

Stowe Harriet Beecher

The Pearl of Orr's Island: A Story of the Coast of Maine



Harriet Stowe

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, though much more than an incident in an author's career, seems to have determined Mrs. Stowe more surely in her purpose to devote herself to literature. During the summer following its appearance, she was in Andover, making over the house which she and her husband were to occupy upon leaving Brunswick; and yet, busy as she was, she was writing articles for *The Independent* and *The National Era*. The following extract from a letter written at that time, July 29, 1852, intimates that she already was sketching the outline of the story which later grew into *The Pearl of Orr's Island*: —

"I seem to have so much to fill my time, and yet there is my Maine story waiting. However, I am composing it every day, only I greatly need living studies for the filling in of my sketches. There is old Jonas, my "fish father," a sturdy, independent fisherman farmer, who in his youth sailed all over the world and made up his mind about everything. In his old age he attends prayer-meetings and reads the *Missionary Herald*. He also has plenty of money in an old brown sea-chest. He is a great heart with an inflexible will and iron muscles. I must go to Orr's Island and see him again." The story seems to have remained in her mind, for we are told by her son that she worked upon it by turns with *The Minister's Wooing*.

It was not, however, until eight years later, after *The Minister's Wooing* had been published and *Agnes of Sorrento* was well begun, that she took up her old story in earnest and set about making it into a short serial. It would seem that her first intention was to confine herself to a sketch of the childhood of her chief characters, with a view to delineating the influences at work upon them; but, as she herself expressed it, "Out of the simple history of the little Pearl of Orr's Island as it had shaped itself in her mind, rose up a Captain Kittridge with his garrulous yarns, and Misses Roxy and Ruey, given to talk, and a whole pigeon roost of yet undreamed of fancies and dreams which would insist on being written." So it came about that the story as originally planned came to a stopping place at the end of Chapter XVII., as the reader may see when he reaches that place. The childish life of her characters ended there, and a lapse of ten years was assumed before their story was taken up again in the next chapter. The book when published had no chapter headings. These have been supplied in the present edition.

CHAPTER I

NAOMI

On the road to the Kennebec, below the town of Bath, in the State of Maine, might have been seen, on a certain autumnal afternoon, a one-horse wagon, in which two persons were sitting. One was an old man, with the peculiarly hard but expressive physiognomy which characterizes the seafaring population of the New England shores. A clear blue eye, evidently practiced in habits of keen observation, white hair, bronzed, weather-beaten cheeks, and a face deeply lined with the furrows of shrewd thought and anxious care, were points of the portrait that made themselves felt at a glance.

By his side sat a young woman of two-and-twenty, of a marked and peculiar personal appearance. Her hair was black, and smoothly parted on a broad forehead, to which a pair of penciled dark eyebrows gave a striking and definite outline. Beneath, lay a pair of large black eyes, remarkable for tremulous expression of melancholy and timidity. The cheek was white and bloodless as a snowberry, though with the clear and perfect oval of good health; the mouth was delicately formed, with a certain sad quiet in its lines, which indicated a habitually repressed and sensitive nature.

The dress of this young person, as often happens in New England, was, in refinement and even elegance, a marked contrast to that of her male companion and to the humble vehicle in which she rode. There was not only the most fastidious neatness, but a delicacy in the choice of colors, an indication of elegant tastes in the whole arrangement, and the quietest suggestion in the world of an acquaintance with the usages of fashion, which struck one oddly in those wild and dreary surroundings. On the whole, she impressed one like those fragile wild-flowers which in April cast their fluttering shadows from the mossy crevices of the old New England granite, – an existence in which colorless delicacy is united to a sort of elastic hardihood of life, fit for the rocky soil and harsh winds it is born to encounter.

The scenery of the road along which the two were riding was wild and bare. Only savins and mulleins, with their dark pyramids or white spires of velvet leaves, diversified the sandy wayside; but out at sea was a wide sweep of blue, reaching far to the open ocean, which lay rolling, tossing, and breaking into white caps of foam in the bright sunshine. For two or three days a northeast storm had been raging, and the sea was in all the commotion which such a general upturning creates.

The two travelers reached a point of elevated land, where they paused a moment, and the man drew up the jogging, stiff-jointed old farm-horse, and raised himself upon his feet to look out at the prospect.

There might be seen in the distance the blue Kennebec sweeping out toward the ocean through its picturesque rocky shores, docked with cedars and other dusky evergreens, which were illuminated by the orange and flame-colored trees of Indian summer. Here and there scarlet creepers swung long trailing garlands over the faces of the dark rock, and fringes of goldenrod above swayed with the brisk blowing wind that was driving the blue waters seaward, in face of the up-coming ocean tide, – a conflict which caused them to rise in great foam-crested waves. There are two channels into this river from the open sea, navigable for ships which are coming in to the city of Bath; one is broad and shallow, the other narrow and deep, and these are divided by a steep ledge of rocks.

Where the spectators of this scene were sitting, they could see in the distance a ship borne with tremendous force by the rising tide into the mouth of the river, and encountering a northwest wind which had succeeded the gale, as northwest winds often do on this coast. The ship, from what

might be observed in the distance, seemed struggling to make the wider channel, but was constantly driven off by the baffling force of the wind.

"There she is, Naomi," said the old fisherman, eagerly, to his companion, "coming right in." The young woman was one of the sort that never start, and never exclaim, but with all deeper emotions grow still. The color slowly mounted into her cheek, her lips parted, and her eyes dilated with a wide, bright expression; her breathing came in thick gasps, but she said nothing.

The old fisherman stood up in the wagon, his coarse, butternut-colored coat-flaps fluttering and snapping in the breeze, while his interest seemed to be so intense in the efforts of the ship that he made involuntary and eager movements as if to direct her course. A moment passed, and his keen, practiced eye discovered a change in her movements, for he cried out involuntarily, —

"*Don't* take the narrow channel to-day!" and a moment after, "O Lord! O Lord! have mercy, — there they go! Look! look! look!"

And, in fact, the ship rose on a great wave clear out of the water, and the next second seemed to leap with a desperate plunge into the narrow passage; for a moment there was a shivering of the masts and the rigging, and she went down and was gone.

"They're split to pieces!" cried the fisherman. "Oh, my poor girl — my poor girl — they're gone! O Lord, have mercy!"

The woman lifted up no voice, but, as one who has been shot through the heart falls with no cry, she fell back, — a mist rose up over her great mournful eyes, — she had fainted.

The story of this wreck of a home-bound ship just entering the harbor is yet told in many a family on this coast. A few hours after, the unfortunate crew were washed ashore in all the joyous holiday rig in which they had attired themselves that morning to go to their sisters, wives, and mothers.

This is the first scene in our story.

CHAPTER II

MARA

Down near the end of Orr's Island, facing the open ocean, stands a brown house of the kind that the natives call "lean-to," or "linter," – one of those large, comfortable structures, barren in the ideal, but rich in the practical, which the workingman of New England can always command. The waters of the ocean came up within a rod of this house, and the sound of its moaning waves was even now filling the clear autumn starlight. Evidently something was going on within, for candles fluttered and winked from window to window, like fireflies in a dark meadow, and sounds as of quick footsteps, and the flutter of brushing garments, might be heard.

Something unusual is certainly going on within the dwelling of Zephaniah Pennel to-night.

Let us enter the dark front-door. We feel our way to the right, where a solitary ray of light comes from the chink of a half-opened door. Here is the front room of the house, set apart as its place of especial social hilarity and sanctity, – the "best room," with its low studded walls, white dimity window-curtains, rag carpet, and polished wood chairs. It is now lit by the dim gleam of a solitary tallow candle, which seems in the gloom to make only a feeble circle of light around itself, leaving all the rest of the apartment in shadow.

In the centre of the room, stretched upon a table, and covered partially by a sea-cloak, lies the body of a man of twenty-five, – lies, too, evidently as one of whom it is written, "He shall return to his house no more, neither shall his place know him any more." A splendid manhood has suddenly been called to forsake that lifeless form, leaving it, like a deserted palace, beautiful in its desolation. The hair, dripping with the salt wave, curled in glossy abundance on the finely-formed head; the flat, broad brow; the closed eye, with its long black lashes; the firm, manly mouth; the strongly-moulded chin, – all, all were sealed with that seal which is never to be broken till the great resurrection day.

He was lying in a full suit of broadcloth, with a white vest and smart blue neck-tie, fastened with a pin, in which was some braided hair under a crystal. All his clothing, as well as his hair, was saturated with sea-water, which trickled from time to time, and struck with a leaden and dropping sound into a sullen pool which lay under the table.

This was the body of James Lincoln, ship-master of the brig Flying Scud, who that morning had dressed himself gayly in his state-room to go on shore and meet his wife, – singing and jesting as he did so.

This is all that you have to learn in the room below; but as we stand there, we hear a trampling of feet in the apartment above, – the quick yet careful opening and shutting of doors, – and voices come and go about the house, and whisper consultations on the stairs. Now comes the roll of wheels, and the Doctor's gig drives up to the door; and, as he goes creaking up with his heavy boots, we will follow and gain admission to the dimly-lighted chamber.

Two gossips are sitting in earnest, whispering conversation over a small bundle done up in an old flannel petticoat. To them the doctor is about to address himself cheerily, but is repelled by sundry signs and sounds which warn him not to speak. Moderating his heavy boots as well as he is able to a pace of quiet, he advances for a moment, and the petticoat is unfolded for him to glance at its contents; while a low, eager, whispered conversation, attended with much head-shaking, warns him that his first duty is with somebody behind the checked curtains of a bed in the farther corner of the room. He steps on tiptoe, and draws the curtain; and there, with closed eye, and cheek as white as wintry snow, lies the same face over which passed the shadow of death when that ill-fated ship went down.

This woman was wife to him who lies below, and within the hour has been made mother to a frail little human existence, which the storm of a great anguish has driven untimely on the shores of life, – a precious pearl cast up from the past eternity upon the wet, wave-ribbed sand of the present. Now, weary with her moanings, and beaten out with the wrench of a double anguish, she lies with closed eyes in that passive apathy which precedes deeper shadows and longer rest.

Over against her, on the other side of the bed, sits an aged woman in an attitude of deep dejection, and the old man we saw with her in the morning is standing with an anxious, awestruck face at the foot of the bed.

The doctor feels the pulse of the woman, or rather lays an inquiring finger where the slightest thread of vital current is scarcely throbbing, and shakes his head mournfully. The touch of his hand rouses her, – her large wild, melancholy eyes fix themselves on him with an inquiring glance, then she shivers and moans, —

"Oh, Doctor, Doctor! – Jamie, Jamie!"

"Come, come!" said the doctor, "cheer up, my girl, you've got a fine little daughter, – the Lord mingles mercies with his afflictions."

Her eyes closed, her head moved with a mournful but decided dissent.

A moment after she spoke in the sad old words of the Hebrew Scripture, —

"Call her not Naomi; call her Mara, for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me."

And as she spoke, there passed over her face the sharp frost of the last winter; but even as it passed there broke out a smile, as if a flower had been thrown down from Paradise, and she said, —

"Not my will, but thy will," and so was gone.

Aunt Roxy and Aunt Ruey were soon left alone in the chamber of death.

"She'll make a beautiful corpse," said Aunt Roxy, surveying the still, white form contemplatively, with her head in an artistic attitude.

"She was a pretty girl," said Aunt Ruey; "dear me, what a Providence! I 'member the wedd'n down in that lower room, and what a handsome couple they were."

"They were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their deaths they were not divided," said Aunt Roxy, sententiously.

"What was it she said, did ye hear?" said Aunt Ruey.

"She called the baby 'Mary.'"

"Ah! sure enough, her mother's name afore her. What a still, softly-spoken thing she always was!"

"A pity the poor baby didn't go with her," said Aunt Roxy; "seven-months' children are so hard to raise."

"'Tis a pity," said the other.

But babies will live, and all the more when everybody says that it is a pity they should. Life goes on as inexorably in this world as death. It was ordered by the Will above that out of these two graves should spring one frail, trembling autumn flower, – the "Mara" whose poor little roots first struck deep in the salt, bitter waters of our mortal life.

CHAPTER III

THE BAPTISM AND THE BURIAL

Now, I cannot think of anything more unlikely and uninteresting to make a story of than that old brown "linter" house of Captain Zephaniah Pennel, down on the south end of Orr's Island.

Zephaniah and Mary Pennel, like Zacharias and Elizabeth, are a pair of worthy, God-fearing people, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless; but that is no great recommendation to a world gaping for sensation and calling for something stimulating. This worthy couple never read anything but the Bible, the "Missionary Herald," and the "Christian Mirror," — never went anywhere except in the round of daily business. He owned a fishing-smack, in which he labored after the apostolic fashion; and she washed, and ironed, and scrubbed, and brewed, and baked, in her contented round, week in and out. The only recreation they ever enjoyed was the going once a week, in good weather, to a prayer-meeting in a little old brown school-house, about a mile from their dwelling; and making a weekly excursion every Sunday, in their fishing craft, to the church opposite, on Harpswell Neck.

To be sure, Zephaniah had read many wide leaves of God's great book of Nature, for, like most Maine sea-captains, he had been wherever ship can go, — to all usual and unusual ports. His hard, shrewd, weather-beaten visage had been seen looking over the railings of his brig in the port of Genoa, swept round by its splendid crescent of palaces and its snow-crested Apennines. It had looked out in the Lagoons of Venice at that wavy floor which in evening seems a sea of glass mingled with fire, and out of which rise temples, and palaces, and churches, and distant silvery Alps, like so many fabrics of dreamland. He had been through the Skagerrack and Cattegat, — into the Baltic, and away round to Archangel, and there chewed a bit of chip, and considered and calculated what bargains it was best to make. He had walked the streets of Calcutta in his shirt-sleeves, with his best Sunday vest, backed with black glazed cambric, which six months before came from the hands of Miss Roxy, and was pronounced by her to be as good as any tailor could make; and in all these places he was just Zephaniah Pennel, — a chip of old Maine, — thrifty, careful, shrewd, honest, God-fearing, and carrying an instinctive knowledge of men and things under a face of rustic simplicity.

It was once, returning from one of his voyages, that he found his wife with a black-eyed, curly-headed little creature, who called him papa, and climbed on his knee, nestled under his coat, rifled his pockets, and woke him every morning by pulling open his eyes with little fingers, and jabbering unintelligible dialects in his ears.

"We will call this child Naomi, wife," he said, after consulting his old Bible; "for that means pleasant, and I'm sure I never see anything beat her for pleasantness. I never knew as children was so engagin'!"

It was to be remarked that Zephaniah after this made shorter and shorter voyages, being somehow conscious of a string around his heart which pulled him harder and harder, till one Sunday, when the little Naomi was five years old, he said to his wife, —

"I hope I ain't a-pervertin' Scriptur' nor nuthin', but I can't help thinkin' of one passage, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a merchantman seeking goodly pearls, and when he hath found one pearl of great price, for joy thereof he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that pearl.' Well, Mary, I've been and sold my brig last week," he said, folding his daughter's little quiet head under his coat, "'cause it seems to me the Lord's given us this pearl of great price, and it's enough for us. I don't want to be rambling round the world after riches. We'll have a little farm down on Orr's Island, and I'll have a little fishing-smack, and we'll live and be happy together."

And so Mary, who in those days was a pretty young married woman, felt herself rich and happy, – no duchess richer or happier. The two contentedly delved and toiled, and the little Naomi was their princess. The wise men of the East at the feet of an infant, offering gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh, is just a parable of what goes on in every house where there is a young child. All the hard and the harsh, and the common and the disagreeable, is for the parents, – all the bright and beautiful for their child.

When the fishing-smack went to Portland to sell mackerel, there came home in Zephaniah's fishy coat pocket strings of coral beads, tiny gaiter boots, brilliant silks and ribbons for the little fairy princess, – his Pearl of the Island; and sometimes, when a stray party from the neighboring town of Brunswick came down to explore the romantic scenery of the solitary island, they would be startled by the apparition of this still, graceful, dark-eyed child exquisitely dressed in the best and brightest that the shops of a neighboring city could afford, – sitting like some tropical bird on a lonely rock, where the sea came dashing up into the edges of arbor vitæ, or tripping along the wet sands for shells and seaweed.

Many children would have been spoiled by such unlimited indulgence; but there are natures sent down into this harsh world so timorous, and sensitive, and helpless in themselves, that the utmost stretch of indulgence and kindness is needed for their development, – like plants which the warmest shelf of the green-house and the most careful watch of the gardener alone can bring into flower. The pale child, with her large, lustrous, dark eyes, and sensitive organization, was nursed and brooded into a beautiful womanhood, and then found a protector in a high-spirited, manly young ship-master, and she became his wife.

And now we see in the best room – the walls lined with serious faces – men, women, and children, that have come to pay the last tribute of sympathy to the living and the dead. The house looked so utterly alone and solitary in that wild, sea-girt island, that one would have as soon expected the sea-waves to rise and walk in, as so many neighbors; but they had come from neighboring points, crossing the glassy sea in their little crafts, whose white sails looked like millers' wings, or walking miles from distant parts of the island.

Some writer calls a funeral one of the amusements of a New England population. Must we call it an amusement to go and see the acted despair of Medea? or the dying agonies of poor Adrienne Lecouvreur? It is something of the same awful interest in life's tragedy, which makes an untaught and primitive people gather to a funeral, – a tragedy where there is no acting, – and one which each one feels must come at some time to his own dwelling.

