth. These persons are thus secured forever after against the bite of any venomous reptile. They have the power of calling snakes, and feel great pleasure in playing with and handling them. Their own bite becomes poisonous to people not inoculated in the same manner. Thus a part of the serpent's nature appears to be transfused into them.

An auction (perhaps in Vanity Fair) of offices, honors, and all sorts of things considered desirable by mankind, together with things eternally valuable, which shall be considered by most people as worthless lumber.

An examination of wits and poets at a police court, and they to be sentenced by the judge to various penalties or fines,—the house of correction, whipping, etc.,—according to the moral offences of which they are guilty.

A volume bound in cowhide. It should treat of breeding cattle, or some other coarse subject.

A young girl inhabits a family graveyard, that being all that remains of rich hereditary possessions.

An interview between General Charles Lee, of the Revolution, and his sister, the foundress and mother of the sect of Shakers.

For a sketch for a child:—the life of a city dove, or perhaps of a flock of doves, flying about the streets, and sometimes alighting on church steeples, on the eaves of lofty houses, etc.

The greater picturesqueness and reality of back courts, and everything appertaining to the rear of a house, as compared with the front, which is fitted up for the public eye. There is much to be learned always, by getting a glimpse at rears. Where the direction of a road has been altered, so as to pass the rear of farm-houses instead of the front, a very noticeable aspect is presented.

A sketch:—the devouring of old country residences by the overgrown monster of a city. For instance, Mr. Beekman's ancestral residence was originally several miles from the city of New York; but the pavements kept creeping nearer and nearer, till now the house is removed, and a street runs directly through what was once its hall.

An essay on various kinds of death, together with the just before and just after.

The majesty of death to be exemplified in a beggar, who, after being seen, humble and cringing, in the streets of a city for many years, at length, by some means or other, gets admittance into a rich man's mansion, and there dies, assuming state and striking awe into the breasts of those who had looked down on him.

To write a dream, which shall resemble the real course of a dream, with all its inconsistency, its strange transformations, which are all taken as a matter of course, its eccentricities and aimlessness, with nevertheless a leading idea running through the whole. Up to this old age of the world, no such thing ever has been written.

To allegorize life with a masquerade, and represent mankind generally as masquers. Here and there a natural face may appear.

With an emblematical divining-rod, to seek for emblematic gold,—that is, for truth,—for what of Heaven is left on earth.

A task for a subjugated fiend:—to gather up all the fallen autumnal leaves of a forest, assort them, and affix each one to the twig where it originally grew.

A vision of Grub Street, forming an allegory of the literary world.

The emerging from their lurking-places of evil characters on some occasion suited to their action, they having been quite unknown to the world hitherto. For instance, the French Revolution brought out such wretches.

The advantage of a longer life than is now allotted to mortals,—the many things that might then be accomplished, to which one lifetime is inadequate, and for which the time spent seems therefore lost, a successor being unable to take up the task where we drop it.

George I. had promised the Duchess of Kendall, his mistress, that, if possible, he would pay her a visit after death. Accordingly, a large raven flew into the window of her villa at Isleworth. She believed it to be his soul, and treated it ever after with all respect and tenderness, till either she or the bird died.

The history of an almshouse in a country village, from the era of its foundation downward,—a record of the remarkable occupants of it, and extracts from interesting portions of its annals. The rich of one generation might, in the next, seek for a house there, either in their own persons or in those of their representatives. Perhaps the son and heir of the founder might have no better refuge. There should be occasional sunshine let into the story; for instance, the good fortune of some nameless infant, educated there, and discovered finally to be the child of wealthy parents.

Pearl, the English of Margaret,—a pretty name for a girl in a story.

The conversation of the steeples of a city, when their bells are ringing on Sunday,—Calvinist, Episcopalian, Unitarian, etc.

Allston's picture of "Belshazzar's Feast,"—with reference to the advantages or otherwise of having life assured to us till we could finish important tasks on which we might be engaged.

Visits to castles in the air,—Chateaux en Espagne, etc.,—with remarks on that sort of architecture.

To consider a piece of gold as a sort of talisman, or as containing within itself all the forms of enjoyment that it can purchase, so that they might appear, by some fantastical chemic process, as visions.

To personify If, But, And, Though, etc.

A man seeks for something excellent, but seeks it in the wrong spirit and in a wrong way, and finds something horrible; as, for instance, he seeks for treasure, and finds a dead body; for the gold that somebody has hidden, and brings to light his accumulated sins.

An auction of second-hands,—thus moralizing how the fashion of this world passeth away.

Noted people in a town,—as the town-crier, the old fruit-man, the constable, the oyster-seller, the fish-man, the scissors-grinder, etc.

The magic ray of sunshine for a child's story,—the sunshine circling round through a prisoner's cell, from his high and narrow window. He keeps his soul alive and cheerful by means of it, it typifying cheerfulness; and when he is released, he takes up the ray of sunshine, and carries it away with him, and it enables him to discover treasures all over the world, in places where nobody else would think of looking for them.

A young man finds a portion of the skeleton of a mammoth; he begins by degrees to become interested in completing it; searches round the world for the means of doing so; spends youth and manhood in the pursuit; and in old age has nothing to show for his life but this skeleton of a mammoth.

For a child's sketch:—a meeting with all the personages mentioned in Mother Goose's Melodies, and other juvenile stories.

Great expectation to be entertained in the allegorical Grub Street of the great American writer. Or a search-warrant to be sent thither to catch a poet. On the former supposition, he shall be discovered under some most unlikely form, or shall be supposed to have lived and died unrecognized.

An old man to promise a youth a treasure of gold, and to keep his promise by teaching him practically a golden rule.

A valuable jewel to be buried in the grave of a beloved person, or thrown over with a corpse at sea, or deposited under the foundation-stone of an edifice,—and to be afterwards met with by the former owner, in some one's possession.