Be that as it may, here was a roomful. Not only Aunt Roxy and Aunt Ruey, who by a prescriptive right presided over all the births, deaths, and marriages of the neighborhood, but there was Captain Kittridge, a long, dry, weather-beaten old sea-captain, who sat as if tied in a double bow-knot, with his little fussy old wife, with a great Leghorn bonnet, and eyes like black glass beads shining through in the bows of her horn spectacles, and her hymn-book in her hand ready to lead the psalm. There were aunts, uncles, cousins, and brethren of the deceased; and in the midst stood two coffins, where the two united in death lay sleeping tenderly, as those to whom rest is good. All was still as death, except a chance whisper from some busy neighbor, or a creak of an old lady's great black fan, or the fizz of a fly down the window-pane, and then a stifled sound of deep-drawn breath and weeping from under a cloud of heavy black crape veils, that were together in the group which country-people call the mourners.

A gleam of autumn sunlight streamed through the white curtains, and fell on a silver baptismal vase that stood on the mother's coffin, as the minister rose and said, "The ordinance of baptism will now be administered." A few moments more, and on a baby brow had fallen a few drops of water, and the little pilgrim of a new life had been called Mara in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, – the minister slowly repeating thereafter those beautiful words of Holy Writ, "A father of

the fatherless is God in his holy habitation," – as if the baptism of that bereaved one had been a solemn adoption into the infinite heart of the Lord.

With something of the quaint pathos which distinguishes the primitive and Biblical people of that lonely shore, the minister read the passage in Ruth from which the name of the little stranger was drawn, and which describes the return of the bereaved Naomi to her native land. His voice trembled, and there were tears in many eyes as he read, "And it came to pass as she came to Bethlehem, all the city was moved about them; and they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi; call me Mara; for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?"

Deep, heavy sobs from the mourners were for a few moments the only answer to these sad words, till the minister raised the old funeral psalm of New England, —

"Why do we mourn departing friends,
Or shake at Death's alarms?
'Tis but the voice that Jesus sends
To call them to his arms.

"Are we not tending upward too,
As fast as time can move?
And should we wish the hours more slow
That bear us to our love?"

The words rose in old "China," – that strange, wild warble, whose quaintly blended harmonies might have been learned of moaning seas or wailing winds, so strange and grand they rose, full of that intense pathos which rises over every defect of execution; and as they sung, Zephaniah Pennel straightened his tall form, before bowed on his hands, and looked heavenward, his cheeks wet with tears, but something sublime and immortal shining upward through his blue eyes; and at the last verse he came forward involuntarily, and stood by his dead, and his voice rose over all the others as he sung, —

"Then let the last loud trumpet sound,
And bid the dead arise!
Awake, ye nations under ground!
Ye saints, ascend the skies!"

The sunbeam through the window-curtain fell on his silver hair, and they that looked beheld his face as it were the face of an angel; he had gotten a sight of the city whose foundation is jasper, and whose every gate is a separate pearl.

CHAPTER IV

AUNT ROXY AND AUNT RUEY

The sea lay like an unbroken mirror all around the pine-girt, lonely shores of Orr's Island. Tall, kingly spruces wore their regal crowns of cones high in air, sparkling with diamonds of clear exuded gum; vast old hemlocks of primeval growth stood darkling in their forest shadows, their branches hung with long hoary moss; while feathery larches, turned to brilliant gold by autumn frosts, lighted up the darker shadows of the evergreens. It was one of those hazy, calm, dissolving days of Indian summer, when everything is so quiet that the faintest kiss of the wave on the beach can be heard, and white clouds seem to faint into the blue of the sky, and soft swathing bands of violet vapor make all earth look dreamy, and give to the sharp, clear-cut outlines of the northern landscape all those mysteries of light and shade which impart such tenderness to Italian scenery.

The funeral was over; the tread of many feet, bearing the heavy burden of two broken lives, had been to the lonely graveyard, and had come back again, – each footstep lighter and more unconstrained as each one went his way from the great old tragedy of Death to the common cheerful walks of Life.

The solemn black clock stood swaying with its eternal "tick-tock, tick-tock," in the kitchen of the brown house on Orr's Island. There was there that sense of a stillness that can be felt, – such as settles down on a dwelling when any of its inmates have passed through its doors for the last time, to go whence they shall not return. The best room was shut up and darkened, with only so much light as could fall through a little heart-shaped hole in the window-shutter, – for except on solemn visits, or prayer meetings, or weddings, or funerals, that room formed no part of the daily family scenery.

The kitchen was clean and ample, with a great open fireplace and wide stone hearth, and oven on one side, and rows of old-fashioned splint-bottomed chairs against the wall. A table scoured to snowy whiteness, and a little work-stand whereon lay the Bible, the "Missionary Herald" and the "Weekly Christian Mirror," before named, formed the principal furniture. One feature, however, must not be forgotten, – a great sea-chest, which had been the companion of Zephaniah through all the countries of the earth. Old, and battered, and unsightly it looked, yet report said that there was good store within of that which men for the most part respect more than anything else; and, indeed, it proved often when a deed of grace was to be done, – when a woman was suddenly made a widow in a coast gale, or a fishing-smack was run down in the fogs off the banks, leaving in some neighboring cottage a family of orphans, – in all such cases, the opening of this sea-chest was an event of good omen to the bereaved; for Zephaniah had a large heart and a large hand, and was apt to take it out full of silver dollars when once it went in. So the ark of the covenant could not have been looked on with more reverence than the neighbors usually showed to Captain Pennel's sea-chest.

The afternoon sun is shining in a square of light through the open kitchen-door, whence one dreamily disposed might look far out to sea, and behold ships coming and going in every variety of shape and size.

But Aunt Roxy and Aunt Ruey, who for the present were sole occupants of the premises, were not people of the dreamy kind, and consequently were not gazing off to sea, but attending to very terrestrial matters that in all cases somebody must attend to. The afternoon was warm and balmy, but a few smouldering sticks were kept in the great chimney, and thrust deep into the embers was a mongrel species of snub-nosed tea-pot, which fumed strongly of catnip-tea, a little of which gracious beverage Miss Roxy was preparing in an old-fashioned cracked India china tea-cup, tasting it as she did so with the air of a connoisseur.

Apparently this was for the benefit of a small something in long white clothes, that lay face downward under a little blanket of very blue new flannel, and which something Aunt Roxy, when not otherwise engaged, constantly patted with a gentle tattoo, in tune to the steady trot of her knee. All babies knew Miss Roxy's tattoo on their backs, and never thought of taking it in ill part. On the contrary, it had a vital and mesmeric effect of sovereign force against colic, and all other disturbers of the nursery; and never was infant known so pressed with those internal troubles which infants cry about, as not speedily to give over and sink to slumber at this soothing appliance.

At a little distance sat Aunt Ruey, with a quantity of black crape strewed on two chairs about her, very busily employed in getting up a mourning-bonnet, at which she snipped, and clipped, and worked, zealously singing, in a high cracked voice, from time to time, certain verses of a funeral psalm.

Miss Roxy and Miss Ruey Toothacre were two brisk old bodies of the feminine gender and singular number, well known in all the region of Harpswell Neck and Middle Bay, and such was their fame that it had even reached the town of Brunswick, eighteen miles away.

They were of that class of females who might be denominated, in the Old Testament language, "cunning women," – that is, gifted with an infinite diversity of practical "faculty," which made them an essential requisite in every family for miles and miles around. It was impossible to say what they could not do: they could make dresses, and make shirts and vests and pantaloons, and cut out boys' jackets, and braid straw, and bleach and trim bonnets, and cook and wash, and iron and mend, could upholster and quilt, could nurse all kinds of sicknesses, and in default of a doctor, who was often miles away, were supposed to be infallible medical oracles. Many a human being had been ushered into life under their auspices, – trotted, chattered in babyhood on their knees, clothed by their handiwork in garments gradually enlarging from year to year, watched by them in the last sickness, and finally arrayed for the long repose by their hands.

These universally useful persons receive among us the title of "aunt" by a sort of general consent, showing the strong ties of relationship which bind them to the whole human family. They are nobody's aunts in particular, but aunts to human nature generally. The idea of restricting their usefulness to any one family, would strike dismay through a whole community. Nobody would be so unprincipled as to think of such a thing as having their services more than a week or two at most. Your country factotum knows better than anybody else how absurd it would be

"To give to a part what was meant for mankind."

Nobody knew very well the ages of these useful sisters. In that cold, clear, severe climate of the North, the roots of human existence are hard to strike; but, if once people do take to living, they come in time to a place where they seem never to grow any older, but can always be found, like last year's mullein stalks, upright, dry, and seedy, warranted to last for any length of time.

Miss Roxy Toothacre, who sits trotting the baby, is a tall, thin, angular woman, with sharp black eyes, and hair once black, but now well streaked with gray. These ravages of time, however, were concealed by an ample mohair frizette of glossy blackness woven on each side into a heap of stiff little curls, which pushed up her cap border in rather a bristling and decisive way. In all her movements and personal habits, even to her tone of voice and manner of speaking, Miss Roxy was vigorous, spicy, and decided. Her mind on all subjects was made up, and she spoke generally as one having authority; and who should, if she should not? Was she not a sort of priestess and sibyl in all the most awful straits and mysteries of life? How many births, and weddings, and deaths had come and gone under her jurisdiction! And amid weeping or rejoicing, was not Miss Roxy still the master-spirit, – consulted, referred to by all? – was not her word law and precedent? Her younger sister, Miss Ruey, a pliant, cozy, easy-to-be-entreated personage, plump and cushiony, revolved around her as a humble satellite. Miss Roxy looked on Miss Ruey as quite a frisky young thing, though under her ample frizette of carrot hair her head might be seen white with the same snow that had powdered that of her sister. Aunt Ruey had a face much resembling the kind of one you

may see, reader, by looking at yourself in the convex side of a silver milk-pitcher. If you try the experiment, this description will need no further amplification.

The two almost always went together, for the variety of talent comprised in their stock could always find employment in the varying wants of a family. While one nursed the sick, the other made clothes for the well; and thus they were always chattering and chatting to each other, like a pair of antiquated house-sparrows, retailing over harmless gossips, and moralizing in that gentle jogtrot which befits serious old women. In fact, they had talked over everything in Nature, and said everything they could think of to each other so often, that the opinions of one were as like those of the other as two sides of a pea-pod. But as often happens in cases of the sort, this was not because the two were in all respects exactly alike, but because the stronger one had mesmerized the weaker into consent.

Miss Roxy was the master-spirit of the two, and, like the great coining machine of a mint, came down with her own sharp, heavy stamp on every opinion her sister put out. She was matter-of-fact, positive, and declarative to the highest degree, while her sister was naturally inclined to the elegiac and the pathetic, indulging herself in sentimental poetry, and keeping a store thereof in her thread-case, which she had cut from the "Christian Mirror." Miss Roxy sometimes, in her brusque way, popped out observations on life and things, with a droll, hard quaintness that took one's breath a little, yet never failed to have a sharp crystallization of truth, – frosty though it were. She was one of those sensible, practical creatures who tear every veil, and lay their fingers on every spot in pure business-like good-will; and if we shiver at them at times, as at the first plunge of a cold bath, we confess to an invigorating power in them after all.

"Well, now," said Miss Roxy, giving a decisive push to the tea-pot, which buried it yet deeper in the embers, "ain't it all a strange kind o' providence that this 'ere little thing is left behind so; and then their callin' on her by such a strange, mournful kind of name, – Mara. I thought sure as could be 'twas Mary, till the minister read the passage from Scriptur'. Seems to me it's kind o' odd. I'd call it Maria, or I'd put an Ann on to it. Mara-ann, now, wouldn't sound so strange."

"It's a Scriptur' name, sister," said Aunt Ruey, "and that ought to be enough for us."

"Well, I don't know," said Aunt Roxy. "Now there was Miss Jones down on Mure P'int called her twins Tiglath-Pileser and Shalmaneser, – Scriptur' names both, but I never liked 'em. The boys used to call 'em, Tiggy and Shally, so no mortal could guess they was Scriptur'."

"Well," said Aunt Ruey, drawing a sigh which caused her plump proportions to be agitated in gentle waves, "'tain't much matter, after all, *what* they call the little thing, for 'tain't 'tall likely it's goin' to live, – cried and worried all night, and kep' a-suckin' my cheek and my night-gown, poor little thing! This 'ere's a baby that won't get along without its mother. What Mis' Pennel's a-goin' to do with it when we is gone, I'm sure I don't know. It comes kind o' hard on old people to be broke o' their rest. If it's goin' to be called home, it's a pity, as I said, it didn't go with its mother" —

"And save the expense of another funeral," said Aunt Roxy. "Now when Mis' Pennel's sister asked her what she was going to do with Naomi's clothes, I couldn't help wonderin' when she said she should keep 'em for the child."

"She had a sight of things, Naomi did," said Aunt Ruey. "Nothin' was never too much for her. I don't believe that Cap'n Pennel ever went to Bath or Portland without havin' it in his mind to bring Naomi somethin'."

"Yes, and she had a faculty of puttin' of 'em on," said Miss Roxy, with a decisive shake of the head. "Naomi was a still girl, but her faculty was uncommon; and I tell you, Ruey, 'tain't everybody hes faculty as hes things."

"The poor Cap'n," said Miss Ruey, "he seemed greatly supported at the funeral, but he's dreadful broke down since. I went into Naomi's room this morning, and there the old man was a-sittin' by her bed, and he had a pair of her shoes in his hand, – you know what a leetle bit of a foot she had. I never saw nothin' look so kind o' solitary as that poor old man did!"

"Well," said Miss Roxy, "she was a master-hand for keepin' things, Naomi was; her drawers is just a sight; she's got all the little presents and things they ever give her since she was a baby, in one drawer. There's a little pair of red shoes there that she had when she wa'n't more'n five year old. You 'member, Ruey, the Cap'n brought 'em over from Portland when we was to the house a-makin' Mis' Pennel's figured black silk that he brought from Calcutty. You 'member they cost just five and sixpence; but, law! the Cap'n he never grudged the money when 'twas for Naomi. And so she's got all her husband's keepsakes and things just as nice as when he give 'em to her."

"It's real affectin'," said Miss Ruey, "I can't all the while help a-thinkin' of the Psalm, —

"So fades the lovely blooming flower, —
Frail, smiling solace of an hour;
So quick our transient comforts fly,
And pleasure only blooms to die."

"Yes," said Miss Roxy; "and, Ruey, I was a-thinkin' whether or no it wa'n't best to pack away them things, 'cause Naomi hadn't fixed no baby drawers, and we seem to want some."

"I was kind o' hintin' that to Mis' Pennel this morning," said Ruey, "but she can't seem to want to have 'em touched."

"Well, we may just as well come to such things first as last," said Aunt Roxy; "'cause if the Lord takes our friends, he does take 'em; and we can't lose 'em and have 'em too, and we may as well give right up at first, and done with it, that they are gone, and we've got to do without 'em, and not to be hangin' on to keep things just as they was."

"So I was a-tellin' Mis' Pennel," said Miss Ruey, "but she'll come to it by and by. I wish the baby might live, and kind o' grow up into her mother's place."

"Well," said Miss Roxy, "I wish it might, but there'd be a sight o' trouble fetchin' on it up. Folks can do pretty well with children when they're young and spry, if they do get 'em up nights; but come to grandchildren, it's pretty tough."

"I'm a-thinkin', sister," said Miss Ruey, taking off her spectacles and rubbing her nose thoughtfully, "whether or no cow's milk ain't goin' to be too hearty for it, it's such a pindlin' little thing. Now, Mis' Badger she brought up a seven-months' child, and she told me she gave it nothin' but these 'ere little seed cookies, wet in water, and it throve nicely, — and the seed is good for wind."

"Oh, don't tell me none of Mis' Badger's stories," said Miss Roxy, "I don't believe in 'em. Cows is the Lord's ordinances for bringing up babies that's lost their mothers; it stands to reason they should be, — and babies that can't eat milk, why they can't be fetched up; but babies can eat milk, and this un will if it lives, and if it can't it won't live." So saying, Miss Roxy drummed away on the little back of the party in question, authoritatively, as if to pound in a wholesome conviction at the outset.

"I hope," said Miss Ruey, holding up a strip of black crape, and looking through it from end to end so as to test its capabilities, "I hope the Cap'n and Mis' Pennel'll get some support at the prayer-meetin' this afternoon."

"It's the right place to go to," said Miss Roxy, with decision.

"Mis' Pennel said this mornin' that she was just beat out tryin' to submit; and the more she said, 'Thy will be done,' the more she didn't seem to feel it."

"Them's common feelin's among mourners, Ruey. These 'ere forty years that I've been round nussin', and layin'-out, and tendin' funerals, I've watched people's exercises. People's sometimes supported wonderfully just at the time, and maybe at the funeral; but the three or four weeks after, most everybody, if they's to say what they feel, is unreconciled."

"The Cap'n, he don't say nothin'," said Miss Ruey.

"No, he don't, but he looks it in his eyes," said Miss Roxy; "he's one of the kind o' mourners as takes it deep; that kind don't cry; it's a kind o' dry, deep pain; them's the worst to get over it, – sometimes they just says nothin', and in about six months they send for you to nuss 'em in consumption or somethin'. Now, Mis' Pennel, she can cry and she can talk, – well, she'll get over it; but *he* won't get no support unless the Lord reaches right down and lifts him up over the world. I've seen that happen sometimes, and I tell you, Ruey, that sort makes powerful Christians."

At that moment the old pair entered the door. Zephaniah Pennel came and stood quietly by the pillow where the little form was laid, and lifted a corner of the blanket. The tiny head was turned to one side, showing the soft, warm cheek, and the little hand was holding tightly a morsel of the flannel blanket. He stood swallowing hard for a few moments. At last he said, with deep humility, to the wise and mighty woman who held her, "I'll tell you what it is, Miss Roxy, I'll give all there is in my old chest yonder if you'll only make her – live."

CHAPTER V THE KITTRIDGES

It did live. The little life, so frail, so unprofitable in every mere material view, so precious in the eyes of love, expanded and flowered at last into fair childhood. Not without much watching and weariness. Many a night the old fisherman walked the floor with the little thing in his arms, talking to it that jargon of tender nonsense which fairies bring as love-gifts to all who tend a cradle. Many a day the good little old grandmother called the aid of gossips about her, trying various experiments of catnip, and sweet fern, and bayberry, and other teas of rustic reputation for baby frailties.

At the end of three years, the two graves in the lonely graveyard were sodded and cemented down by smooth velvet turf, and playing round the door of the brown houses was a slender child, with ways and manners so still and singular as often to remind the neighbors that she was not like other children, – a bud of hope and joy, – but the outcome of a great sorrow, – a pearl washed ashore by a mighty, uprooting tempest. They that looked at her remembered that her father's eye had never beheld her, and her baptismal cup had rested on her mother's coffin.

She was small of stature, beyond the wont of children of her age, and moulded with a fine waxen delicacy that won admiration from all eyes. Her hair was curly and golden, but her eyes were dark like her mother's, and the lids drooped over them in that manner which gives a peculiar expression of dreamy wistfulness. Every one of us must remember eyes that have a strange, peculiar expression of pathos and desire, as if the spirit that looked out of them were pressed with vague remembrances of a past, or but dimly comprehended the mystery of its present life. Even when the baby lay in its cradle, and its dark, inquiring eyes would follow now one object and now another, the gossips would say the child was longing for something, and Miss Roxy would still further venture to predict that that child always would long and never would know exactly what she was after.

That dignitary sits at this minute enthroned in the kitchen corner, looking majestically over the press-board on her knee, where she is pressing the next year's Sunday vest of Zephaniah Pennel. As she makes her heavy tailor's goose squeak on the work, her eyes follow the little delicate fairy form which trips about the kitchen, busily and silently arranging a little grotto of gold and silver shells and seaweed. The child sings to herself as she works in a low chant, like the prattle of a brook, but ever and anon she rests her little arms on a chair and looks through the open kitchen-door far, far off where the horizon line of the blue sea dissolves in the blue sky.

"See that child now, Roxy," said Miss Ruey, who sat stitching beside her; "do look at her eyes. She's as handsome as a pictur', but 't ain't an ordinary look she has neither; she seems a contented little thing; but what makes her eyes always look so kind o' wishful?"

"Wa'n't her mother always a-longin' and a-lookin' to sea, and watchin' the ships, afore she was born?" said Miss Roxy; "and didn't her heart break afore she was born? Babies like that is marked always. They don't know what ails 'em, nor nobody."

"It's her mother she's after," said Miss Ruey.

"The Lord only knows," said Miss Roxy; "but them kind o' children always seem homesick to go back where they come from. They're mostly grave and old-fashioned like this 'un. If they gets past seven years, why they live; but it's always in 'em to long; they don't seem to be really unhappy neither, but if anything's ever the matter with 'em, it seems a great deal easier for 'em to die than to live. Some say it's the mothers longin' after 'em makes 'em feel so, and some say it's them longin' after their mothers; but dear knows, Ruey, what anything is or what makes anything. Children's mysterious, that's my mind."

"Mara, dear," said Miss Ruey, interrupting the child's steady lookout, "what you thinking of?"

"Me want somefin'," said the little one.

"That's what she's always sayin'," said Miss Roxy.

"Me want somebody to pay wis'," continued the little one.

"Want somebody to play with," said old Dame Pennel, as she came in from the back-room with her hands yet floury with kneading bread; "sure enough, she does. Our house stands in such a lonesome place, and there ain't any children. But I never saw such a quiet little thing – always still and always busy."

"I'll take her down with me to Cap'n Kittridge's," said Miss Roxy, "and let her play with their little girl; she'll chirk her up, I'll warrant. She's a regular little witch, Sally is, but she'll chirk her up. It ain't good for children to be so still and old-fashioned; children ought to be children. Sally takes to Mara just 'cause she's so different."

"Well, now, you may," said Dame Pennel; "to be sure *he* can't bear her out of his sight a minute after he comes in; but after all, old folks can't be company for children."

Accordingly, that afternoon, the little Mara was arrayed in a little blue flounced dress, which stood out like a balloon, made by Miss Roxy in first-rate style, from a French fashion-plate; her golden hair was twined in manifold curls by Dame Pennel, who, restricted in her ideas of ornamentation, spared, nevertheless, neither time nor money to enhance the charms of this single ornament to her dwelling. Mara was her picture-gallery, who gave her in the twenty-four hours as many Murillos or Greuzes as a lover of art could desire; and as she tied over the child's golden curls a little flat hat, and saw her go dancing off along the sea-sands, holding to Miss Roxy's bony finger, she felt she had in her what galleries of pictures could not buy.

It was a good mile to the one story, gambrel-roofed cottage where lived Captain Kittridge, – the long, lean, brown man, with his good wife of the great Leghorn bonnet, round, black bead eyes, and psalm-book, whom we told you of at the funeral. The Captain, too, had followed the sea in his early life, but being not, as he expressed it, "very rugged," in time changed his ship for a tight little cottage on the seashore, and devoted himself to boat-building, which he found sufficiently lucrative to furnish his brown cottage with all that his wife's heart desired, besides extra money for knick-knacks when she chose to go up to Brunswick or over to Portland to shop.

The Captain himself was a welcome guest at all the firesides round, being a chatty body, and disposed to make the most of his foreign experiences, in which he took the usual advantages of a traveler. In fact, it was said, whether slanderously or not, that the Captain's yarns were spun to order; and as, when pressed to relate his foreign adventures, he always responded with, "What would you like to hear?" it was thought that he fabricated his article to suit his market. In short, there was no species of experience, finny, fishy, or aquatic, – no legend of strange and unaccountable incident of fire or flood, – no romance of foreign scenery and productions, to which his tongue was not competent, when he had once seated himself in a double bow-knot at a neighbor's evening fireside.

His good wife, a sharp-eyed, literal body, and a vigorous church-member, felt some concern of conscience on the score of these narrations; for, being their constant auditor, she, better than any one else, could perceive the variations and discrepancies of text which showed their mythical character, and oftentimes her black eyes would snap and her knitting-needles rattle with an admonitory vigor as he went on, and sometimes she would unmercifully come in at the end of a narrative with, —

"Well, now, the Cap'n's told them ar stories till he begins to b'lieve 'em himself, I think."

But works of fiction, as we all know, if only well gotten up, have always their advantages in the hearts of listeners over plain, homely truth; and so Captain Kittridge's yarns were marketable fireside commodities still, despite the skepticisms which attended them.

The afternoon sunbeams at this moment are painting the gambrel-roof with a golden brown. It is September again, as it was three years ago when our story commenced, and the sea and sky are purple and amethystine with its Italian haziness of atmosphere.

The brown house stands on a little knoll, about a hundred yards from the open ocean. Behind it rises a ledge of rocks, where cedars and hemlocks make deep shadows into which the sun shoots golden shafts of light, illuminating the scarlet feathers of the sumach, which throw themselves jauntily forth from the crevices; while down below, in deep, damp, mossy recesses, rise ferns which autumn has just begun to tinge with yellow and brown. The little knoll where the cottage stood had on its right hand a tiny bay, where the ocean water made up amid picturesque rocks – shaggy and solemn. Here trees of the primeval forest, grand and lordly, looked down silently into the waters which ebbed and flowed daily into this little pool. Every variety of those beautiful evergreens which feather the coast of Maine, and dip their wings in the very spray of its ocean foam, found here a representative. There were aspiring black spruces, crowned on the very top with heavy coronets of cones; there were balsamic firs, whose young buds breathe the scent of strawberries; there were cedars, black as midnight clouds, and white pines with their swaying plumage of needle-like leaves, strewing the ground beneath with a golden, fragrant matting; and there were the gigantic, wide-winged hemlocks, hundreds of years old, and with long, swaying, gray beards of moss, looking white and ghostly under the deep shadows of their boughs. And beneath, creeping round trunk and matting over stones, were many and many of those wild, beautiful things which embellish the shadows of these northern forests. Long, feathery wreaths of what are called ground-pines ran here and there in little ruffles of green, and the prince's pine raised its oriental feather, with a mimic cone on the top, as if it conceived itself to be a grown-up tree. Whole patches of partridge-berry wove their evergreen matting, dotted plentifully with brilliant scarlet berries. Here and there, the rocks were covered with a curiously inwoven tapestry of moss, overshot with the exquisite vine of the *Linnea borealis*, which in early spring rings its two fairy bells on the end of every spray; while elsewhere the wrinkled leaves of the mayflower wove themselves through and through deep beds of moss, meditating silently thoughts of the thousand little cups of pink shell which they had it in hand to make when the time of miracles should come round next spring.

Nothing, in short, could be more quaintly fresh, wild, and beautiful than the surroundings of this little cove which Captain Kittridge had thought fit to dedicate to his boat-building operations, – where he had set up his tar-kettle between two great rocks above the highest tide-mark, and where, at the present moment, he had a boat upon the stocks.

Mrs. Kittridge, at this hour, was sitting in her clean kitchen, very busily engaged in ripping up a silk dress, which Miss Roxy had engaged to come and make into a new one; and, as she ripped, she cast now and then an eye at the face of a tall, black clock, whose solemn tick-tock was the only sound that could be heard in the kitchen.

By her side, on a low stool, sat a vigorous, healthy girl of six years, whose employment evidently did not please her, for her well-marked black eyebrows were bent in a frown, and her large black eyes looked surly and wrathful, and one versed in children's grievances could easily see what the matter was, – she was turning a sheet! Perhaps, happy young female reader, you don't know what that is, – most likely not; for in these degenerate days the strait and narrow ways of self-denial, formerly thought so wholesome for little feet, are quite grass-grown with neglect. Childhood nowadays is unceasingly fêted and caressed, the principal difficulty of the grown people seeming to be to discover what the little dears want, – a thing not always clear to the little dears themselves. But in old times, turning sheets was thought a most especial and wholesome discipline for young girls; in the first place, because it took off the hands of their betters a very uninteresting and monotonous labor; and in the second place, because it was such a long, straight, unending turnpike, that the youthful travelers, once started thereupon, could go on indefinitely, without requiring guidance and direction of their elders. For these reasons, also, the task was held in special detestation by children in direct proportion to their amount of life, and their ingenuity and love of variety. A dull child took it tolerably well; but to a lively, energetic one, it was a perfect torture.

"I don't see the use of sewing up sheets one side, and ripping up the other," at last said Sally, breaking the monotonous tick-tock of the clock by an observation which has probably occurred to every child in similar circumstances.

"Sally Kittridge, if you say another word about that ar sheet, I'll whip you," was the very explicit rejoinder; and there was a snap of Mrs. Kittridge's black eyes, that seemed to make it likely that she would keep her word. It was answered by another snap from the six-year-old eyes, as Sally comforted herself with thinking that when she was a woman she'd speak her mind out in pay for all this.

At this moment a burst of silvery child-laughter rang out, and there appeared in the doorway, illuminated by the afternoon sunbeams, the vision of Miss Roxy's tall, lank figure, with the little golden-haired, blue-robed fairy, hanging like a gay butterfly upon the tip of a thorn-bush. Sally dropped the sheet and clapped her hands, unnoticed by her mother, who rose to pay her respects to the "cunning woman" of the neighborhood.

"Well, now, Miss Roxy, I was 'mazin' afraid you wer'n't a-comin'. I'd just been an' got my silk ripped up, and didn't know how to get a step farther without you."

"Well, I was finishin' up Cap'n Pennel's best pantaloons," said Miss Roxy; "and I've got 'em along so, Ruey can go on with 'em; and I told Mis' Pennel I must come to you, if 'twas only for a day; and I fetched the little girl down, 'cause the little thing's so kind o' lonesome like. I thought Sally could play with her, and chirk her up a little."

"Well, Sally," said Mrs. Kittridge, "stick in your needle, fold up your sheet, put your thimble in your work-pocket, and then you may take the little Mara down to the cove to play; but be sure you don't let her go near the tar, nor wet her shoes. D'ye hear?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Sally, who had sprung up in light and radiance, like a translated creature, at this unexpected turn of fortune, and performed the welcome orders with a celerity which showed how agreeable they were; and then, stooping and catching the little one in her arms, disappeared through the door, with the golden curls fluttering over her own crow-black hair.

The fact was, that Sally, at that moment, was as happy as human creature could be, with a keenness of happiness that children who have never been made to turn sheets of a bright afternoon can never realize. The sun was yet an hour high, as she saw, by the flash of her shrewd, time-keeping eye, and she could bear her little prize down to the cove, and collect unknown quantities of gold and silver shells, and starfish, and salad-dish shells, and white pebbles for her, besides quantities of well turned shavings, brown and white, from the pile which constantly was falling under her father's joiner's bench, and with which she would make long extemporaneous tresses, so that they might play at being mermaids, like those that she had heard her father tell about in some of his sea-stories.

"Now, raily, Sally, what you got there?" said Captain Kittridge, as he stood in his shirt-sleeves peering over his joiner's bench, to watch the little one whom Sally had dumped down into a nest of clean white shavings. "Wal', wal', I should think you'd a-stolen the big doll I see in a shop-window the last time I was to Portland. So this is Pennel's little girl? – poor child!"

"Yes, father, and we want some nice shavings."

"Stay a bit, I'll make ye a few a-purpose," said the old man, reaching his long, bony arm, with the greatest ease, to the farther part of his bench, and bringing up a board, from which he proceeded to roll off shavings in fine satin rings, which perfectly delighted the hearts of the children, and made them dance with glee; and, truth to say, reader, there are coarser and homelier things in the world than a well turned shaving.

"There, go now," he said, when both of them stood with both hands full; "go now and play; and mind you don't let the baby wet her feet, Sally; them shoes o' hern must have cost five-and-sixpence at the very least."

That sunny hour before sundown seemed as long to Sally as the whole seam of the sheet; for childhood's joys are all pure gold; and as she ran up and down the white sands, shouting at every shell she found, or darted up into the overhanging forest for checkerberries and ground-pine, all the sorrows of the morning came no more into her remembrance.

The little Mara had one of those sensitive, excitable natures, on which every external influence acts with immediate power. Stimulated by the society of her energetic, buoyant little neighbor, she no longer seemed wishful or pensive, but kindled into a perfect flame of wild delight, and gamboled about the shore like a blue and gold-winged fly; while her bursts of laughter made the squirrels and blue jays look out inquisitively from their fastnesses in the old evergreens. Gradually the sunbeams faded from the pines, and the waves of the tide in the little cove came in, solemnly tinted with purple, flaked with orange and crimson, borne in from a great rippling sea of fire, into which the sun had just sunk.

"Mercy on us – them children!" said Miss Roxy.

"*He's* bringin' 'em along," said Mrs. Kittridge, as she looked out of the window and saw the tall, lank form of the Captain, with one child seated on either shoulder, and holding on by his head.

The two children were both in the highest state of excitement, but never was there a more marked contrast of nature. The one seemed a perfect type of well-developed childish health and vigor, good solid flesh and bones, with glowing skin, brilliant eyes, shining teeth, well-knit, supple limbs, – vigorously and healthily beautiful; while the other appeared one of those aerial mixtures of cloud and fire, whose radiance seems scarcely earthly. A physiologist, looking at the child, would shake his head, seeing one of those perilous organizations, all nerve and brain, which come to life under the clear, stimulating skies of America, and, burning with the intensity of lighted phosphorus, waste themselves too early.

The little Mara seemed like a fairy sprite, possessed with a wild spirit of glee. She laughed and clapped her hands incessantly, and when set down on the kitchen-floor spun round like a little elf; and that night it was late and long before her wide, wakeful eyes could be veiled in sleep.

"Company jist sets this 'ere child crazy," said Miss Roxy; "it's jist her lonely way of livin'; a pity Mis' Pennel hadn't another child to keep company along with her."

"Mis' Pennel oughter be trainin' of her up to work," said Mrs. Kittridge. "Sally could oversew and hem when she wa'n't more'n three years old; nothin' straightens out children like work. Mis' Pennel she just keeps that ar child to look at."

"All children ain't alike, Mis' Kittridge," said Miss Roxy, sententiously. "This 'un ain't like your Sally. 'A hen and a bumble-bee can't be fetched up alike, fix it how you will!"

CHAPTER VI GRANDPARENTS

Zephaniah Pennel came back to his house in the evening, after Miss Roxy had taken the little Mara away. He looked for the flowery face and golden hair as he came towards the door, and put his hand in his vest-pocket, where he had deposited a small store of very choice shells and sea curiosities, thinking of the widening of those dark, soft eyes when he should present them.

"Where's Mara?" was the first inquiry after he had crossed the threshold.