A noted gambler had acquired such self-command that, in the most desperate circumstances of his game, no change of feature ever betrayed him; only there was a slight scar upon his forehead, which at such moments assumed a deep blood-red hue. Thus, in playing at brag, for instance, his antagonist could judge from this index when he had a bad hand. At last, discovering what it was that betrayed him, he covered the scar with a green silk shade.

A dream the other night, that the world had become dissatisfied with the inaccurate manner in which facts are reported, and had employed me, with a salary of a thousand dollars, to relate things of public importance exactly as they happen.

A person who has all the qualities of a friend, except that he invariably fails you at the pinch.

Concord, July 27, 1844.—To sit down in a solitary place or a busy and bustling one, if you please, and await such little events as may happen, or observe such noticeable points as the eyes fall upon around you. For instance, I sat down to-day, at about ten o'clock in the forenoon, in Sleepy Hollow, a shallow space scooped out among the woods, which surround it on all sides, it being pretty nearly circular or oval, and perhaps four or five hundred yards in diameter. At the present season, a thriving field of Indian corn, now in its most perfect growth and tasselled out, occupies nearly half of the hollow; and it is like the lap of bounteous Nature, filled with breadstuff. On one verge of this hollow, skirting it, is a terraced pathway, broad enough for a wheel-track, overshadowed with oaks, stretching their long, knotted, rude, rough arms between earth and sky; the gray skeletons, as you look upward, are strikingly prominent amid the green foliage. Likewise, there are chestnuts, growing

up in a more regular and pyramidal shape; white pines, also; and a shrubbery composed of the shoots of all these trees, overspreading and softening the bank on which the parent stems are growing, these latter being intermingled with coarse grass. Observe the pathway; it is strewn over with little bits of dry twigs and decayed branches, and the sear and brown oak-leaves of last year, that have been moistened by snow and rain, and whirled about by harsh and gentle winds, since their verdure has departed. The needle-like leaves of the pine that are never noticed in falling—that fall, yet never leave the tree bare—are likewise on the path; and with these are pebbles, the remains of what was once a gravelled surface, but which the soil accumulating from the decay of leaves, and washing down from the bank, has now almost covered. The sunshine comes down on the pathway, with the bright glow of noon, at certain points; in other places, there is a shadow as deep as the glow; but along the greater portion sunshine glimmers through shadow, and shadow effaces sunshine, imaging that pleasant mood of mind when gayety and pensiveness intermingle. A bird is chirping overhead among the branches, but exactly whereabout you seek in vain to determine; indeed, you hear the rustle of the leaves, as he continually changes his position. A little sparrow, however, hops into view, alighting on the slenderest twigs, and seemingly delighting in the swinging and heaving motion which his slight substance communicates to them; but he is not the loquacious bird, whose voice still comes, eager and busy, from his hidden whereabout. Insects are fluttering around. The cheerful, sunny hum of the flies is altogether summer-like, and so gladsome that you pardon them their intrusiveness and impertinence, which continually impel them to fly against your face, to alight upon your hands, and to buzz in your very ear, as if they wished to get into your head, among your most secret thoughts. In truth, a fly is the most impertinent and indelicate thing in creation,—the very type and moral of human spirits with whom one occasionally meets, and who, perhaps, after an existence troublesome and vexatious to all with whom they come in contact, have been doomed to reappear in this congenial shape. Here is one intent upon alighting on my nose. In a room, now,—in a human habitation,—I could find in my conscience to put him to death; but here we have intruded upon his own domain, which he holds in common with all other children of earth and air; and we have no right to slay him on his own ground. Now we look about us more minutely, and observe that the acorn-cups of last year are strewn plentifully on the bank and on the path. There is always pleasure in examining an acorn-cup,—perhaps associated with fairy banquets, where they were said to compose the table-service. Here, too, are those balls which grow as excrescences on the leaves of the oak, and which young kittens love so well to play with, rolling them over the carpet. We see mosses, likewise, growing on the banks, in as great variety as the trees of the wood. And how strange is the gradual process with which we detect objects that are right before the eyes! Here now are whortleberries, ripe and black, growing actually within reach of my hand, yet unseen till this moment. Were we to sit here all day,—a week, a month, and doubtless a lifetime,—objects would thus still be presenting themselves as new, though there would seem to be no reason why we should not have detected them all at the first moment.

Now a cat-bird is mewing at no great distance. Then the shadow of a bird flits across a sunny spot. There is a peculiar impressiveness in this mode of being made acquainted with the flight of a bird; it impresses the mind more than if the eye had actually seen it. As we look round to catch a glimpse of the winged creature, we behold the living blue of the sky, and the brilliant disk of the sun, broken and made tolerable to the eye by the intervening foliage. Now, when you are not thinking of it, the fragrance of the white pines is suddenly wafted to you by a slight, almost imperceptible breeze, which has begun to stir. Now the breeze is the softest sigh imaginable, yet with a spiritual potency, insomuch that it seems to penetrate, with its mild, ethereal coolness, through the outward clay, and breathe upon the spirit itself, which shivers with gentle delight. Now the breeze strengthens so much as to shake all the leaves, making them rustle sharply; but it has lost its most ethereal power. And now, again, the shadows of the boughs lie as motionless as if they were painted on the pathway. Now, in the stillness, is heard the long, melancholy note of a bird, complaining above of some wrong or sorrow that man, or her own kind, or the immitigable doom of mortal affairs, has inflicted upon her,