"Why, Roxy's been an' taken her down to Cap'n Kittridge's to spend the night," said Miss Ruey. "Roxy's gone to help Mis' Kittridge to turn her spotted gray and black silk. We was talking this mornin' whether 'no 't would turn, 'cause I thought the spot was overshot, and wouldn't make up on the wrong side; but Roxy she says it's one of them ar Calcutty silks that has two sides to 'em, like the one you bought Miss Pennel, that we made up for her, you know;" and Miss Ruey arose and gave a finishing snap to the Sunday pantaloons, which she had been left to "finish off," — which snap said, as plainly as words could say that there was a good job disposed of.

Zephaniah stood looking as helpless as animals of the male kind generally do when appealed to with such prolixity on feminine details; in reply to it all, only he asked meekly, —

"Where's Mary?"

"Mis' Pennel? Why, she's up chamber. She'll be down in a minute, she said; she thought she'd have time afore supper to get to the bottom of the big chist, and see if that 'ere vest pattern ain't there, and them sticks o' twist for the button-holes, 'cause Roxy she says she never see nothin' so rotten as that 'ere twist we've been a-workin' with, that Mis' Pennel got over to Portland; it's a clear cheat, and Mis' Pennel she give more'n half a cent a stick more for 't than what Roxy got for her up to Brunswick; so you see these 'ere Portland stores charge up, and their things want lookin' after."

Here Mrs. Pennel entered the room, "the Captain" addressing her eagerly, —

"How came you to let Aunt Roxy take Mara off so far, and be gone so long?"

"Why, law me, Captain Pennel! the little thing seems kind o' lonesome. Chil'en want chil'en; Miss Roxy says she's altogether too sort o' still and old-fashioned, and must have child's company to chirk her up, and so she took her down to play with Sally Kittridge; there's no manner of danger or harm in it, and she'll be back to-morrow afternoon, and Mara will have a real good time."

"Wal', now, really," said the good man, "but it's 'mazin' lonesome."

"Cap'n Pennel, you're gettin' to make an idol of that 'ere child," said Miss Ruey. "We have to watch our hearts. It minds me of the hymn, —

""The fondness of a creature's love,
How strong it strikes the sense, —
Thither the warm affections move,
Nor can we call them hence.""

Miss Ruey's mode of getting off poetry, in a sort of high-pitched canter, with a strong thump on every accented syllable, might have provoked a smile in more sophisticated society, but Zephaniah listened to her with deep gravity, and answered, —

"I'm 'fraid there's truth in what you say, Aunt Ruey. When her mother was called away, I thought that was a warning I never should forget; but now I seem to be like Jonah, — I'm restin' in the shadow of my gourd, and my heart is glad because of it. I kind o' trembled at the prayer meetin' when we was a-singin', —

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee."

"Yes," said Miss Ruey, "Roxy says if the Lord should take us up short on our prayers, it would make sad work with us sometimes."

"Somehow," said Mrs. Pennel, "it seems to me just her mother over again. She don't look like her. I think her hair and complexion comes from the Badger blood; my mother had that sort o' hair and skin, – but then she has ways like Naomi, – and it seems as if the Lord had kind o' given Naomi back to us; so I hope she's goin' to be spared to us."

Mrs. Pennel had one of those natures – gentle, trustful, and hopeful, because not very deep; she was one of the little children of the world whose faith rests on child-like ignorance, and who know not the deeper needs of deeper natures; such see only the sunshine and forget the storm.

This conversation had been going on to the accompaniment of a clatter of plates and spoons and dishes, and the fizzling of sausages, prefacing the evening meal, to which all now sat down after a lengthened grace from Zephaniah.

"There's a tremendous gale a-brewin'," he said, as they sat at table. "I noticed the clouds to-night as I was comin' home, and somehow I felt kind o' as if I wanted all our folks snug in-doors."

"Why, law, husband, Cap'n Kittridge's house is as good as ours, if it does blow. You never can seem to remember that houses don't run aground or strike on rocks in storms."

"The Cap'n puts me in mind of old Cap'n Jeduth Scranton," said Miss Ruey, "that built that queer house down by Middle Bay. The Cap'n he would insist on havin' on't jist like a ship, and the closet-shelves had holes for the tumblers and dishes, and he had all his tables and chairs battened down, and so when it came a gale, they say the old Cap'n used to sit in his chair and hold on to hear the wind blow."

"Well, I tell you," said Captain, "those that has followed the seas hears the wind with different ears from lands-people. When you lie with only a plank between you and eternity, and hear the voice of the Lord on the waters, it don't sound as it does on shore."

And in truth, as they were speaking, a fitful gust swept by the house, wailing and screaming and rattling the windows, and after it came the heavy, hollow moan of the surf on the beach, like the wild, angry howl of some savage animal just beginning to be lashed into fury.

"Sure enough, the wind is rising," said Miss Ruey, getting up from the table, and flattening her snub nose against the window-pane. "Dear me, how dark it is! Mercy on us, how the waves come in! – all of a sheet of foam. I pity the ships that's comin' on coast such a night."

The storm seemed to have burst out with a sudden fury, as if myriads of howling demons had all at once been loosened in the air. Now they piped and whistled with eldritch screech round the corners of the house – now they thundered down the chimney – and now they shook the door and rattled the casement – and anon mustering their forces with wild ado, seemed to career over the house, and sail high up into the murky air. The dash of the rising tide came with successive crash upon crash like the discharge of heavy artillery, seeming to shake the very house, and the spray borne by the wind dashed whizzing against the window-panes.

Zephaniah, rising from supper, drew up the little stand that had the family Bible on it, and the three old time-worn people sat themselves as seriously down to evening worship as if they had been an extensive congregation. They raised the old psalm-tune which our fathers called "Complaint," and the cracked, wavering voices of the women, with the deep, rough bass of the old sea-captain, rose in the uproar of the storm with a ghostly, strange wildness, like the scream of the curlew or the wailing of the wind: —

"Spare us, O Lord, aloud we pray,
Nor let our sun go down at noon:
Thy years are an eternal day,
And must thy children die so soon!"

Miss Ruey valued herself on singing a certain weird and exalted part which in ancient days used to be called counter, and which wailed and gyrated in unimaginable heights of the scale, much as you may hear a shrill, fine-voiced wind over a chimney-top; but altogether, the deep and earnest gravity with which the three filled up the pauses in the storm with their quaint minor key, had something singularly impressive. When the singing was over, Zephaniah read to the accompaniment of wind and sea, the words of poetry made on old Hebrew shores, in the dim, gray dawn of the world: —

"The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thundereth; the Lord is upon many waters. The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness; the Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh. The Lord sitteth upon the floods, yea, the Lord sitteth King forever. The Lord will give strength to his people; yea, the Lord will bless his people with peace."

How natural and home-born sounded this old piece of Oriental poetry in the ears of the three! The wilderness of Kadesh, with its great cedars, was doubtless Orr's Island, where even now the goodly fellowship of black-winged trees were groaning and swaying, and creaking as the breath of the Lord passed over them.

And the three old people kneeling by their smouldering fireside, amid the general uproar, Zephaniah began in the words of a prayer which Moses the man of God made long ago under the shadows of Egyptian pyramids: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."

We hear sometimes in these days that the Bible is no more inspired of God than many other books of historic and poetic merit. It is a fact, however, that the Bible answers a strange and wholly exceptional purpose by thousands of firesides on all shores of the earth; and, till some other book can be found to do the same thing, it will not be surprising if a belief of its Divine origin be one of the ineffaceable ideas of the popular mind. It will be a long while before a translation from Homer or a chapter in the Koran, or any of the beauties of Shakespeare, will be read in a stormy night on Orr's Island with the same sense of a Divine presence as the Psalms of David, or the prayer of Moses, the man of God.

Boom! boom! "What's that?" said Zephaniah, starting, as they rose up from prayer. "Hark! again, that's a gun, — there's a ship in distress."

"Poor souls," said Miss Ruey; "it's an awful night!"

The captain began to put on his sea-coat.

"You ain't a-goin' out?" said his wife.

"I must go out along the beach a spell, and see if I can hear any more of that ship."

"Mercy on us; the wind'll blow you over!" said Aunt Ruey.

"I rayther think I've stood wind before in my day," said Zephaniah, a grim smile stealing over his weather-beaten cheeks. In fact, the man felt a sort of secret relationship to the storm, as if it were in some manner a family connection — a wild, roystering cousin, who drew him out by a rough attraction of comradeship.

"Well, at any rate," said Mrs. Pennel, producing a large tin lantern perforated with many holes, in which she placed a tallow candle, "take this with you, and don't stay out long."

The kitchen door opened, and the first gust of wind took off the old man's hat and nearly blew him prostrate. He came back and shut the door. "I ought to have known better," he said, knotting

his pocket-handkerchief over his head, after which he waited for a momentary lull, and went out into the storm.

Miss Ruey looked through the window-pane, and saw the light go twinkling far down into the gloom, and ever and anon came the mournful boom of distant guns.

"Certainly there is a ship in trouble somewhere," she said.

"He never can be easy when he hears these guns," said Mrs. Pennel; "but what can he do, or anybody, in such a storm, the wind blowing right on to shore?"

"I shouldn't wonder if Cap'n Kittridge should be out on the beach, too," said Miss Ruey; "but laws, he ain't much more than one of these 'ere old grasshoppers you see after frost comes. Well, any way, there *ain't* much help in man if a ship comes ashore in such a gale as this, such a dark night too."

"It's kind o' lonesome to have poor little Mara away such a night as this is," said Mrs. Pennel; "but who would a-thought it this afternoon, when Aunt Roxy took her?"

"I 'member my grandmother had a silver cream-pitcher that come ashore in a storm on Mare P'int," said Miss Ruey, as she sat trotting her knitting-needles. "Grand'ther found it, half full of sand, under a knot of seaweed way up on the beach. It had a coat of arms on it, – might have belonged to some grand family, that pitcher; in the Toothacre family yet."

"I remember when I was a girl," said Mrs. Pennel, "seeing the hull of a ship that went on Eagle Island; it run way up in a sort of gully between two rocks, and lay there years. They split pieces off it sometimes to make fires, when they wanted to make a chowder down on the beach."

"My aunt, Lois Toothacre, that lives down by Middle Bay," said Miss Ruey, "used to tell about a dreadful blow they had once in time of the equinoctial storm; and what was remarkable, she insisted that she heard a baby cryin' out in the storm, – she heard it just as plain as could be."

"Laws a-mercy," said Mrs. Pennel, nervously, "it was nothing but the wind, – it always screeches like a child crying; or maybe it was the seals; seals will cry just like babes."

"So they told her; but no, – she insisted she knew the difference, – it *was* a baby. Well, what do you think, when the storm cleared off, they found a baby's cradle washed ashore sure enough!"

"But they didn't find any baby," said Mrs. Pennel, nervously.

"No; they searched the beach far and near, and that cradle was all they found. Aunt Lois took it in – it was a very good cradle, and she took it to use, but every time there came up a gale, that ar cradle would rock, rock, jist as if somebody was a-sittin' by it; and you could stand across the room and see there wa'n't nobody there."

"You make me all of a shiver," said Mrs. Pennel.

This, of course, was just what Miss Ruey intended, and she went on: —

"Wal', you see they kind o' got used to it; they found there wa'n't no harm come of its rockin', and so they didn't mind; but Aunt Lois had a sister Cerinthy that was a weakly girl, and had the janders. Cerinthy was one of the sort that's born with veils over their faces, and can see sperits; and one time Cerinthy was a-visitin' Lois after her second baby was born, and there came up a blow, and Cerinthy comes out of the keepin'-room, where the cradle was a-standin', and says, 'Sister,' says she, 'who's that woman sittin' rockin' the cradle?' and Aunt Lois says she, 'Why, there ain't nobody. That ar cradle always will rock in a gale, but I've got used to it, and don't mind it.' 'Well,' says Cerinthy, 'jist as true as you live, I just saw a woman with a silk gown on, and long black hair a-hangin' down, and her face was pale as a sheet, sittin' rockin' that ar cradle, and she looked round at me with her great black eyes kind o' mournful and wishful, and then she stooped down over the cradle.' 'Well,' says Lois, 'I ain't goin' to have no such doin's in my house,' and she went right in and took up the baby, and the very next day she jist had the cradle split up for kindlin'; and that night, if you'll believe, when they was a-burnin' of it, they heard, jist as plain as could be, a baby scream, scream, screamin' round the house; but after that they never heard it no more."

"I don't like such stories," said Dame Pennel, "'specially to-night, when Mara's away. I shall get to hearing all sorts of noises in the wind. I wonder when Cap'n Pennel will be back."

And the good woman put more wood on the fire, and as the tongues of flame streamed up high and clear, she approached her face to the window-pane and started back with half a scream, as a pale, anxious visage with sad dark eyes seemed to approach her. It took a moment or two for her to discover that she had seen only the reflection of her own anxious, excited face, the pitchy blackness without having converted the window into a sort of dark mirror.

Miss Ruey meanwhile began solacing herself by singing, in her chimney-corner, a very favorite sacred melody, which contrasted oddly enough with the driving storm and howling sea: —

"Haste, my beloved, haste away,
Cut short the hours of thy delay;
Fly like the bounding hart or roe,
Over the hills where spices grow."

The tune was called "Invitation," — one of those profusely florid in runs, and trills, and quavers, which delighted the ears of a former generation; and Miss Ruey, innocently unconscious of the effect of old age on her voice, ran them up and down, and out and in, in a way that would have made a laugh, had there been anybody there to notice or to laugh.

"I remember singin' that ar to Mary Jane Wilson the very night she died," said Aunt Ruey, stopping. "She wanted me to sing to her, and it was jist between two and three in the mornin'; there was jist the least red streak of daylight, and I opened the window and sat there and sung, and when I come to 'over the hills where spices grow,' I looked round and there was a change in Mary Jane, and I went to the bed, and says she very bright, 'Aunt Ruey, the Beloved has come,' and she was gone afore I could raise her up on her pillow. I always think of Mary Jane at them words; if ever there was a broken-hearted crittur took home, it was her."

At this moment Mrs. Pennel caught sight through the window of the gleam of the returning lantern, and in a moment Captain Pennel entered, dripping with rain and spray.

"Why, Cap'n! you're e'en a'most drowned," said Aunt Ruey.

"How long have you been gone? You must have been a great ways," said Mrs. Pennel.

"Yes, I have been down to Cap'n Kittridge's. I met Kittridge out on the beach. We heard the guns plain enough, but couldn't see anything. I went on down to Kittridge's to get a look at little Mara."

"Well, she's all well enough?" said Mrs. Pennel, anxiously.

"Oh, yes, well enough. Miss Roxy showed her to me in the trundle-bed, 'long with Sally. The little thing was lying smiling in her sleep, with her cheek right up against Sally's. I took comfort looking at her. I couldn't help thinking: 'So he giveth his beloved sleep!'"

CHAPTER VII FROM THE SEA

During the night and storm, the little Mara had lain sleeping as quietly as if the cruel sea, that had made her an orphan from her birth, were her kind-tempered old grandfather singing her to sleep, as he often did, – with a somewhat hoarse voice truly, but with ever an undertone of protecting love. But toward daybreak, there came very clear and bright into her childish mind a dream, having that vivid distinctness which often characterizes the dreams of early childhood.

She thought she saw before her the little cove where she and Sally had been playing the day before, with its broad sparkling white beach of sand curving round its blue sea-mirror, and studded thickly with gold and silver shells. She saw the boat of Captain Kittridge upon the stocks, and his tar-kettle with the smouldering fires flickering under it; but, as often happens in dreams, a certain rainbow vividness and clearness invested everything, and she and Sally were jumping for joy at the beautiful things they found on the beach.

Suddenly, there stood before them a woman, dressed in a long white garment. She was very pale, with sweet, serious dark eyes, and she led by the hand a black-eyed boy, who seemed to be crying and looking about as for something lost. She dreamed that she stood still, and the woman came toward her, looking at her with sweet, sad eyes, till the child seemed to feel them in every fibre of her frame. The woman laid her hand on her head as if in blessing, and then put the boy's hand in hers, and said, "Take him, Mara, he is a playmate for you;" and with that the little boy's face flashed out into a merry laugh. The woman faded away, and the three children remained playing together, gathering shells and pebbles of a wonderful brightness. So vivid was this vision, that the little one awoke laughing with pleasure, and searched under her pillows for the strange and beautiful things that she had been gathering in dreamland.

"What's Mara looking after?" said Sally, sitting up in her trundle-bed, and speaking in the patronizing motherly tone she commonly used to her little playmate.

"All gone, pitty boy – all gone!" said the child, looking round regretfully, and shaking her golden head; "pitty lady all gone!"

"How queer she talks!" said Sally, who had awakened with the project of building a sheet-house with her fairy neighbor, and was beginning to loosen the upper sheet and dispose the pillows with a view to this species of architecture. "Come, Mara, let's make a pretty house!" she said.

"Pitty boy out dere – out dere!" said the little one, pointing to the window, with a deeper expression than ever of wishfulness in her eyes.

"Come, Sally Kittridge, get up this minute!" said the voice of her mother, entering the door at this moment; "and here, put these clothes on to Mara, the child mustn't run round in her best; it's strange, now, Mary Pennel never thinks of such things."