the complaining, but unresisting sufferer. And now, all of a sudden, we hear the sharp, shrill chirrup of a red squirrel, angry, it seems, with somebody—perhaps with ourselves—for having intruded into what he is pleased to consider his own domain. And hark! terrible to the ear, here is the minute but intense hum of a mosquito. Instinct prevails over all sentiment; we crush him at once, and there is his grim and grisly corpse, the ugliest object in nature. This incident has disturbed our tranquillity. In truth, the whole insect tribe, so far as we can judge, are made more for themselves, and less for man, than any other portion of creation. With such reflections, we look at a swarm of them, peopling, indeed, the whole air, but only visible when they flash into the sunshine, and annihilated out of visible existence when they dart into a region of shadow, to be again reproduced as suddenly. Now we hear the striking of the village clock, distant, but yet so near that each stroke is distinctly impressed upon the air. This is a sound that does not disturb the repose of the scene; it does not break our Sabbath,—for like a Sabbath seems this place,—and the more so, on account of the cornfield rustling at our feet. It tells of human labor; but being so solitary now, it seems as if it were so on account of the sacredness of the Sabbath. Yet it is not; for we hear at a distance mowers whetting their scythes; but these sounds of labor, when at a proper remoteness, do but increase the quiet of one who lies at his ease, all in a mist of his own musings. There is the tinkling of a cowbell,—a noise how peevishly discordant were it close at hand, but even musical now. But hark! there is the whistle of the locomotive,—the long shriek, heard above all other harshness; for the space of a mile cannot mollify it into harmony. It tells a story of busy men, citizens from the hot street, who have come to spend a day in a country village,—men of business,—in short, of all unquietness; and no wonder that it gives such a startling scream, since it brings the noisy world into the midst of our slumberous peace. As our thoughts repose again after this interruption, we find ourselves gazing up at the leaves, and comparing their different aspects,—the beautiful diversity of green, as the sun is diffused through them as a medium, or reflected from their glossy surface. We see, too, here and there, dead, leafless branches, which we had no more been aware of before than if they had assumed this old and dry decay since we sat down upon the bank. Look at our feet; and here, likewise, are objects as good as new. There are two little round, white fungi, which probably sprung from the ground in the course of last night,—curious productions, of the mushroom tribe, and which by and by will be those small things with smoke in them which children call puff-balls. Is there nothing else? Yes; here is a whole colony of little ant-hills,—a real village of them. They are round hillocks, formed of minute particles of gravel, with an entrance in the centre, and through some of them blades of grass or small shrubs have sprouted up, producing an effect not unlike trees that overshadow a homestead. Here is a type of domestic industry,—perhaps, too, something of municipal institutions,—perhaps likewise—who knows?—the very model of a community, which Fourierites and others are stumbling in pursuit of. Possibly the student of such philosophies should go to the ant, and find that Nature has given him his lesson there. Meantime, like a malevolent genius, I drop a few grains of sand into the entrance of one of these dwellings, and thus quite obliterate it. And behold, here comes one of the inhabitants, who has been abroad upon some public or private business, or perhaps to enjoy a fantastic walk, and cannot any longer find his own door. What surprise, what hurry, what confusion of mind are expressed in all his movements! How inexplicable to him must be the agency that has effected this mischief! The incident will probably be long remembered in the annals of the ant-colony, and be talked of in the winter days, when they are making merry over their hoarded provisions. But now it is time to move. The sun has shifted his position, and has found a vacant space through the branches, by means of which he levels his rays full upon my head. Yet now, as I arise, a cloud has come across him, and makes everything gently sombre in an instant. Many clouds, voluminous and heavy, are scattered about the sky, like the shattered ruins of a dreamer's Utopia; but I will not send my thoughts thitherward now, nor take one of them into my present observations.

And now how narrow, scanty, and meagre is the record of observations, compared with the immensity that was to be observed within the bounds which I prescribed to myself! How shallow and

thin a stream of thought, too,—of distinct and expressed thought,—compared with the broad tide of dim emotions, ideas, associations, which were flowing through the haunted regions of imagination, intellect, and sentiment,—sometimes excited by what was around me, sometimes with no perceptible connection with them! When we see how little we can express, it is a wonder that any man ever takes up a pen a second time.

To find all sorts of ridiculous employments for people that have nothing better to do;—as to comb out the cows' tails, shave goats, hoard up seeds of weeds, etc., etc.

The baby, the other day, tried to grasp a handful of sunshine. She also grasps at the shadows of things in candle-light.

To typify our mature review of our early projects and delusions, by representing a person as wandering, in manhood, through and among the various castles in the air that he had reared in his youth, and describing how they look to him,—their dilapidation, etc. Possibly some small portion of these structures may have a certain reality, and suffice him to build a humble dwelling in which to pass his life.

The search of an investigator for the unpardonable sin: he at last finds it in his own heart and practice.

The trees reflected in the river;—they are unconscious of a spiritual world so near them. So are we.

The unpardonable sin might consist in a want of love and reverence for the human soul; in consequence of which, the investigator pried into its dark depths,—not with a hope or purpose of making it better, but from a cold, philosophical curiosity,—content that it should be wicked in whatever kind and degree, and only desiring to study it out. Would not this, in other words, be the separation of the intellect from the heart?

There are some faces that have no more expression in them than any other part of the body. The hand of one person may express more than the face of another.

An ugly person with tact may make a bad face and figure pass very tolerably, and more than tolerably. Ugliness without tact is horrible. It ought to be lawful to extirpate such wretches.

To represent the influence which dead men have among living affairs. For instance, a dead man controls the disposition of wealth; a dead man sits on the judgment-seat, and the living judges do but repeat his decisions; dead men's opinions in all things control the living truth; we believe in dead men's religions; we laugh at dead men's jokes; we cry at dead men's pathos; everywhere, and in all matters, dead men tyrannize inexorably over us.

When the heart is full of care, or the mind much occupied, the summer and the sunshine and the moonlight are but a gleam and glimmer,—a vague dream, which does not come within us, but only makes itself imperfectly perceptible on the outside of us.