Sally, who was of an efficient temperament, was preparing energetically to second these commands of her mother, and endue her little neighbor with a coarse brown stuff dress, somewhat faded and patched, which she herself had outgrown when of Mara's age; with shoes, which had been coarsely made to begin with, and very much battered by time; but, quite to her surprise, the child, generally so passive and tractable, opposed a most unexpected and desperate resistance to this operation. She began to cry and to sob and shake her curly head, throwing her tiny hands out in a wild species of freakish opposition, which had, notwithstanding, a quaint and singular grace about it, while she stated her objections in all the little English at her command.

"Mara don't want – Mara want pitty boo des – and *pitty* shoes."

"Why, was ever anything like it?" said Mrs. Kittridge to Miss Roxy, as they both were drawn to the door by the outcry; "here's this child won't have decent every-day clothes put on her, – she

must be kept dressed up like a princess. Now, that ar's French calico!" said Mrs. Kittridge, holding up the controverted blue dress, "and that ar never cost a cent under five-and-sixpence a yard; it takes a yard and a half to make it, and it must have been a good day's work to make it up; call that three-and-sixpence more, and with them pearl buttons and thread and all, that ar dress never cost less than a dollar and seventy-five, and here she's goin' to run out every day in it!"

"Well, well!" said Miss Roxy, who had taken the sobbing fair one in her lap, "you know, Mis' Kittridge, this 'ere's a kind o' pet lamb, an old-folks' darling, and things be with her as they be, and we can't make her over, and she's such a nervous little thing we mustn't cross her." Saying which, she proceeded to dress the child in her own clothes.

"If you had a good large checked apron, I wouldn't mind putting that on her!" added Miss Roxy, after she had arrayed the child.

"Here's one," said Mrs. Kittridge; "that may save her clothes some."

Miss Roxy began to put on the wholesome garment; but, rather to her mortification, the little fairy began to weep again in a most heart-broken manner.

"Don't want che't apon."

"Why don't Mara want nice checked apron?" said Miss Roxy, in that extra cheerful tone by which children are to be made to believe they have mistaken their own mind.

"Don't want it!" with a decided wave of the little hand; "I's too pitty to wear che't apon."

"Well! well!" said Mrs. Kittridge, rolling up her eyes, "did I ever! no, I never did. If there ain't depraved natur' a-comin' out early. Well, if she says she's pretty now, what'll it be when she's fifteen?"

"She'll learn to tell a lie about it by that time," said Miss Roxy, "and say she thinks she's horrid. The child *is* pretty, and the truth comes uppermost with her now."

"Haw! haw! haw!" burst with a great crash from Captain Kittridge, who had come in behind, and stood silently listening during this conversation; "that's musical now; come here, my little maid, you *are* too pretty for checked aprons, and no mistake;" and seizing the child in his long arms, he tossed her up like a butterfly, while her sunny curls shone in the morning light.

"There's one comfort about the child, Miss Kittridge," said Aunt Roxy: "she's one of them that dirt won't stick to. I never knew her to stain or tear her clothes, – she always come in jist so nice."

"She ain't much like Sally, then!" said Mrs. Kittridge. "That girl'll run through more clothes! Only last week she walked the crown out of my old black straw bonnet, and left it hanging on the top of a blackberry-bush."

"Wal', wal'," said Captain Kittridge, "as to dressin' this 'ere child, – why, ef Pennel's a mind to dress her in cloth of gold, it's none of our business! He's rich enough for all he wants to do, and so let's eat our breakfast and mind our own business."

After breakfast Captain Kittridge took the two children down to the cove, to investigate the state of his boat and tar-kettle, set high above the highest tide-mark. The sun had risen gloriously, the sky was of an intense, vivid blue, and only great snowy islands of clouds, lying in silver banks on the horizon, showed vestiges of last night's storm. The whole wide sea was one glorious scene of forming and dissolving mountains of blue and purple, breaking at the crest into brilliant silver. All round the island the waves were constantly leaping and springing into jets and columns of brilliant foam, throwing themselves high up, in silvery cataracts, into the very arms of the solemn evergreen forests which overhung the shore.

The sands of the little cove seemed harder and whiter than ever, and were thickly bestrewn with the shells and seaweed which the upturnings of the night had brought in. There lay what might have been fringes and fragments of sea-gods' vestures, – blue, crimson, purple, and orange seaweeds, wreathed in tangled ropes of kelp and sea-grass, or lying separately scattered on the sands. The children ran wildly, shouting as they began gathering sea-treasures; and Sally, with the

air of an experienced hand in the business, untwisted the coils of rosy seaweed, from which every moment she disengaged some new treasure, in some rarer shell or smoother pebble.

Suddenly, the child shook out something from a knotted mass of sea-grass, which she held up with a perfect shriek of delight. It was a bracelet of hair, fastened by a brilliant clasp of green, sparkling stones, such as she had never seen before. She redoubled her cries of delight, as she saw it sparkle between her and the sun, calling upon her father.

"Father! father! do come here, and see what I've found!"

He came quickly, and took the bracelet from the child's hand; but, at the same moment, looking over her head, he caught sight of an object partially concealed behind a projecting rock. He took a step forward, and uttered an exclamation, —

"Well, well! sure enough! poor things!"

There lay, bedded in sand and seaweed, a woman with a little boy clasped in her arms! Both had been carefully lashed to a spar, but the child was held to the bosom of the woman, with a pressure closer than any knot that mortal hands could tie. Both were deep sunk in the sand, into which had streamed the woman's long, dark hair, which sparkled with glittering morsels of sand and pebbles, and with those tiny, brilliant, yellow shells which are so numerous on that shore.

The woman was both young and beautiful. The forehead, damp with ocean-spray, was like sculptured marble, — the eyebrows dark and decided in their outline; but the long, heavy, black fringes had shut down, as a solemn curtain, over all the history of mortal joy or sorrow that those eyes had looked upon. A wedding-ring gleamed on the marble hand; but the sea had divorced all human ties, and taken her as a bride to itself. And, in truth, it seemed to have made to her a worthy bed, for she was all folded and inwreathed in sand and shells and seaweeds, and a great, weird-looking leaf of kelp, some yards in length, lay twined around her like a shroud. The child that lay in her bosom had hair, and face, and eyelashes like her own, and his little hands were holding tightly a portion of the black dress which she wore.

"Cold, — cold, — stone dead!" was the muttered exclamation of the old seaman, as he bent over the woman.

"She must have struck her head there," he mused, as he laid his finger on a dark, bruised spot on her temple. He laid his hand on the child's heart, and put one finger under the arm to see if there was any lingering vital heat, and then hastily cut the lashings that bound the pair to the spar, and with difficulty disengaged the child from the cold clasp in which dying love had bound him to a heart which should beat no more with mortal joy or sorrow.

Sally, after the first moment, had run screaming toward the house, with all a child's forward eagerness, to be the bearer of news; but the little Mara stood, looking anxiously, with a wishful earnestness of face.

"Pitty boy, — pitty boy, — come!" she said often; but the old man was so busy, he scarcely regarded her.

"Now, Cap'n Kittridge, do tell!" said Miss Roxy, meeting him in all haste, with a cap-border stiff in air, while Dame Kittridge exclaimed, —

"Now, you don't! Well, well! didn't I say that was a ship last night? And what a solemnizing thought it was that souls might be goin' into eternity!"

"We must have blankets and hot bottles, right away," said Miss Roxy, who always took the earthly view of matters, and who was, in her own person, a personified humane society. "Miss Kittridge, you jist dip out your dishwater into the smallest tub, and we'll put him in. Stand away, Mara! Sally, you take her out of the way! We'll fetch this child to, perhaps. I've fetched 'em to, when they's seemed to be dead as door-nails!"

"Cap'n Kittridge, you're sure the woman's dead?"

"Laws, yes; she had a blow right on her temple here. There's no bringing her to till the resurrection."

"Well, then, you jist go and get Cap'n Pennel to come down and help you, and get the body into the house, and we'll attend to layin' it out by and by. Tell Ruey to come down."

Aunt Roxy issued her orders with all the military vigor and precision of a general in case of a sudden attack. It was her habit. Sickness and death were her opportunities; where they were, she felt herself at home, and she addressed herself to the task before her with undoubting faith.

Before many hours a pair of large, dark eyes slowly emerged from under the black-fringed lids of the little drowned boy, – they rolled dreamily round for a moment, and dropped again in heavy languor.

The little Mara had, with the quiet persistence which formed a trait in her baby character, dragged stools and chairs to the back of the bed, which she at last succeeded in scaling, and sat opposite to where the child lay, grave and still, watching with intense earnestness the process that was going on. At the moment when the eyes had opened, she stretched forth her little arms, and said, eagerly, "Pitty boy, come," – and then, as they closed again, she dropped her hands with a sigh of disappointment. Yet, before night, the little stranger sat up in bed, and laughed with pleasure at the treasures of shells and pebbles which the children spread out on the bed before him.

He was a vigorous, well-made, handsome child, with brilliant eyes and teeth, but the few words that he spoke were in a language unknown to most present. Captain Kittridge declared it to be Spanish, and that a call which he most passionately and often repeated was for his mother. But he was of that happy age when sorrow can be easily effaced, and the efforts of the children called forth joyous smiles. When his playthings did not go to his liking, he showed sparkles of a fiery, irascible spirit.

The little Mara seemed to appropriate him in feminine fashion, as a chosen idol and graven image. She gave him at once all her slender stock of infantine treasures, and seemed to watch with an ecstatic devotion his every movement, – often repeating, as she looked delightedly around, "Pitty boy, come."

She had no words to explain the strange dream of the morning; it lay in her, struggling for expression, and giving her an interest in the new-comer as in something belonging to herself. Whence it came, – whence come multitudes like it, which spring up as strange, enchanted flowers, every now and then in the dull, material pathway of life, – who knows? It may be that our present faculties have among them a rudimentary one, like the germs of wings in the chrysalis, by which the spiritual world becomes sometimes an object of perception; there may be natures in which the walls of the material are so fine and translucent that the spiritual is seen through them as through a glass darkly. It may be, too, that the love which is stronger than death has a power sometimes to make itself heard and felt through the walls of our mortality, when it would plead for the defenseless ones it has left behind. All these things *may* be, – who knows?

"There," said Miss Roxy, coming out of the keeping-room at sunset; "I wouldn't ask to see a better-lookin' corpse. That ar woman was a sight to behold this morning. I guess I shook a double handful of stones and them little shells out of her hair, – now she reely looks beautiful. Captain Kittridge has made a coffin out o' some cedar-boards he happened to have, and I lined it with bleached cotton, and stuffed the pillow nice and full, and when we come to get her in, she reely will look lovely."

"I s'pose, Mis' Kittridge, you'll have the funeral to-morrow, – it's Sunday."

"Why, yes, Aunt Roxy, – I think everybody must want to improve such a dispensation. Have you took little Mara in to look at the corpse?"

"Well, no," said Miss Roxy; "Mis' Pennel's gettin' ready to take her home."

"I think it's an opportunity we ought to improve," said Mrs. Kittridge, "to learn children what death is. I think we can't begin to solemnize their minds too young."

At this moment Sally and the little Mara entered the room.

"Come here, children," said Mrs. Kittridge, taking a hand of either one, and leading them to the closed door of the keeping-room; "I've got somethin' to show you."

The room looked ghostly and dim, – the rays of light fell through the closed shutter on an object mysteriously muffled in a white sheet.

Sally's bright face expressed only the vague curiosity of a child to see something new; but the little Mara resisted and hung back with all her force, so that Mrs. Kittridge was obliged to take her up and hold her.

She folded back the sheet from the chill and wintry form which lay so icily, lonely, and cold. Sally walked around it, and gratified her curiosity by seeing it from every point of view, and laying her warm, busy hand on the lifeless and cold one; but Mara clung to Mrs. Kittridge, with eyes that expressed a distressed astonishment. The good woman stooped over and placed the child's little hand for a moment on the icy forehead. The little one gave a piercing scream, and struggled to get away; and as soon as she was put down, she ran and hid her face in Aunt Roxy's dress, sobbing bitterly.

"That child'll grow up to follow vanity," said Mrs. Kittridge; "her little head is full of dress now, and she hates anything serious, – it's easy to see that."

The little Mara had no words to tell what a strange, distressful chill had passed up her arm and through her brain, as she felt that icy cold of death, – that cold so different from all others. It was an impression of fear and pain that lasted weeks and months, so that she would start out of sleep and cry with a terror which she had not yet a sufficiency of language to describe.

"You seem to forget, Mis' Kittridge, that this 'ere child ain't rugged like our Sally," said Aunt Roxy, as she raised the little Mara in her arms. "She was a seven-months' baby, and hard to raise at all, and a shivery, scary little creature."

"Well, then, she ought to be hardened," said Dame Kittridge. "But Mary Pennel never had no sort of idea of bringin' up children; 'twas jist so with Naomi, – the girl never had no sort o' resolution, and she just died for want o' resolution, – that's what came of it. I tell ye, children's got to learn to take the world as it is; and 'tain't no use bringin' on 'em up too tender. Teach 'em to begin as they've got to go out, – that's my maxim."

"Mis' Kittridge," said Aunt Roxy, "there's reason in all things, and there's difference in children. 'What's one's meat's another's pison.' You couldn't fetch up Mis' Pennel's children, and she couldn't fetch up your'n, – so let's say no more 'bout it."

"I'm always a-tellin' my wife that ar," said Captain Kittridge; "she's always wantin' to make everybody over after her pattern."

"Cap'n Kittridge, I don't think *you* need to speak," resumed his wife. "When such a loud providence is a-knockin' at *your* door, I think you'd better be a-searchin' your own heart, – here it is the eleventh hour, and you hain't come into the Lord's vineyard yet."

"Oh! come, come, Mis' Kittridge, don't twit a feller afore folks," said the Captain. "I'm goin' over to Harpswell Neck this blessed minute after the minister to 'tend the funeral, – so we'll let *him* preach."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN

Life on any shore is a dull affair, – ever degenerating into commonplace; and this may account for the eagerness with which even a great calamity is sometimes accepted in a neighborhood, as affording wherewithal to stir the deeper feelings of our nature. Thus, though Mrs. Kittridge was by no means a hard-hearted woman, and would not for the world have had a ship wrecked on her particular account, yet since a ship had been wrecked and a body floated ashore at her very door, as it were, it afforded her no inconsiderable satisfaction to dwell on the details and to arrange for the funeral.

It was something to talk about and to think of, and likely to furnish subject-matter for talk for years to come when she should go out to tea with any of her acquaintances who lived at Middle Bay, or Maquoit, or Harpswell Neck. For although in those days, – the number of light-houses being much smaller than it is now, – it was no uncommon thing for ships to be driven on shore in storms, yet this incident had undeniably more that was stirring and romantic in it than any within the memory of any tea-table gossip in the vicinity. Mrs. Kittridge, therefore, looked forward to the funeral services on Sunday afternoon as to a species of solemn fête, which imparted a sort of consequence to her dwelling and herself. Notice of it was to be given out in "meeting" after service, and she might expect both keeping-room and kitchen to be full. Mrs. Pennel had offered to do her share of Christian and neighborly kindness, in taking home to her own dwelling the little boy. In fact, it became necessary to do so in order to appease the feelings of the little Mara, who clung to the new acquisition with most devoted fondness, and wept bitterly when he was separated from her even for a few moments. Therefore, in the afternoon of the day when the body was found, Mrs. Pennel, who had come down to assist, went back in company with Aunt Ruey and the two children.

The September evening set in brisk and chill, and the cheerful fire that snapped and roared up the ample chimney of Captain Kittridge's kitchen was a pleasing feature. The days of our story were before the advent of those sullen gnomes, the "air-tights," or even those more sociable and cheery domestic genii, the cooking-stoves. They were the days of the genial open kitchen-fire, with the crane, the pot-hooks, and trammels, – where hissed and boiled the social tea-kettle, where steamed the huge dinner-pot, in whose ample depths beets, carrots, potatoes, and turnips boiled in jolly sociability with the pork or corned beef which they were destined to flank at the coming meal.

On the present evening, Miss Roxy sat bolt upright, as was her wont, in one corner of the fireplace, with her spectacles on her nose, and an unwonted show of candles on the little stand beside her, having resumed the task of the silk dress which had been for a season interrupted. Mrs. Kittridge, with her spectacles also mounted, was carefully and warily "running-up breadths," stopping every few minutes to examine her work, and to inquire submissively of Miss Roxy if "it will do?"

Captain Kittridge sat in the other corner busily whittling on a little boat which he was shaping to please Sally, who sat on a low stool by his side with her knitting, evidently more intent on what her father was producing than on the evening task of "ten bouts," which her mother exacted before she could freely give her mind to anything on her own account. As Sally was rigorously sent to bed exactly at eight o'clock, it became her to be diligent if she wished to do anything for her own amusement before that hour.

And in the next room, cold and still, was lying that faded image of youth and beauty which the sea had so strangely given up. Without a name, without a history, without a single accompaniment from which her past could even be surmised, – there she lay, sealed in eternal silence.

"It's strange," said Captain Kittridge, as he whittled away, – "it's very strange we don't find anything more of that ar ship. I've been all up and down the beach a-lookin'. There was a spar and some broken bits of boards and timbers come ashore down on the beach, but nothin' to speak of."

"It won't be known till the sea gives up its dead," said Miss Roxy, shaking her head solemnly, "and there'll be a great givin' up then, I'm a-thinkin'."

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Kittridge, with an emphatic nod.