Biographies of eminent American merchants,—it would be a work likely to have a great circulation in our commercial country. If successful, there might be a second volume of eminent foreign merchants. Perhaps it had better be adapted to the capacity of young clerks and apprentices.

For the virtuoso's collection:—Alexander's copy of the Iliad, enclosed in the jewelled casket of Darius, still fragrant with the perfumes Darius kept in it. Also the pen with which Faust signed away his salvation, with the drop of blood dried in it.

October 13, 1844.—This morning, after a heavy hoar-frost, the leaves, at sunrise, were falling from the trees in our avenue without a breath of wind, quietly descending by their own weight. In an hour or two after, the ground was strewn with them; and the trees are almost bare, with the exception of two or three poplars, which are still green. The apple and pear trees are still green; so is the willow. The first severe frosts came at least a fortnight ago,—more, if I mistake not.

Sketch of a person, who, by strength of character or assistant circumstances, has reduced another to absolute slavery and dependence on him. Then show that the person who appeared to be the master must inevitably be at least as much a slave as the other, if not more so. All slavery is reciprocal, on the supposition most favorable to the masters.

Persons who write about themselves and their feelings, as Byron did, may be said to serve up their own hearts, duly spiced, and with brain-sauce out of their own heads, as a repast for the public.

To represent a man in the midst of all sorts of cares and annoyances, with impossibilities to perform, and driven almost distracted by his inadequacy. Then quietly comes Death, and releases him from all his troubles; and he smiles, and congratulates himself on escaping so easily.

What if it should be discovered to be all a mistake, that people, who were supposed to have died long ago, are really dead? Byron to be still living, a man of sixty; Burns, too, in extreme old age; Bonaparte likewise; and many other distinguished men, whose lives might have extended to these limits. Then the private acquaintances, friends, enemies, wives, taken to be dead, to be all really living in this world. The machinery might be a person's being persuaded to believe that he had been mad; or having dwelt many years on a desolate island; or having been in the heart of Africa or China; and a friend amuses himself with giving this account. Or some traveller from Europe shall thus correct popular errors.

The life of a woman, who, by the old Colony law, was condemned to wear always the letter A sewed on her garment in token of her sin.

To make literal pictures of figurative expressions. For instance, he burst into tears,—a man suddenly turned into a shower of briny drops. An explosion of laughter,—a man blowing up, and his fragments flying about on all sides. He cast his eyes upon the ground,—a man standing eyeless, with his eyes thrown down, and staring up at him in wonderment, etc., etc., etc.

An uneducated countryman, supposing he had a live frog in his stomach, applied himself to the study of medicine, in order to find a cure, and so became a profound physician. Thus some misfortune, physical or moral, may be the means of educating and elevating us.

Concord, March 12, 1845.—Last night was very cold, and bright starlight; yet there was a mist or fog diffused all over the landscape, lying close to the ground, and extending upwards, probably not much above the tops of the trees. This fog was crystallized by the severe frost; and its little feathery crystals covered all the branches and smallest twigs of trees and shrubs; so that, this morning, at first sight, it appeared as if they were covered with snow. On closer examination, however, these most delicate feathers appeared shooting out in all directions from the branches,—above as well as beneath,—and looking, not as if they had been attached, but had been put forth by the plant,—a new kind of

foliage. It is impossible to describe the exquisite beauty of the effect, when close to the eye; and even at a distance this delicate appearance was not lost, but imparted a graceful, evanescent aspect to great trees, perhaps a quarter of a mile off, making them look like immense plumes, or something that would vanish at a breath. The so-much admired sight of icy trees cannot compare with it in point of grace, delicacy, and beauty; and, moreover, there is a life and animation in this, not to be found in the other. It was to be seen in its greatest perfection at sunrise, or shortly after; for the slightest warmth impaired the minute beauty of the frost-feathers, and the general effect. But in the first sunshine, and while there was still a partial mist hovering around the hill and along the river, while some of the trees were lit up with an illumination that did not *shine*,—that is to say, glitter,—but was not less bright than if it had glittered, while other portions of the scene were partly obscured, but not gloomy,—on the contrary, very cheerful,—it was a picture that never can be painted nor described, nor, I fear, remembered with any accuracy, so magical was its light and shade, while at the same time the earth and everything upon it were white; for the ground is entirely covered by yesterday's snow-storm.

Already, before eleven o'clock, these feathery crystals have vanished, partly through the warmth of the sun, and partly by gentle breaths of wind; for so slight was their hold upon the twigs that the least motion, or thought almost, sufficed to bring them floating down, like a little snow-storm, to the ground. In fact, the fog, I suppose, was a cloud of snow, and would have scattered down upon us, had it been at the usual height above the earth.

All the above description is most unsatisfactory.

ON TRANSLATING THE DIVINA COMMEDIA

FOURTH SONNET

How strange the sculptures that adorn these towers!
This crowd of statues, in whose folded sleeves
Birds build their nests; while canopied with leaves
Parvis and portal bloom like trellised bowers,
And the vast minster seems a cross of flowers!
But fiends and dragons from the gargoyled eaves
Watch the dead Christ between the living thieves,
And underneath the traitor Judas lowers!
Ah! from what agonies of heart and brain,
What exultations trampling on despair,
What tenderness, what tears, what hate of wrong,
What passionate outcry of a soul in pain,
Uprose this poem of the earth and air,
This mediæval miracle of song!

FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

We who enjoy the fruits of civil and religious liberty as our daily food, reaping the harvest we did not sow, seldom give a thought to those who in the dim past prepared the ground and scattered the seed that has yielded such plenteous return. If occasionally we peer into the gloom of by-gone centuries, some stalwart form, like that of Luther, arrests our backward glance, and all beyond is dark and void. But generations before Martin Luther the work for the harvest of coming ages was begun. Humble but earnest men, with such rude aids as they possessed, were toiling to clear away the dense underbrush of ignorance and superstition, and let the light of the sun in on the stagnant swamp; struggling to plough up the stony soil that centuries of oppression had made hard and barren; scattering seed that the sun would scorch and the birds of the air devour; and dying without seeing a green blade to reward them with the hope that their toils were not in vain.

But their labors were not lost. The soil thus prepared by the painful and unrequited toil of those who had gone down to obscure graves, sorrowing and hopeless, offered less obstruction to the strong arms and better appliances of the reformers of a later day. Of the seed scattered by the early sowers, a grain found here and there a sheltering crevice, and struggled into life, bearing fruit that in the succession of years increased and multiplied until thousands were fed and strengthened by its harvest.

The military history of the reign of the third Edward of England is illuminated with such a blaze of glory, that the dazzled eye can with difficulty distinguish the dark background of its domestic life. Cressy and Poitiers carried the military fame of England throughout the world, and struck terror into her enemies; but at home dwelt turbulence, corruption, rapine, and misery. The barons quarrelled and fought among themselves. The clergy wallowed in a sty of corruption and debauchery. The laboring classes were sunk in ignorance and hopeless misery. It was the dark hour that precedes the first glimmer of dawn.

Poitiers was won in 1356. Four years the French king remained in honorable captivity in England. Then came the treaty of Bretigny, which released King John and terminated the war. The great nobles, with their armies of lesser knights and swarms of men-at-arms, returned to England, viewed with secret and well-founded distrust by the industrious and laboring classes along their homeward route. The nobles established themselves in their castles, immediately surrounded by swarms of reckless men, habituated by years of war to deeds of lawlessness and violence, and having subject to their summons feudatory knights, each of whom had his own band of turbulent retainers. With such elements of discord, it was impossible for good order long to be maintained. The nobles quarrelled, and their retainers were not backward in taking up the quarrel. The feudatory knights had disagreements among themselves, and carried on petty war against each other. Confederated bands of lawless men traversed the country, seizing property wherever it could be found, outraging women, taking prisoners and ransoming them, and making war against all who opposed their progress or were personally obnoxious to them. Castles and estates were seized and held on some imaginary claim. It was in vain to appeal to the laws. Justice was powerless to correct abuses or aid the oppressed. Powerful barons gave countenance to the marauders, that their services might be secured in the event of a quarrel with their neighbors; nor did they hesitate to share in the booty. Might everywhere triumphed over right, and the "law of the strong arm" superseded the ordinances of the civil power.

The condition of the Church was no better than that of the State. Fraud, corruption, and oppression sat in high places in both. The prelates had their swarms of armed retainers, and ruled their flocks with the sword as well as the crosier. The monasteries, with but few exceptions, were the haunts of extravagance and sensuality, instead of the abodes of self-denying virtue and learning. The portly abbot, his black robe edged with costly fur and clasped with a silver girdle, his peaked shoes in the height of the fashion, and wearing a handsomely ornamented dagger or hunting-knife, rode out accompanied by a pack of trained hunting-dogs, the golden bells on his bridle

"Gingeling in the whistling wind as clear
And eke as loud as doth the chapel bell."

The monks who were unable to indulge their taste for the chase sought recompense in unrestrained indulgence at the table. The land was overspread with an innumerable swarm of begging friars, who fawned on the great, flattered the wealthy, and despoiled the poor. Another class traversed the country, selling pardons "come from Rome all hot," and extolling the virtues of their relics and the power of their indulgences with the eloquence of a quack vending his nostrums. Bishops held civil offices under the king, and priests acted as stewards in great men's houses. Simony possessed the Church, and the ministers of religion again sold their Master for silver.

The domestic and social life of the higher classes of society in the last half of the fourteenth century can be delineated, with a fair approach to exactness, from the detached hints scattered through such old romances and poems of that period as the diligent labors of zealous antiquaries have brought to light.

The residences of all the great and wealthy possessed one general character. The central point and most important feature was the great hall, adjoining which in most houses a "parlour," or talking-room, had recently been built. A principal chamber for the ladies of the household was generally placed on the ground-floor, with an upper chamber, or "soler," over it. In the larger establishments additional chambers had been clustered around the main building, increasing in number with the wants of the household. The castles and fortified buildings varied a little in outward construction from the ordinary manorial residences, but the same general arrangement of the interior existed. A few of the stronger and more important buildings were of stone; but the larger proportion were of timber, or timber and stone combined.

The great hall was the most important part of the establishment. Here the general business of the household was transacted, the meals served, strangers received, audiences granted, and what may be termed the public life of the family carried on. It was also the general rendezvous of the servants and retainers, who lounged about it when duty or pleasure did not call them to the other offices or to the field. In the evening they gathered around the fire, built in an iron grate standing in the middle of the room; for as yet chimneys were a luxury confined to the principal chamber. The few remaining halls of this period that have not been remodelled in succeeding ages present no trace of a fireplace or chimney. At night the male servants and men-at-arms stretched themselves to sleep on the benches along its sides, or on the rush-covered floor.

The floor at the upper end was raised, forming the *dais*, or place of honor. On this, stretching nearly from side to side, was the "table dormant," or fixed table, with a "settle," or bench with a back, between it and the wall. On the lower floor, and extending lengthwise on each side down the hall, stood long benches for the use of the servants and retainers. At meal-times, in front of these were placed the temporary tables of loose boards supported on trestles. At the upper end was the cupboard, or "dresser," for the plate and furniture of the table. In the halls of the greater nobles, on important occasions, tapestry or curtains were hung on the walls, or at least on that portion of the wall next the dais, and still more rarely a carpet was used for that part of the floor,—rushes or bare tiles being more general. A perch for hawks, and the grate of burning wood, sending its smoke up to the blackened open roof, completed the picture of the hall of a large establishment in the fourteenth century.