"Father," said Sally, "how many, many things there must be at the bottom of the sea, – so many ships are sunk with all their fine things on board. Why don't people contrive some way to go down and get them?"

"They do, child," said Captain Kittridge; "they have diving-bells, and men go down in 'em with caps over their faces, and long tubes to get the air through, and they walk about on the bottom of the ocean."

"Did you ever go down in one, father?"

"Why, yes, child, to be sure; and strange enough it was, to be sure. There you could see great big sea critters, with ever so many eyes and long arms, swimming right up to catch you, and all you could do would be to muddy the water on the bottom, so they couldn't see you."

"I never heard of that, Cap'n Kittridge," said his wife, drawing herself up with a reproving coolness.

"Wal', Mis' Kittridge, you hain't heard of everything that ever happened," said the Captain, imperturbably, "though you *do* know a sight."

"And how does the bottom of the ocean look, father?" said Sally.

"Laws, child, why trees and bushes grow there, just as they do on land; and great plants, – blue and purple and green and yellow, and lots of great pearls lie round. I've seen 'em big as chippin'-birds' eggs."

"Cap'n Kittridge!" said his wife.

"I have, and big as robins' eggs, too, but them was off the coast of Ceylon and Malabar, and way round the Equator," said the Captain, prudently resolved to throw his romance to a sufficient distance.

"It's a pity you didn't get a few of them pearls," said his wife, with an indignant appearance of scorn.

"I did get lots on 'em, and traded 'em off to the Nabobs in the interior for Cashmere shawls and India silks and sich," said the Captain, composedly; "and brought 'em home and sold 'em at a good figure, too."

"Oh, father!" said Sally, earnestly, "I wish you had saved just one or two for us."

"Laws, child, I wish now I had," said the Captain, good-naturedly. "Why, when I was in India, I went up to Lucknow, and Benares, and round, and saw all the Nabobs and Biggums, – why, they don't make no more of gold and silver and precious stones than we do of the shells we find on the beach. Why, I've seen one of them fellers with a diamond in his turban as big as my fist."

"Cap'n Kittridge, what are you telling?" said his wife once more.

"Fact, – as big as my fist," said the Captain, obdurately; "and all the clothes he wore was jist a stiff crust of pearls and precious stones. I tell you, he looked like something in the Revelations, – a real New Jerusalem look he had."

"I call that ar talk wicked, Cap'n Kittridge, usin' Scriptur' that ar way," said his wife.

"Why, don't it tell about all sorts of gold and precious stones in the Revelations?" said the Captain; "that's all I meant. Them ar countries off in Asia ain't like our'n, – stands to reason they shouldn't be; them's Scripture countries, and everything is different there."

"Father, didn't you ever get any of those splendid things?" said Sally.

"Laws, yes, child. Why, I had a great green ring, an emerald, that one of the princes giv' me, and ever so many pearls and diamonds. I used to go with 'em rattlin' loose in my vest pocket. I

was young and gay in them days, and thought of bringin' of 'em home for the gals, but somehow I always got opportunities for swappin' of 'em off for goods and sich. That ar shawl your mother keeps in her camfire chist was what I got for one on 'em."

"Well, well," said Mrs. Kittridge, "there's never any catchin' you, 'cause you've been where we haven't."

"You've caught me once, and that ought'r do," said the Captain, with unruffled good-nature. "I tell you, Sally, your mother was the handsomest gal in Harpswell in them days."

"I should think you was too old for such nonsense, Cap'n," said Mrs. Kittridge, with a toss of her head, and a voice that sounded far less inexorable than her former admonition. In fact, though the old Captain was as unmanageable under his wife's fireside *régime* as any brisk old cricket that skipped and sang around the hearth, and though he hopped over all moral boundaries with a cheerful alertness of conscience that was quite discouraging, still there was no resisting the spell of his inexhaustible good-nature.

By this time he had finished the little boat, and to Sally's great delight, began sailing it for her in a pail of water.

"I wonder," said Mrs. Kittridge, "what's to be done with that ar child. I suppose the selectmen will take care on't; it'll be brought up by the town."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Miss Roxy, "if Cap'n Pennel should adopt it."

"You don't think so," said Mrs. Kittridge. "'Twould be taking a great care and expense on their hands at their time of life."

"I wouldn't want no better fun than to bring up that little shaver," said Captain Kittridge; "he's a bright un, I promise you."

"You, Cap'n Kittridge! I wonder you can talk so," said his wife. "It's an awful responsibility, and I wonder you don't think whether or no you're fit for it."

"Why, down here on the shore, I'd as lives undertake a boy as a Newfoundland pup," said the Captain. "Plenty in the sea to eat, drink, and wear. That ar young un may be the staff of their old age yet."

"You see," said Miss Roxy, "I think they'll adopt it to be company for little Mara; they're bound up in her, and the little thing pines bein' alone."

"Well, they make a real graven image of that ar child," said Mrs. Kittridge, "and fairly bow down to her and worship her."

"Well, it's natural," said Miss Roxy. "Besides, the little thing is cunnin'; she's about the cunnin'est little crittur that I ever saw, and has such enticin' ways."

The fact was, as the reader may perceive, that Miss Roxy had been thawed into an unusual attachment for the little Mara, and this affection was beginning to spread a warming element though her whole being. It was as if a rough granite rock had suddenly awakened to a passionate consciousness of the beauty of some fluttering white anemone that nestled in its cleft, and felt warm thrills running through all its veins at every tender motion and shadow. A word spoken against the little one seemed to rouse her combativeness. Nor did Dame Kittridge bear the child the slightest ill-will, but she was one of those naturally care-taking people whom Providence seems to design to perform the picket duties for the rest of society, and who, therefore, challenge everybody and everything to stand and give an account of themselves. Miss Roxy herself belonged to this class, but sometimes found herself so stoutly overhauled by the guns of Mrs. Kittridge's battery, that she could only stand modestly on the defensive.

One of Mrs. Kittridge's favorite hobbies was education, or, as she phrased it, the "fetchin' up" of children, which she held should be performed to the letter of the old stiff rule. In this manner she had already trained up six sons, who were all following their fortunes upon the seas, and, on this account, she had no small conceit of her abilities; and when she thought she discerned a lamb

being left to frisk heedlessly out of bounds, her zeal was stirred to bring it under proper sheepfold regulations.

"Come, Sally, it's eight o'clock," said the good woman.

Sally's dark brows lowered over her large, black eyes, and she gave an appealing look to her father.

"Law, mother, let the child sit up a quarter of an hour later, jist for once."

"Cap'n Kittridge, if I was to hear to you, there'd never be no rule in this house. Sally, you go 'long this minute, and be sure you put your knittin' away in its place."

The Captain gave a humorous nod of submissive good-nature to his daughter as she went out. In fact, putting Sally to bed was taking away his plaything, and leaving him nothing to do but study faces in the coals, or watch the fleeting sparks which chased each other in flocks up the sooty back of the chimney.

It was Saturday night, and the morrow was Sunday, – never a very pleasant prospect to the poor Captain, who, having, unfortunately, no spiritual tastes, found it very difficult to get through the day in compliance with his wife's views of propriety, for he, alas! soared no higher in his aims.

"I b'lieve, on the hull, Polly, I'll go to bed, too," said he, suddenly starting up.

"Well, father, your clean shirt is in the right-hand corner of the upper drawer, and your Sunday clothes on the back of the chair by the bed."

The fact was that the Captain promised himself the pleasure of a long conversation with Sally, who nestled in the trundle-bed under the paternal couch, to whom he could relate long, many-colored yarns, without the danger of interruption from her mother's sharp, truth-seeking voice.

A moralist might, perhaps, be puzzled exactly what account to make of the Captain's disposition to romancing and embroidery. In all real, matter-of-fact transactions, as between man and man, his word was as good as another's, and he was held to be honest and just in his dealings. It was only when he mounted the stilts of foreign travel that his paces became so enormous. Perhaps, after all, a rude poetic and artistic faculty possessed the man. He might have been a humbler phase of the "mute, inglorious Milton." Perhaps his narrations required the privileges and allowances due to the inventive arts generally. Certain it was that, in common with other artists, he required an atmosphere of sympathy and confidence in which to develop himself fully; and, when left alone with children, his mind ran such riot, that the bounds between the real and unreal became foggier than the banks of Newfoundland.

The two women sat up, and the night wore on apace, while they kept together that customary vigil which it was thought necessary to hold over the lifeless casket from which an immortal jewel had recently been withdrawn.

"I re'lly did hope," said Mrs. Kittridge, mournfully, "that this 'ere solemn Providence would have been sent home to the Cap'n's mind; but he seems jist as light and triflin' as ever."

"There don't nobody see these 'ere things unless they's effectually called," said Miss Roxy, "and the Cap'n's time ain't come."

"It's gettin' to be t'ward the eleventh hour," said Mrs. Kittridge, "as I was a-tellin' him this afternoon."

"Well," said Miss Roxy, "you know

"While the lamp holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return."

"Yes, I know that," said Mrs. Kittridge, rising and taking up the candle. "Don't you think, Aunt Roxy, we may as well give a look in there at the corpse?"

It was past midnight as they went together into the keeping-room. All was so still that the clash of the rising tide and the ticking of the clock assumed that solemn and mournful distinctness which even tones less impressive take on in the night-watches. Miss Roxy went mechanically

through with certain arrangements of the white drapery around the cold sleeper, and uncovering the face and bust for a moment, looked critically at the still, unconscious countenance.

"Not one thing to let us know who or what she is," she said; "that boy, if he lives, would give a good deal to know, some day."

"What is it one's duty to do about this bracelet?" said Mrs. Kittridge, taking from a drawer the article in question, which had been found on the beach in the morning.

"Well, I s'pose it belongs to the child, whatever it's worth," said Miss Roxy.

"Then if the Pennells conclude to take him, I may as well give it to them," said Mrs. Kittridge, laying it back in the drawer.

Miss Roxy folded the cloth back over the face, and the two went out into the kitchen. The fire had sunk low – the crickets were chirruping gleefully. Mrs. Kittridge added more wood, and put on the tea-kettle that their watching might be refreshed by the aid of its talkative and inspiring beverage. The two solemn, hard-visaged women drew up to each other by the fire, and insensibly their very voices assumed a tone of drowsy and confidential mystery.

"If this 'ere poor woman was hopefully pious, and could see what was goin' on here," said Mrs. Kittridge, "it would seem to be a comfort to her that her child has fallen into such good hands. It seems a'most a pity she couldn't know it."

"How do you know she don't?" said Miss Roxy, brusquely.

"Why, you know the hymn," said Mrs. Kittridge, quoting those somewhat saddusaical lines from the popular psalm-book: —

""The living know that they must die,
But all the dead forgotten lie —
*Their memory and their senses gone,
Alike unknowing and unknown.*""

"Well, I don't know 'bout that," said Miss Roxy, flavoring her cup of tea; "hymn-book ain't Scriptur', and I'm pretty sure that ar ain't true always;" and she nodded her head as if she could say more if she chose.

Now Miss Roxy's reputation of vast experience in all the facts relating to those last fateful hours, which are the only certain event in every human existence, caused her to be regarded as a sort of Delphic oracle in such matters, and therefore Mrs. Kittridge, not without a share of the latent superstition to which each human heart must confess at some hours, drew confidentially near to Miss Roxy, and asked if she had anything particular on her mind.

"Well, Mis' Kittridge," said Miss Roxy, "I ain't one of the sort as likes to make a talk of what I've seen, but mebbe if I was, I've seen some things *as* remarkable as anybody. I tell you, Mis' Kittridge, folks don't tend the sick and dyin' bed year in and out, at all hours, day and night, and not see some remarkable things; that's my opinion."

"Well, Miss Roxy, did you ever see a sperit?"

"I won't say as I have, and I won't say as I haven't," said Miss Roxy; "only as I have seen some remarkable things."

There was a pause, in which Mrs. Kittridge stirred her tea, looking intensely curious, while the old kitchen-clock seemed to tick with one of those fits of loud insistence which seem to take clocks at times when all is still, as if they had something that they were getting ready to say pretty soon, if nobody else spoke.

But Miss Roxy evidently had something to say, and so she began: —

"Mis' Kittridge, this 'ere's a very particular subject to be talkin' of. I've had opportunities to observe that most haven't, and I don't care if I jist say to you, that I'm pretty sure spirits that has left the body do come to their friends sometimes."

The clock ticked with still more *empressement*, and Mrs. Kittridge glared through the horn bows of her glasses with eyes of eager curiosity.

"Now, you remember Cap'n Titcomb's wife, that died fifteen years ago when her husband had gone to Archangel; and you remember that he took her son John out with him – and of all her boys, John was the one she was particular sot on."

"Yes, and John died at Archangel; I remember that."

"Jes' so," said Miss Roxy, laying her hand on Mrs. Kittridge's; "he died at Archangel the very day his mother died, and jist the hour, for the Cap'n had it down in his log-book."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, I do. Well, now," said Miss Roxy, sinking her voice, "this 'ere was remarkable. Mis' Titcomb was one of the fearful sort, tho' one of the best women that ever lived. Our minister used to call her 'Mis' Muchafraid' – you know, in the 'Pilgrim's Progress' – but he was satisfied with her evidences, and told her so; she used to say she was 'afraid of the dark valley,' and she told our minister so when he went out, that ar last day he called; and his last words, as he stood with his hand on the knob of the door, was 'Mis' Titcomb, the Lord will find ways to bring you thro' the dark valley.' Well, she sunk away about three o'clock in the morning. I remember the time, 'cause the Cap'n's chronometer watch that he left with her lay on the stand for her to take her drops by. I heard her kind o' restless, and I went up, and I saw she was struck with death, and she looked sort o' anxious and distressed."

"Oh, Aunt Roxy," says she, 'it's so dark, who will go with me?' and in a minute her whole face brightened up, and says she, 'John is going with me,' and she jist gave the least little sigh and never breathed no more – she jist died as easy as a bird. I told our minister of it next morning, and he asked if I'd made a note of the hour, and I told him I had, and says he, 'You did right, Aunt Roxy.'"

"What did he seem to think of it?"

"Well, he didn't seem inclined to speak freely. 'Miss Roxy,' says he, 'all natur's in the Lord's hands, and there's no saying why he uses this or that; them that's strong enough to go by faith, he lets 'em, but there's no saying what he won't do for the weak ones.'"

"Wa'n't the Cap'n overcome when you told him?" said Mrs. Kittridge.

"Indeed he was; he was jist as white as a sheet."

Miss Roxy now proceeded to pour out another cup of tea, and having mixed and flavored it, she looked in a weird and sibylline manner across it, and inquired, —

"Mis' Kittridge, do you remember that ar Mr. Wadkins that come to Brunswick twenty years ago, in President Averill's days?"

"Yes, I remember the pale, thin, long-nosed gentleman that used to sit in President Averill's pew at church. Nobody knew who he was, or where he came from. The college students used to call him Thaddeus of Warsaw. Nobody knew who he was but the President, 'cause he could speak all the foreign tongues – one about as well as another; but the President he knew his story, and said he was a good man, and he used to stay to the sacrament regular, I remember."

"Yes," said Miss Roxy, "he used to live in a room all alone, and keep himself. Folks said he was quite a gentleman, too, and fond of reading."

"I heard Cap'n Atkins tell," said Mrs. Kittridge, "how they came to take him up on the shores of Holland. You see, when he was somewhere in a port in Denmark, some men come to him and offered him a pretty good sum of money if he'd be at such a place on the coast of Holland on such a day, and take whoever should come. So the Cap'n he went, and sure enough on that day there come a troop of men on horseback down to the beach with this man, and they all bid him good-by, and seemed to make much of him, but he never told 'em nothin' on board ship, only he seemed kind o' sad and pinin'."

"Well," said Miss Roxy, "Ruey and I we took care o' that man in his last sickness, and we watched with him the night he died, and there was something quite remarkable."

"Do tell now," said Mrs. Kittridge.

"Well, you see," said Miss Roxy, "he'd been low and poorly all day, kind o' tossin' and restless, and a little light-headed, and the Doctor said he thought he wouldn't last till morning, and so Ruey and I we set up with him, and between twelve and one Ruey said she thought she'd jist lop down a few minutes on the old sofa at the foot of the bed, and I made me a cup of tea like as I'm a-doin' now, and set with my back to him."

"Well?" said Mrs. Kittridge, eagerly.

"Well, you see he kept a-tossin' and throwin' off the clothes, and I kept a-gettin' up to straighten 'em; and once he threw out his arms, and something bright fell out on to the pillow, and I went and looked, and it was a likeness that he wore by a ribbon round his neck. It was a woman – a real handsome one – and she had on a low-necked black dress, of the cut they used to call Marie Louise, and she had a string of pearls round her neck, and her hair curled with pearls in it, and very wide blue eyes. Well, you see, I didn't look but a minute before he seemed to wake up, and he caught at it and hid it in his clothes. Well, I went and sat down, and I grew kind o' sleepy over the fire; but pretty soon I heard him speak out very clear, and kind o' surprised, in a tongue I didn't understand, and I looked round."

Miss Roxy here made a pause, and put another lump of sugar into her tea.

"Well?" said Mrs. Kittridge, ready to burst with curiosity.

"Well, now, I don't like to tell about these 'ere things, and you mustn't never speak about it; but as sure as you live, Polly Kittridge, I see that ar very woman standin' at the back of the bed, right in the partin' of the curtains, jist as she looked in the pictur' – blue eyes and curly hair and pearls on her neck, and black dress."