The "parlour," or talking-room, as its name imports, was used chiefly for conferences, and for such business as required more privacy than was attainable in the hall, but was unsuited to the domestic character of the chamber.

After the hall, the most important feature of the building was the principal chamber. Here the domestic life of the family was carried on. Here the ladies of the household spent their time when not at meals or engaged in out-door sports and pastimes. The furniture of this room was more complete

than that of the other parts of the building, but was still rude and scanty when judged by modern wants. The bed was of massive proportions and frequently of ornamental character. A truckle-bed for the children or chamber servants was pushed under the principal bed by day. At the foot of the latter stood the huge "hutch," or chest, in which were deposited for safety the family plate and valuables. Two or three stools and large chairs, with a perch or bar on which to hang garments, completed the usual furniture of the chamber.

In this room was one important feature not found in the others, and which accounted for the increasing attachment manifested towards it. The fire, instead of being placed in an iron grate or brazier in the middle of the room, burned merrily on the hearth; and the smoke, instead of seeking its exit by the window, was carried up a chimney of generous proportions.

The household day commenced early. The members of the family arose from the beds where they had slept in the garments worn by our first parents before the fall; for the effeminacy of sleeping in night-dresses had not yet been introduced, and it was only the excessively poor that made the clothes worn during the day serve in lieu of blankets and coverlets.

"'I have but one whole hater,'[1] quoth Haukyn;
'I am the less to blame,
Though it be soiled and seldom clean:
I sleep therein of nights.'"

Breakfast was served about six o'clock. It is difficult to get an exact description of the customs of the breakfast-table, or the nature of the meal, as the contemporary writers make little allusion to it. Probably it was but a slight repast, to allay the cravings of appetite until the great meal of the day was served. Until within a few years of the period of which we write, the dinner-hour was so early that but little food was taken before that time.

Dinner was then, as now, the principal meal of the English day. In the houses of the great it was conducted with much ceremony; and among the richer classes certain well-established rules of courtesy in relation to the meal were observed. The family and their guests entered the great hall about ten o'clock. They were met by a domestic, bearing a pitcher and basin, and his assistant, with a towel. Water was poured on the hands of each person, and the ablutions carefully performed; scrupulous cleanliness in this respect being required, from the fact that forks were as yet things undreamed of. The principal guests took their seats at the "table dormant," on the dais, the person of highest rank having the middle seat,—which was consequently at the head of the hall,—and the others being arranged according to their respective rank.

At the side-tables, below the dais, sat the inferior members of the household, with the guests of lesser note,—these also arranged with careful regard to rank and position. The beggar or poor wayfarer who was admitted to a humble share of the feast crouched on the rushes among the dogs who lay awaiting the bones and relics of the repast, and thankfully fed, like Lazarus, on "the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table."

The guests being seated, the busy servitors hastened to cover the table with a "fair white linen cloth," of unsullied purity; and on it were placed the salt-cellars of massive silver, the spoons and knives; next the bread, and then the wine, poured with great ceremony into the drinking-cups by the cupbearer. The silver vessels were brought from the "dresser," and arranged on the table, the display being proportioned to the wealth and condition of the host and the consideration to be paid to the guests. The head cook and his assistants entered in procession, bearing the dishes in regular order, and deposited them on the table with due solemnity. The pottage was first served, and when this course was eaten, the vessels and spoons were removed. The carver performed his office on the

[1] Garment.

meats, holding the joint, according to the traditions of his order, carefully with the thumb and first two fingers of his left hand, whilst he carved. The pieces were placed on "trenchers" or slices of bread, and handed to the guests, who made no scruple of freely using their fingers. The bones and refuse of the food were placed on the table, or thrown to the dogs.

The people of that day were not insensible to the pleasures of the table; and, unless urgent matters called them to the field or the council, dinner was enjoyed with leisurely deliberation. In great houses of hospitable reputation, the great hall at the hour of meals was open to all comers. The traveller who found himself at its door was admitted, and received position and food according to his condition. The minstrels that wandered over the country in great numbers were always welcome, and were well supplied with food and drink, and received liberal gifts for their songs and the long romances of love and chivalry which they recited to music. Not unfrequently satirical songs were sung, or the minstrel narrated stories in which the humor was of a coarser nature than would now be tolerated in the presence of ladies, but which in that day were listened to without a blush.

Dinner ended, the vessels and unconsumed meats were removed, the tablecloths gathered up, and the relics of the feast thrown on the floor for the dogs to devour. The side-tables were removed from their trestles and piled in a corner, and the hall cleared for the entertainments that frequently followed the dinner. These consisted of feats of conjuring by the "joculators," balancing and tumbling by the women who wandered about seeking a livelihood by such means, or dancing by the ladies of the household and their guests.

The feast and its succeeding amusements disposed of, the ladies either shared in the out-door sports and games, of which there were many in which women could take part, or they retired to the chamber, where, seated in low chairs or in the recessed windows, they engaged in making the needle-work pictures that adorned the tapestry, listening the while to the love-romances narrated by the minstrel who had been invited for the purpose, or gave willing ear to the flattery of some "virelay" or love-song, sung by gay canon, gentle page, or courtly knight.

About six o'clock, the household once more assembled in the hall for supper; and then the orders for the ensuing day were given to the servants and retainers. Soon after dark the members of the family and their guests sought their respective sleeping-places, as contrivances for lighting were rude, and had to be economized. Such of the servants as had special chambers or sleeping-places retired to them, whilst a large proportion of the male servants and such of the retainers as belonged immediately to the household stretched themselves on the benches or floor of the hall, and were soon fast asleep. Such is a sketch of the ordinary course of domestic life among the higher classes of English society in the fourteenth century.

Among the greater nobles, the details of the daily life were sometimes on a more magnificent scale; but the leading features were as we have described them. Rude pomp and barbaric splendor marked the establishments of some of the powerful barons and ecclesiastical dignitaries. At tilt and tournament, the contending knights strove to outshine each other in gorgeousness of equipment, as well as in deeds of arms. Nor were the ladies averse to richness of attire in their own persons. Costly robes and dainty furs were worn, and jewels and gems of price sparkled when the dames and demoiselles appeared at great gatherings, or on occasions of state and ceremony. The extravagance of dress in both sexes had grown to be so great an evil, that stringent sumptuary laws were passed, but without producing any effect.

The moral state of even the highest classes of society was not of a flattering character. Europe was one huge camp and battle-field, in which all the chivalry of the day had been educated,—no good school for purity of life and delicacy of language. The literature of the time, at least that portion of it which penetrated to ladies' chambers, was of an amorous, and too frequently of an indelicate character. A debased and sensual clergy swarmed over the land, finding their way into every household, and gradually corrupting those with whom their sacred office brought them into

contact. The manners and habits of the time afforded every facility for the gratification of debased passions and indulgence in immoral practices.

Whilst the barons feasted and fought, the ladies intrigued, and the clergy violated every principle of the religion they professed, the great mass of the population lived on, with scarcely a thought bestowed on them by their social superiors. Between the Anglo-Norman baron and the Anglo-Saxon laborer, or "villain," there was a great gulf fixed. The antipathy of an antagonistic and conquered race to its conquerors was intensified by years of oppression and wrong, and the laborer cherished a burning desire to break the bonds of thraldom in which most of the poor were held.

By the laws of the feudal system, the tenants and laborers on the property of a baron were his "villains," or slaves. They were divided into two classes;—the "villains regardant," who were permitted to occupy and cultivate small portions of land, on condition of rendering certain stipulated services to their lord, and were therefore considered in the light of slaves to the land; and the "villains in gross," who were the personal slaves of the landowner, and were compelled to do the work they were set to perform in consideration of their food and clothing. Besides these two classes a third had recently come into existence, and, owing to various causes, was fast increasing in extent and importance,—that of free laborers, who worked for hire. This class was recruited in various ways from the ranks of the "villains in gross." Some were manumitted by their dying masters, as an act of piety in atonement for the deeds of violence done during life; but by far the greater number effected their freedom by escaping to distant parts of the country, where but little search would be made for them, or by seeking the refuge of the walled towns and cities, where a residence of a year and a day would give them freedom by law. The citizens were always ready to give asylum to those fugitives, for they supplied the growing need for laborers, and enabled the cities, by the increase of population, to maintain their independence against the pretensions of the barons.

The condition of the "villain" was bad at the best; and numerous petty acts of oppression in most instances increased the bitterness of his lot. Himself the property of another, he could not legally hold possessions of any kind. Not only the land he tilled, and the rude implements of husbandry with which he painfully cultivated the soil, but the cattle with which he worked, the house in which he lived, the few chattels he gathered around him, and the scanty store of money earned by hard labor, all belonged to his master, who could at any time dispossess him of them. The "villain" who obtained a livelihood by working the few acres of land which had been held from father to son, on condition of performing personal labor or other services on the estate of the landowner, was subject not only to the demands of his master, but to the tithing of the Church; to the doles exacted by the swarms of begging friars, who, like Irish beggars of the present day, invoked cheap blessings on the cheerful giver, and launched bitter curses at the heads of those who refused alms; to the impositions of the wandering "pardoners," with their charms and relics; and to the tyrannical exactions of the "summoners," who, under pretence of writs from ecclesiastical courts, robbed all who were not in position to resist their fraudulent demands. What these spared was frequently swept away by the visits of the king's purveyors and the officers of others in power, who, not content with robbing the poor husbandman of the proceeds of his toil, treated the men with violence and the women with outrage. Complaint was useless. The "churl" had no rights which those in office were bound to respect.

Ignorant, superstitious, and condemned to a life of unrequited toil and unredressed wrongs, the mental and moral condition of the agricultural poor was wretchedly low. Huddled together in mud cottages, through the rotten thatches of which the rain penetrated; clothed with rough garments that were seldom changed night or day; feeding on coarse food, and that in insufficient quantities,—their physical condition was one of extreme misery. The usual daily allowance of food to the bond laborer of either class, when working for the owner of the land, was two herrings, milk for cheese, and a loaf of bread, with the addition in harvest of a small allowance of beer. Occasionally, salted meats or stockfish were substituted for the herrings.

The condition of the free laborer was measurably better; but even he was condemned to a life of privation and wretchedness, relieved only by the knowledge that his scanty earnings were his own, and that he could change the scene of his labors if he saw fit. The ordinary agricultural laborer, at the wages usually given, would have to work more than a week for a bushel of wheat. At harvest-time and other periods when the demand for labor was unusually great, as it was after the pestilences that swept the land about the time of which we write, the free laborers demanded higher wages; and although laws were passed to prevent their obtaining more than the usual rates, necessity frequently compelled their employment at the advanced prices. The receipt of higher wages only temporarily bettered their condition. Accustomed to griping hunger and short allowances of food, when better days came, they thought only of enjoying the present, and took no heed of the future. After harvest, with its high wages and cheapness of provision, the laborer frequently became wasteful and improvident. Instead of the stinted allowance of salted meat or fish, with the pinched loaf of bean-flour, and an occasional draught of weak beer, his fastidious appetite demanded fresh meat or fish, white bread, vegetables freshly gathered, and ale of the best. As long as his store lasted, he worked as little as possible, and grumbled at the fortune that made him a laborer. But these halcyon days were few, and soon passed away, to be followed by decreasing allowances of the commonest food, fierce pangs of hunger, and miserable destitution. A bad harvest inflicted untold wretchedness on the poor. Ill lodged, ill fed, and scantily clothed, disease cut them down like grass before the scythe. A deadly pestilence swept over the land in 1348, carrying off about two thirds of the people; and nearly all the victims were from among the poorest classes. In 1361, another pestilence carried off thousands, again spreading terror and dismay through the country. Seven years later a third visitation desolated England. Here and there one of the better class fell a victim to the destroyer; but the great mass were from the ranks of the half-starved and poorly lodged laborers.