"What did you do?" said Mrs. Kittridge.

"Do? Why, I jist held my breath and looked, and in a minute it kind o' faded away, and I got up and went to the bed, but the man was gone. He lay there with the pleasantest smile on his face that ever you see; and I woke up Ruey, and told her about it."

Mrs. Kittridge drew a long breath. "What do you think it was?"

"Well," said Miss Roxy, "I know what I think, but I don't think best to tell. I told Doctor Meritts, and he said there were more things in heaven and earth than folks knew about – and so I think."

Meanwhile, on this same evening, the little Mara frisked like a household fairy round the hearth of Zephaniah Pennel.

The boy was a strong-limbed, merry-hearted little urchin, and did full justice to the abundant hospitalities of Mrs. Pennel's tea-table; and after supper little Mara employed herself in bringing apronful after apronful of her choicest treasures, and laying them down at his feet. His great black eyes flashed with pleasure, and he gamboled about the hearth with his new playmate in perfect forgetfulness, apparently, of all the past night of fear and anguish.

When the great family Bible was brought out for prayers, and little Mara composed herself on a low stool by her grandmother's side, he, however, did not conduct himself as a babe of grace. He resisted all Miss Ruey's efforts to make him sit down beside her, and stood staring with his great, black, irreverent eyes during the Bible-reading, and laughed out in the most inappropriate manner when the psalm-singing began, and seemed disposed to mingle incoherent remarks of his own even in the prayers.

"This is a pretty self-willed youngster," said Miss Ruey, as they rose from the exercises, "and I shouldn't think he'd been used to religious privileges."

"Perhaps not," said Zephaniah Pennel; "but who can say but what this providence is a message of the Lord to us – such as Pharaoh's daughter sent about Moses, 'Take this child, and bring him up for me?'"

"I'd like to take him, if I thought I was capable," said Mrs. Pennel, timidly. "It seems a real providence to give Mara some company; the poor child pines so for want of it."

"Well, then, Mary, if you say so, we will bring him up with our little Mara," said Zephaniah, drawing the child toward him. "May the Lord bless him!" he added, laying his great brown hands on the shining black curls of the child.

CHAPTER IX

MOSES

Sunday morning rose clear and bright on Harpswell Bay. The whole sea was a waveless, blue looking-glass, streaked with bands of white, and flecked with sailing cloud-shadows from the skies above. Orr's Island, with its blue-black spruces, its silver firs, its golden larches, its scarlet sumachs, lay on the bosom of the deep like a great many-colored gem on an enchanted mirror. A vague, dreamlike sense of rest and Sabbath stillness seemed to brood in the air. The very spruce-trees seemed to know that it was Sunday, and to point solemnly upward with their dusky fingers; and the small tide-waves that chased each other up on the shelly beach, or broke against projecting rocks, seemed to do it with a chastened decorum, as if each blue-haired wave whispered to his brother, "Be still – be still."

Yes, Sunday it was along all the beautiful shores of Maine – netted in green and azure by its thousand islands, all glorious with their majestic pines, all musical and silvery with the caresses of the sea-waves, that loved to wander and lose themselves in their numberless shelly coves and tiny beaches among their cedar shadows.

Not merely as a burdensome restraint, or a weary endurance, came the shadow of that Puritan Sabbath. It brought with it all the sweetness that belongs to rest, all the sacredness that hallows home, all the memories of patient thrift, of sober order, of chastened yet intense family feeling, of calmness, purity, and self-respecting dignity which distinguish the Puritan household. It seemed a solemn pause in all the sights and sounds of earth. And he whose moral nature was not yet enough developed to fill the blank with visions of heaven was yet wholesomely instructed by his weariness into the secret of his own spiritual poverty.

Zephaniah Pennel, in his best Sunday clothes, with his hard visage glowing with a sort of interior tenderness, ministered this morning at his family-altar – one of those thousand priests of God's ordaining that tend the sacred fire in as many families of New England. He had risen with the morning star and been forth to meditate, and came in with his mind softened and glowing. The trance-like calm of earth and sea found a solemn answer with him, as he read what a poet wrote by the sea-shores of the Mediterranean, ages ago: "Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honor and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind. The trees of the Lord are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted; where the birds make their nests; as for the stork, the fir-trees are her house. O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all."

Ages ago the cedars that the poet saw have rotted into dust, and from their cones have risen generations of others, wide-winged and grand. But the words of that poet have been wafted like seed to our days, and sprung up in flowers of trust and faith in a thousand households.

"Well, now," said Miss Ruey, when the morning rite was over, "Mis' Pennel, I s'pose you and the Cap'n will be wantin' to go to the meetin', so don't you gin yourse'ves a mite of trouble about the children, for I'll stay at home with 'em. The little feller was starty and fretful in his sleep last night, and didn't seem to be quite well."

"No wonder, poor dear," said Mrs. Pennel; "it's a wonder children can forget as they do."

"Yes," said Miss Ruey; "you know them lines in the 'English Reader,' —

'Gay hope is theirs by fancy led,
Least pleasing when possessed;

The tear forgot as soon as shed,
The sunshine of the breast.'

Them lines all'ys seemed to me affectin'."

Miss Ruey's sentiment was here interrupted by a loud cry from the bedroom, and something between a sneeze and a howl.

"Massy! what is that ar young un up to!" she exclaimed, rushing into the adjoining bedroom.

There stood the young Master Hopeful of our story, with streaming eyes and much-bedaubed face, having just, after much labor, succeeded in making Miss Ruey's snuff-box fly open, which he did with such force as to send the contents in a perfect cloud into eyes, nose, and mouth. The scene of struggling and confusion that ensued cannot be described. The washings, and wipings, and sobbings, and exhortings, and the sympathetic sobs of the little Mara, formed a small tempest for the time being that was rather appalling.

"Well, this 'ere's a youngster that's a-goin' to make work," said Miss Ruey, when all things were tolerably restored. "Seems to make himself at home first thing."

"Poor little dear," said Mrs. Pennel, in the excess of loving-kindness, "I hope he will; he's welcome, I'm sure."

"Not to my snuff-box," said Miss Ruey, who had felt herself attacked in a very tender point.

"He's got the notion of lookin' into things pretty early," said Captain Pennel, with an indulgent smile.

"Well, Aunt Ruey," said Mrs. Pennel, when this disturbance was somewhat abated, "I feel kind o' sorry to deprive you of your privileges to-day."

"Oh! never mind me," said Miss Ruey, briskly. "I've got the big Bible, and I can sing a hymn or two by myself. My voice ain't quite what it used to be, but then I get a good deal of pleasure out of it." Aunt Ruey, it must be known, had in her youth been one of the foremost leaders in the "singers' seats," and now was in the habit of speaking of herself much as a retired *prima donna* might, whose past successes were yet in the minds of her generation.

After giving a look out of the window, to see that the children were within sight, she opened the big Bible at the story of the ten plagues of Egypt, and adjusting her horn spectacles with a sort of sideways twist on her little pug nose, she seemed intent on her Sunday duties. A moment after she looked up and said, "I don't know but I must send a message by you over to Mis' Deacon Badger, about a worldly matter, if 'tis Sunday; but I've been thinkin', Mis' Pennel, that there'll have to be clothes made up for this 'ere child next week, and so perhaps Roxy and I had better stop here a day or two longer, and you tell Mis' Badger that we'll come to her a Wednesday, and so she'll have time to have that new press-board done, – the old one used to pester me so."

"Well, I'll remember," said Mrs. Pennel.

"It seems a'most impossible to prevent one's thoughts wanderin' Sundays," said Aunt Ruey; "but I couldn't help a-thinkin' I could get such a nice pair o' trousers out of them old Sunday ones of the Cap'n's in the garret. I was a-lookin' at 'em last Thursday, and thinkin' what a pity 'twas you hadn't nobody to cut down for; but this 'ere young un's going to be such a tearer, he'll want somethin' real stout; but I'll try and put it out of my mind till Monday. Mis' Pennel, you'll be sure to ask Mis' Titcomb how Harriet's toothache is, and whether them drops cured her that I gin her last Sunday; and ef you'll jist look in a minute at Major Broad's, and tell 'em to use bayberry wax for his blister, it's so healin'; and do jist ask if Sally's baby's eye-tooth has come through yet."

"Well, Aunt Ruey, I'll try to remember all," said Mrs. Pennel, as she stood at the glass in her bedroom, carefully adjusting the respectable black silk shawl over her shoulders, and tying her neat bonnet-strings.

"I s'pose," said Aunt Ruey, "that the notice of the funeral'll be gin out after sermon."

"Yes, I think so," said Mrs. Pennel.

"It's another loud call," said Miss Ruey, "and I hope it will turn the young people from their thoughts of dress and vanity, – there's Mary Jane Sanborn was all took up with gettin' feathers and velvet for her fall bonnet. I don't think I shall get no bonnet this year till snow comes. My bonnet's respectable enough, – don't you think so?"

"Certainly, Aunt Ruey, it looks very well."

"Well, I'll have the pork and beans and brown-bread all hot on table agin you come back," said Miss Ruey, "and then after dinner we'll all go down to the funeral together. Mis' Pennel, there's one thing on my mind, – what you goin' to call this 'ere boy?"

"Father and I've been thinkin' that over," said Mrs. Pennel.

"Wouldn't think of giv'n him the Cap'n's name?" said Aunt Ruey.

"He must have a name of his own," said Captain Pennel. "Come here, sonny," he called to the child, who was playing just beside the door.

The child lowered his head, shook down his long black curls, and looked through them as elfishly as a Skye terrier, but showed no inclination to come.

"One thing he hasn't learned, evidently," said Captain Pennel, "and that is to mind."

"Here!" he said, turning to the boy with a little of the tone he had used of old on the quarter-deck, and taking his small hand firmly.

The child surrendered, and let the good man lift him on his knee and stroke aside the clustering curls; the boy then looked fixedly at him with his great gloomy black eyes, his little firm-set mouth and bridled chin, – a perfect little miniature of proud manliness.

"What's your name, little boy?"

The great eyes continued looking in the same solemn quiet.

"Law, he don't understand a word," said Zephaniah, putting his hand kindly on the child's head; "our tongue is all strange to him. Kittridge says he's a Spanish child; may be from the West Indies; but nobody knows, – we never shall know his name."

"Well, I dare say it was some Popish nonsense or other," said Aunt Ruey; "and now he's come to a land of Christian privileges, we ought to give him a good Scripture name, and start him well in the world."

"Let's call him Moses," said Zephaniah, "because we drew him out of the water."

"Now, did I ever!" said Miss Ruey; "there's something in the Bible to fit everything, ain't there?"

"I like Moses, because I had a brother of that name," said Mrs. Pennel.

The child had slid down from his protector's knee, and stood looking from one to the other gravely while this discussion was going on. What change of destiny was then going on for him in this simple formula of adoption, none could tell; but, surely, never orphan stranded on a foreign shore found home with hearts more true and loving.

"Well, wife, I suppose we must be goin'," said Zephaniah.

About a stone's throw from the open door, the little fishing-craft lay courtesying daintily on the small tide-waves that came licking up the white pebbly shore. Mrs. Pennel seated herself in the end of the boat, and a pretty placid picture she was, with her smooth, parted hair, her modest, cool, drab bonnet, and her bright hazel eyes, in which was the Sabbath calm of a loving and tender heart. Zephaniah loosed the sail, and the two children stood on the beach and saw them go off. A pleasant little wind carried them away, and back on the breeze came the sound of Zephaniah's Sunday-morning psalm: —

"Lord, in the morning thou shalt hear
My voice ascending high;
To thee will I direct my prayer,
To thee lift up mine eye.

"Unto thy house will I resort.
To taste thy mercies there;
I will frequent thy holy court,
And worship in thy fear."

The surface of the glassy bay was dotted here and there with the white sails of other little craft bound for the same point and for the same purpose. It was as pleasant a sight as one might wish to see.

Left in charge of the house, Miss Ruey drew a long breath, took a consoling pinch of snuff, sang "Bridgewater" in an uncommonly high key, and then began reading in the prophecies. With her good head full of the "daughter of Zion" and the house of Israel and Judah, she was recalled to terrestrial things by loud screams from the barn, accompanied by a general flutter and cackling among the hens.

Away plodded the good soul, and opening the barn-door saw the little boy perched on the top of the hay-mow, screaming and shrieking, – his face the picture of dismay, – while poor little Mara's cries came in a more muffled manner from some unexplored lower region. In fact, she was found to have slipped through a hole in the hay-mow into the nest of a very domestic sitting-hen, whose clamors at the invasion of her family privacy added no little to the general confusion.

The little princess, whose nicety as to her dress and sensitiveness as to anything unpleasant about her pretty person we have seen, was lifted up streaming with tears and broken eggs, but otherwise not seriously injured, having fallen on the very substantial substratum of hay which Dame Poulet had selected as the foundation of her domestic hopes.

"Well, now, did I ever!" said Miss Ruey, when she had ascertained that no bones were broken; "if that ar young un isn't a limb! I declare for't I pity Mis' Pennel, – she don't know what she's undertook. How upon 'arth the critter managed to get Mara on to the hay, I'm sure I can't tell, – that ar little thing never got into no such scrapes before."

Far from seeming impressed with any wholesome remorse of conscience, the little culprit frowned fierce defiance at Miss Ruey, when, after having repaired the damages of little Mara's toilet, she essayed the good old plan of shutting him into the closet. He fought and struggled so fiercely that Aunt Ruey's carroty frissette came off in the skirmish, and her head-gear, always rather original, assumed an aspect verging on the supernatural. Miss Ruey thought of Philistines and Moabites, and all the other terrible people she had been reading about that morning, and came as near getting into a passion with the little elf as so good-humored and Christian an old body could possibly do. Human virtue is frail, and every one has some vulnerable point. The old Roman senator could not control himself when his beard was invaded, and the like sensitiveness resides in an old woman's cap; and when young master irreverently clawed off her Sunday best, Aunt Ruey, in her confusion of mind, administered a sound cuff on either ear.

Little Mara, who had screamed loudly through the whole scene, now conceiving that her precious new-found treasure was endangered, flew at poor Miss Ruey with both little hands; and throwing her arms round her "boy," as she constantly called him, she drew him backward, and looked defiance at the common enemy. Miss Ruey was dumb-struck.

"I declare for't, I b'lieve he's bewitched her," she said, stupefied, having never seen anything like the martial expression which now gleamed from those soft brown eyes. "Why, Mara dear, – putty little Mara."

But Mara was busy wiping away the angry tears that stood on the hot, glowing cheeks of the boy, and offering her little rosebud of a mouth to kiss him, as she stood on tiptoe.

"Poor boy, – no kie, – Mara's boy," she said; "Mara love boy;" and then giving an angry glance at Aunt Ruey, who sat much disheartened and confused, she struck out her little pearly hand, and cried, "Go way, – go way, naughty!"

The child jabbered unintelligibly and earnestly to Mara, and she seemed to have the air of being perfectly satisfied with his view of the case, and both regarded Miss Ruey with frowning looks. Under these peculiar circumstances, the good soul began to bethink her of some mode of compromise, and going to the closet took out a couple of slices of cake, which she offered to the little rebels with pacificatory words.

Mara was appeased at once, and ran to Aunt Ruey; but the boy struck the cake out of her hand, and looked at her with steady defiance. The little one picked it up, and with much chipping and many little feminine manœuvres, at last succeeded in making him taste it, after which appetite got the better of his valorous resolutions, – he ate and was comforted; and after a little time, the three were on the best possible footing. And Miss Ruey having smoothed her hair, and arranged her frisette and cap, began to reflect upon herself as the cause of the whole disturbance. If she had not let them run while she indulged in reading and singing, this would not have happened. So the toilful good soul kept them at her knee for the next hour or two, while they looked through all the pictures in the old family Bible.

The evening of that day witnessed a crowded funeral in the small rooms of Captain Kittridge. Mrs. Kittridge was in her glory. Solemn and lugubrious to the last degree, she supplied in her own proper person the want of the whole corps of mourners, who generally attract sympathy on such occasions. But what drew artless pity from all was the unconscious orphan, who came in, led by Mrs. Pennel by the one hand, and with the little Mara by the other.

The simple rite of baptism administered to the wondering little creature so strongly recalled that other scene three years before, that Mrs. Pennel hid her face in her handkerchief, and Zephaniah's firm hand shook a little as he took the boy to offer him to the rite. The child received the ceremony with a look of grave surprise, put up his hand quickly and wiped the holy drops from his brow, as if they annoyed him; and shrinking back, seized hold of the gown of Mrs. Pennel. His great beauty, and, still more, the air of haughty, defiant firmness with which he regarded the company, drew all eyes, and many were the whispered comments.

"Pennel'll have his hands full with that ar chap," said Captain Kittridge to Miss Roxy.

Mrs. Kittridge darted an admonitory glance at her husband, to remind him that she was looking at him, and immediately he collapsed into solemnity.

The evening sunbeams slanted over the blackberry bushes and mullein stalks of the graveyard, when the lonely voyager was lowered to the rest from which she should not rise till the heavens be no more. As the purple sea at that hour retained no trace of the ships that had furrowed its waves, so of this mortal traveler no trace remained, not even in that infant soul that was to her so passionately dear.