The morality of the poor was, as might be expected, at a low ebb. Modesty, chastity, and temperance could scarcely be looked for in wretched mud huts, where all ages and sexes herded together like swine. Men and women alike fled from their miserable homes to the ale-house, where they drank long draughts of cheap ale, and, in imitation of their superiors in station, listened to a low class of "japers" who recited "rhymes of Robin Hood," or told coarse and obscene stories for the sake of a share of the ale, or such few small coins as could be drawn from the ragged pouches of the bacchanals.

Between proud wealth and abject poverty there can be no friendly feeling. Stolid, brutish ignorance can alone render the bonds of the slave endurable. As his eyes are slowly opened by increasing knowledge, and he can compare his condition with that of the freeman, his fetters gall him, he becomes restive in his bonds, and at length turns in blind fury on his oppressors, striking mad blows with his manacled hands. Trodden into the dust by the iron heel of a tyrannical feudal power, the peasantry of France had turned on their oppressors, and wreaked a brief but savage vengeance for ages of wrong. The atrocious cruelties and mad excesses of the revolted Jacquerie could only have been committed by those who had been so long treated as brutes that they had acquired brutish passions and instincts. The English peasantry had not yet followed the example of their French compeers; but the gathering storm already darkened the sky, and the mutterings of the thunder were heard. Superstitiously religious, they hated the ministers of religion who violated its principles. Born slaves and hopelessly debased and ignorant, they began to ask the question,—

"When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who then was the gentleman?"

Occasionally a rude ballad found its way among the people fiercely expressive of their scorn of the clergy and their hatred of the rich. One that was very popular, and has been transmitted to our day, asked,—

"While God was on earth
And wandered wide,
What was the reason
Why he would not ride?
Because he would have no groom
To go by his side,
Nor grudging of no gadeling[2]
To scold nor to chide.

* * * *

"Hearken hitherward, horsemen,
A tiding I you tell,
That ye shall hang
And harbor in hell!"

But no leader had as yet arisen to give proper voice to the desire for reformation that burned in the hearts of the common people. The writers of that age were breathing the intoxicating air of court favor, and heeded not the sufferings of the common rabble. Froissart, the courtly canon and chronicler of deeds of chivalry, was writing French madrigals and amorous ditties for the ear of Queen Philippa, and loved too well gay society, luxurious feasts, and dainty attire, not to shrink with disgust from thought of the dirty, uncouth, and miserable herd of "greasy caps." Gower was inditing fashionable love-songs. Chaucer, who years after was to direct such telling blows in his Canterbury Tales at the vices and corruptness of the clergy, was a favorite member of the retinue of the powerful "John of Gaunt, time-honored Lancaster," and had as yet only written long and stately poems on the history of Troilus and Cressida, the Parliament of Birds, and the Court of Love. Wycliffe, the great English reformer of the Church, was quietly living at his rectory of Fylingham, and preparing his first essays against the mendicant orders. John Ball, the "crazy priest of Kent," as Froissart calls him, was brooding over the miseries of his poor parishioners, and nursing in his mind that enmity to all social distinctions with which he afterwards inflamed the minds of the peasantry, and incited them to open rebellion.

But in the quarter least expected the oppressed people found an advocate. An unobtrusive monk, whose name is almost a doubtful tradition, stole out from his quiet cell in Malvern Abbey, and, whilst his brethren feasted, climbed the gentle slope of the Worcestershire hills, and drank in the beauties of the varied landscape at his feet. There, on a May morning, as he rested under a bank by the side of a brooklet, and was lulled to sleep by the murmuring of the water, he dreamed those dreams that set waking people to thinking, and gave a powerful impetus to the moral and social revolution that was just commencing.

The "Vision of Piers Plowman" is every way a singular production. Clothed in the then almost obsolete verse of a past age, it breathes wholly the spirit of the time in which it was written. The work of a monk, it is unsparing in its attacks on the monastic orders. Intended for the reading or hearing of the middle and lower classes, it gives more frequent glimpses of the social condition of all ranks of people than any other work of that age. As a philological monument, it is of great value; as a poem, it contains many passages of merit; and as a storehouse of allusions to the social life of the people in the fourteenth century, it is invaluable.

[2] Vagabond.

The poem consists of a series of visions or dreams, of an allegorical character, in which the dreamer seeks to find Truth and Righteousness on earth, meeting with but little success. The allegorical idea cannot be followed without weariness, and, in fact, the intentions of the writer are by no means clear, the allegory being frequently involved and contradictory. The beauty of the poem lies in its detached passages, its occasional poetic touches, its graphic pictures, biting satire, and withering denunciation of fraud, corruption, and tyranny. The measure adopted is the unrhymed alliterative, characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon literature, and which had long been disused, but which retained its hold on the affections of the common people, who were of Anglo-Saxon stock. In the extracts we give from the poem, the measure is retained, but the words modernized, so far as can be done without injuring the sense or metre.

The opening passage of the "Vision" has been so frequently reproduced, as a specimen of the poet's style, that it is probably familiar to many readers, but its exquisite naturalness and simplicity tempt us to quote it here.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.