CHAPTER X

THE MINISTER

Mrs. Kittridge's advantages and immunities resulting from the shipwreck were not yet at an end. Not only had one of the most "solemn providences" known within the memory of the neighborhood fallen out at her door, – not only had the most interesting funeral that had occurred for three or four years taken place in her parlor, but she was still further to be distinguished in having the minister to tea after the performances were all over. To this end she had risen early, and taken down her best china tea-cups, which had been marked with her and her husband's joint initials in Canton, and which only came forth on high and solemn occasions. In view of this probable distinction, on Saturday, immediately after the discovery of the calamity, Mrs. Kittridge had found time to rush to her kitchen, and make up a loaf of pound-cake and some doughnuts, that the great occasion which she foresaw might not find her below her reputation as a forehanded housewife.

It was a fine golden hour when the minister and funeral train turned away from the grave. Unlike other funerals, there was no draught on the sympathies in favor of mourners – no wife, or husband, or parent, left a heart in that grave; and so when the rites were all over, they turned with the more cheerfulness back into life, from the contrast of its freshness with those shadows into which, for the hour, they had been gazing.

The Rev. Theophilus Sewell was one of the few ministers who preserved the costume of a former generation, with something of that imposing dignity with which, in earlier times, the habits of the clergy were invested. He was tall and majestic in stature, and carried to advantage the powdered wig and three-cornered hat, the broad-skirted coat, knee-breeches, high shoes, and plated buckles of the ancient costume. There was just a sufficient degree of the formality of olden times to give a certain quaintness to all he said and did. He was a man of a considerable degree of talent, force, and originality, and in fact had been held in his day to be one of the most promising graduates of Harvard University. But, being a good man, he had proposed to himself no higher ambition than to succeed to the pulpit of his father in Harpswell.

His parish included not only a somewhat scattered seafaring population on the mainland, but also the care of several islands. Like many other of the New England clergy of those times, he united in himself numerous different offices for the benefit of the people whom he served. As there was neither lawyer nor physician in the town, he had acquired by his reading, and still more by his experience, enough knowledge in both these departments to enable him to administer to the ordinary wants of a very healthy and peaceable people.

It was said that most of the deeds and legal conveyances in his parish were in his handwriting, and in the medical line his authority was only rivaled by that of Miss Roxy, who claimed a very obvious advantage over him in a certain class of cases, from the fact of her being a woman, which was still further increased by the circumstance that the good man had retained steadfastly his bachelor estate. "So, of course," Miss Roxy used to say, "poor man! what could he know about a woman, you know?"

This state of bachelorhood gave occasion to much surmising; but when spoken to about it, he was accustomed to remark with gallantry, that he should have too much regard for any lady whom he could think of as a wife, to ask her to share his straitened circumstances. His income, indeed, consisted of only about two hundred dollars a year; but upon this he and a very brisk, cheerful maiden sister contrived to keep up a thrifty and comfortable establishment, in which everything appeared to be pervaded by a spirit of quaint cheerfulness.

In fact, the man might be seen to be an original in his way, and all the springs of his life were kept oiled by a quiet humor, which sometimes broke out in playful sparkles, despite the gravity

of the pulpit and the awfulness of the cocked hat. He had a placid way of amusing himself with the quaint and picturesque side of life, as it appeared in all his visitings among a very primitive, yet very shrewd-minded people.

There are those people who possess a peculiar faculty of mingling in the affairs of this life as spectators as well as actors. It does not, of course, suppose any coldness of nature or want of human interest or sympathy – nay, it often exists most completely with people of the tenderest human feeling. It rather seems to be a kind of distinct faculty working harmoniously with all the others; but he who possesses it needs never to be at a loss for interest or amusement; he is always a spectator at a tragedy or comedy, and sees in real life a humor and a pathos beyond anything he can find shadowed in books.

Mr. Sewell sometimes, in his pastoral visitations, took a quiet pleasure in playing upon these simple minds, and amusing himself with the odd harmonies and singular resolutions of chords which started out under his fingers. Surely he had a right to something in addition to his limited salary, and this innocent, unsuspected entertainment helped to make up the balance for his many labors.

His sister was one of the best-hearted and most unsuspicious of the class of female idolaters, and worshiped her brother with the most undoubting faith and devotion – wholly ignorant of the constant amusement she gave him by a thousand little feminine peculiarities, which struck him with a continual sense of oddity. It was infinitely diverting to him to see the solemnity of her interest in his shirts and stockings, and Sunday clothes, and to listen to the subtle distinctions which she would draw between best and second-best, and every-day; to receive her somewhat prolix admonition how he was to demean himself in respect of the wearing of each one; for Miss Emily Sewell was a gentlewoman, and held rigidly to various traditions of gentility which had been handed down in the Sewell family, and which afforded her brother too much quiet amusement to be disturbed. He would not have overthrown one of her quiddities for the world; it would be taking away a part of his capital in existence.

Miss Emily was a trim, genteel little person, with dancing black eyes, and cheeks which had the roses of youth well dried into them. It was easy to see that she had been quite pretty in her days; and her neat figure, her brisk little vivacious ways, her unceasing good-nature and kindness of heart, still made her an object both of admiration and interest in the parish. She was great in drying herbs and preparing recipes; in knitting and sewing, and cutting and contriving; in saving every possible snip and chip either of food or clothing; and no less liberal was she in bestowing advice and aid in the parish, where she moved about with all the sense of consequence which her brother's position warranted.

The fact of his bachelorhood caused his relations to the female part of his flock to be even more shrouded in sacredness and mystery than is commonly the case with the great man of the parish; but Miss Emily delighted to act as interpreter. She was charmed to serve out to the willing ears of his parish from time to time such scraps of information as regarded his life, habits, and opinions as might gratify their ever new curiosity. Instructed by her, all the good wives knew the difference between his very best long silk stocking and his second best, and how carefully the first had to be kept under lock and key, where he could not get at them; for he was understood, good as he was, to have concealed in him all the thriftless and pernicious inconsiderateness of the male nature, ready at any moment to break out into unheard-of improprieties. But the good man submitted himself to Miss Emily's rule, and suffered himself to be led about by her with an air of half whimsical consciousness.

Mrs. Kittridge that day had felt the full delicacy of the compliment when she ascertained by a hasty glance, before the first prayer, that the good man had been brought out to her funeral in all his very best things, not excepting the long silk stockings, for she knew the second-best pair by means of a certain skillful darn which Miss Emily had once shown her, which commemorated

the spot where a hole had been. The absence of this darn struck to Mrs. Kittridge's heart at once as a delicate attention.

"Mis' Simpkins," said Mrs. Kittridge to her pastor, as they were seated at the tea-table, "told me that she wished when you were going home that you would call in to see Mary Jane; she couldn't come out to the funeral on account of a dreffle sore throat. I was tellin' on her to gargle it with blackberry-root tea – don't you think that is a good gargle, Mr. Sewell?"

"Yes, I think it a very good gargle," replied the minister, gravely.

"Ma'sh rosemary is the gargle that I always use," said Miss Roxy; "it cleans out your throat so."

"Marsh rosemary is a very excellent gargle," said Mr. Sewell.

"Why, brother, don't you think that rose leaves and vitriol is a good gargle?" said little Miss Emily; "I always thought that you liked rose leaves and vitriol for a gargle."

"So I do," said the imperturbable Mr. Sewell, drinking his tea with the air of a sphinx.

"Well, now, you'll have to tell which on 'em will be most likely to cure Mary Jane," said Captain Kittridge, "or there'll be a pullin' of caps, I'm thinkin'; or else the poor girl will have to drink them all, which is generally the way."

"There won't any of them cure Mary Jane's throat," said the minister, quietly.

"Why, brother!" "Why, Mr. Sewell!" "Why, you don't!" burst in different tones from each of the women.

"I thought you said that blackberry-root tea was good," said Mrs. Kittridge.

"I understood that you 'proved of ma'sh rosemary," said Miss Roxy, touched in her professional pride.

"And I am sure, brother, that I have heard you say, often and often, that there wasn't a better gargle than rose leaves and vitriol," said Miss Emily.

"You are quite right, ladies, all of you. I think these are all good gargles – excellent ones."

"But I thought you said that they didn't do any good?" said all the ladies in a breath.

"No, they don't – not the least in the world," said Mr. Sewell; "but they are all excellent gargles, and as long as people must have gargles, I think one is about as good as another."

"Now you have got it," said Captain Kittridge.

"Brother, you do say the strangest things," said Miss Emily.

"Well, I must say," said Miss Roxy, "it is a new idea to me, long as I've been nussin', and I nussed through one season of scarlet fever when sometimes there was five died in one house; and if ma'sh rosemary didn't do good then, I should like to know what did."

"So would a good many others," said the minister.

"Law, now, Miss Roxy, you mus'n't mind him. Do you know that I believe he says these sort of things just to hear us talk? Of course he wouldn't think of puttin' his experience against yours."

"But, Mis' Kittridge," said Miss Emily, with a view of summoning a less controverted subject, "what a beautiful little boy that was, and what a striking providence that brought him into such a good family!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Kittridge; "but I'm sure I don't see what Mary Pennel is goin' to do with that boy, for she ain't got no more government than a twisted tow-string."

"Oh, the Cap'n, he'll lend a hand," said Miss Roxy, "it won't be easy gettin' roun' him; Cap'n bears a pretty steady hand when he sets out to drive."

"Well," said Miss Emily, "I do think that bringin' up children is the most awful responsibility, and I always wonder when I hear that any one dares to undertake it."

"It requires a great deal of resolution, certainly," said Mrs. Kittridge; "I'm sure I used to get a'most discouraged when my boys was young: they was a reg'lar set of wild ass's colts," she added, not perceiving the reflection on their paternity.

But the countenance of Mr. Sewell was all aglow with merriment, which did not break into a smile.

"Wal', Mis' Kittridge," said the Captain, "strikes me that you're gettin' pussonal."

"No, I ain't neither," said the literal Mrs. Kittridge, ignorant of the cause of the amusement which she saw around her; "but you wa'n't no help to me, you know; you was always off to sea, and the whole wear and tear on't came on me."

"Well, well, Polly, all's well that ends well; don't you think so, Mr. Sewell?"

"I haven't much experience in these matters," said Mr. Sewell, politely.

"No, indeed, that's what he hasn't, for he never will have a child round the house that he don't turn everything topsy-turvy for them," said Miss Emily.

"But I was going to remark," said Mr. Sewell, "that a friend of mine said once, that the woman that had brought up six boys deserved a seat among the martyrs; and that is rather my opinion."

"Wal', Polly, if you git up there, I hope you'll keep a seat for me."

"Cap'n Kittridge, what levity!" said his wife.

"I didn't begin it, anyhow," said the Captain.

Miss Emily interposed, and led the conversation back to the subject. "What a pity it is," she said, "that this poor child's family can never know anything about him. There may be those who would give all the world to know what has become of him; and when he comes to grow up, how sad he will feel to have no father and mother!"

"Sister," said Mr. Sewell, "you cannot think that a child brought up by Captain Pennel and his wife would ever feel as without father and mother."

"Why, no, brother, to be sure not. There's no doubt he will have everything done for him that a child could. But then it's a loss to lose one's real home."

"It may be a gracious deliverance," said Mr. Sewell – "who knows? We may as well take a cheerful view, and think that some kind wave has drifted the child away from an unfortunate destiny to a family where we are quite sure he will be brought up industriously and soberly, and in the fear of God."

"Well, I never thought of that," said Miss Roxy.

Miss Emily, looking at her brother, saw that he was speaking with a suppressed vehemence, as if some inner fountain of recollection at the moment were disturbed. But Miss Emily knew no more of the deeper parts of her brother's nature than a little bird that dips its beak into the sunny waters of some spring knows of its depths of coldness and shadow.

"Mis' Pennel was a-sayin' to me," said Mrs. Kittridge, "that I should ask you what was to be done about the bracelet they found. We don't know whether 'tis real gold and precious stones, or only glass and pinchbeck. Cap'n Kittridge he thinks it's real; and if 'tis, why then the question is, whether or no to try to sell it, or keep it for the boy agin he grows up. It may help find out who and what he is."

"And why should he want to find out?" said Mr. Sewell. "Why should he not grow up and think himself the son of Captain and Mrs. Pennel? What better lot could a boy be born to?"

"That may be, brother, but it can't be kept from him. Everybody knows how he was found, and you may be sure every bird of the air will tell him, and he'll grow up restless and wanting to know. Mis' Kittridge, have you got the bracelet handy?"

The fact was, little Miss Emily was just dying with curiosity to set her dancing black eyes upon it.

"Here it is," said Mrs. Kittridge, taking it from a drawer.

It was a bracelet of hair, of some curious foreign workmanship. A green enameled serpent, studded thickly with emeralds and with eyes of ruby, was curled around the clasp. A crystal plate covered a wide flat braid of hair, on which the letters "D.M." were curiously embroidered in a

cipher of seed pearls. The whole was in style and workmanship quite different from any jewelry which ordinarily meets one's eye.

But what was remarkable was the expression in Mr. Sewell's face when this bracelet was put into his hand. Miss Emily had risen from table and brought it to him, leaning over him as she did so, and he turned his head a little to hold it in the light from the window, so that only she remarked the sudden expression of blank surprise and startled recognition which fell upon it. He seemed like a man who chokes down an exclamation; and rising hastily, he took the bracelet to the window, and standing with his back to the company, seemed to examine it with the minutest interest. After a few moments he turned and said, in a very composed tone, as if the subject were of no particular interest, —

"It is a singular article, so far as workmanship is concerned. The value of the gems in themselves is not great enough to make it worth while to sell it. It will be worth more as a curiosity than anything else. It will doubtless be an interesting relic to keep for the boy when he grows up."

"Well, Mr. Sewell, you keep it," said Mrs. Kittridge; "the Pennells told me to give it into your care."

"I shall commit it to Emily here; women have a native sympathy with anything in the jewelry line. She'll be sure to lay it up so securely that she won't even know where it is herself."

"Brother!"

"Come, Emily," said Mr. Sewell, "your hens will all go to roost on the wrong perch if you are not at home to see to them; so, if the Captain will set us across to Harpswell, I think we may as well be going."

"Why, what's your hurry?" said Mrs. Kittridge.

"Well," said Mr. Sewell, "firstly, there's the hens; secondly, the pigs; and lastly, the cow. Besides I shouldn't wonder if some of Emily's admirers should call on her this evening, — never any saying when Captain Broad may come in."

"Now, brother, you are too bad," said Miss Emily, as she bustled about her bonnet and shawl. "Now, that's all made up out of whole cloth. Captain Broad called last week a Monday, to talk to you about the pews, and hardly spoke a word to me. You oughtn't to say such things, 'cause it raises reports."

"Ah, well, then, I won't again," said her brother. "I believe, after all, it was Captain Badger that called twice."

"Brother!"

"And left you a basket of apples the second time."

"Brother, you know he only called to get some of my hoarhound for Mehitable's cough."

"Oh, yes, I remember."

"If you don't take care," said Miss Emily, "I'll tell where you call."

"Come, Miss Emily, you must not mind him," said Miss Roxy; "we all know his ways."

And now took place the grand leave-taking, which consisted first of the three women's standing in a knot and all talking at once, as if their very lives depended upon saying everything they could possibly think of before they separated, while Mr. Sewell and Captain Kittridge stood patiently waiting with the resigned air which the male sex commonly assume on such occasions; and when, after two or three "Come, Emily's," the group broke up only to form again on the doorstep, where they were at it harder than ever, and a third occasion of the same sort took place at the bottom of the steps, Mr. Sewell was at last obliged by main force to drag his sister away in the middle of a sentence.

Miss Emily watched her brother shrewdly all the way home, but all traces of any uncommon feeling had passed away; and yet, with the restlessness of female curiosity, she felt quite sure that she had laid hold of the end of some skein of mystery, could she only find skill enough to unwind it.

She took up the bracelet, and held it in the fading evening light, and broke into various observations with regard to the singularity of the workmanship. Her brother seemed entirely absorbed in talking with Captain Kittridge about the brig Anna Maria, which was going to be launched from Pennel's wharf next Wednesday. But she, therefore, internally resolved to lie in wait for the secret in that confidential hour which usually preceded going to bed. Therefore, as soon as she had arrived at their quiet dwelling, she put in operation the most seducing little fire that ever crackled and snapped in a chimney, well knowing that nothing was more calculated to throw light into any hidden or concealed chamber of the soul than that enlivening blaze, which danced so merrily on her well-polished andirons, and made the old chintz sofa and the time-worn furniture so rich in remembrances of family comfort.

She then proceeded to divest her brother of his wig and his dress-coat, and to induct him into the flowing ease of a study-gown, crowning his well-shaven head with a black cap, and placing his slippers before the corner of a sofa nearest the fire. She observed him with satisfaction sliding into his seat, and then she trotted to a closet with a glass door in the corner of the room, and took down an old, quaintly-shaped silver cup, which had been an heirloom in their family, and was the only piece of plate which their modern domestic establishment could boast; and with this, down cellar she tripped, her little heels tapping lightly on each stair, and the hum of a song coming back after her as she sought the cider-barrel. Up again she came, and set the silver cup, with its clear amber contents, down by the fire, and then busied herself in making just the crispest, nicest square of toast to be eaten with it; for Miss Emily had conceived the idea that some little ceremony of this sort was absolutely necessary to do away all possible ill effects from a day's labor, and secure an uninterrupted night's repose. Having done all this, she took her knitting-work, and stationed herself just opposite to her brother.

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