THE LIFE OF NANCY

BY

SARAH ORNE JEWETT

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I.

The wooded hills and pastures of eastern Massachusetts are so close to Boston that from upper windows of the city, looking westward, you can see the tops of pine-trees and orchard-boughs on the high horizon. There is a rustic environment on the landward side; there are old farmhouses at the back of Milton Hill and beyond Belmont which look as unchanged by the besieging suburbs of a great city as if they were forty miles from even its borders. Now and then, in Boston streets, you can see an old farmer in his sleigh or farm wagon as if you saw him in a Berkshire village. He seems neither to look up at the towers nor down at any fashionable citizens, but goes his way alike unconscious of seeing or being seen.

On a certain day a man came driving along Beacon Street, who looked bent in the shoulders, as if his worn fur cap were too heavy for head and shoulders both. This type of the ancient New England farmer in winter twitched the reins occasionally, like an old woman, to urge the steady white horse that plodded along as unmindful of his master's suggestions as of the silver-mounted harnesses that passed them by. Both horse and driver appeared to be conscious of sufficient wisdom, and even worth, for the duties of life; but all this placidity and self-assurance were in sharp contrast to the eager excitement of a pretty, red-cheeked girl who sat at the driver's side. She was as sensitive to every new impression as they were dull. Her face bloomed out of a round white hood in such charming fashion that those who began to smile at an out-of-date equipage were interrupted by a second and stronger instinct, and paid the homage that one must always pay to beauty.

It was a bitter cold morning. The great sleighbells on the horse's shaggy neck jangled along the street, and seemed to still themselves as they came among the group of vehicles that were climbing the long hill by the Common.

As the sleigh passed a clubhouse that stands high on the slope, a young man who stood idly behind one of the large windows made a hurried step forward, and his sober face relaxed into a broad, delighted smile; then he turned quickly, and presently appearing at the outer door, scurried down the long flight of steps to the street, fastening the top buttons of his overcoat by the way. The old sleigh, with its worn buffalo skin hanging unevenly over the back, was only a short distance up the street, but its pursuer found trouble in gaining much upon the steady gait of the white horse. He ran two or three steps now and then, and was almost close enough to speak as he drew near to the pavement by the State House. The pretty girl was looking up with wonder and delight,

but in another moment they went briskly on, and it was not until a long pause had to be made at the blocked crossing of Tremont Street that the chase was ended.

The wonders of a first visit to Boston were happily continued to Miss Nancy Gale in the sudden appearance at her side of a handsome young gentleman. She put out a most cordial and warm hand from her fitch muff, and her acquaintance noticed with pleasure the white knitted mitten that protected it from the weather. He had not yet found time to miss the gloves left behind at the club, but the warm little mitten was very comfortable to his fingers.

"I was just thinking—I hoped I should see you, when I was starting to come in this morning," she said, with an eager look of pleasure; then, growing shy after the unconscious joy of the first moment, "Boston is a pretty big place, isn't it?"

"We all think so," said Tom Aldis with fine candor. "It seems odd to see you here."

"Uncle Ezra, this is Mr. Aldis that I have been telling you about, who was down at our place so long in the fall," explained Nancy, turning to look appealingly at her stern companion. "Mr. Aldis had to remain with a friend who had sprained his ankle. Is Mr. Carew quite well now?" she turned again to ask.

"Oh yes," answered Tom. "I saw him last week; he's in New York this winter. But where are you staying, Nancy?" he asked eagerly, with a hopeful glance at uncle Ezra. "I should like to take you somewhere this afternoon. This is your first visit, isn't it? Couldn't you go to see Rip Van Winkle to-morrow? It's the very best thing there is just now. Jefferson's playing this week."

"Our folks ain't in the habit of attending theatres, sir," said uncle Ezra, checking this innocent plan as effectually as an untracked horse-car was stopping traffic in the narrow street. He looked over his shoulder to see if there were any room to turn, but was disappointed.

Tom Aldis gave a glance, also, and was happily reassured; the street was getting fuller behind them every moment. "I beg you to excuse me, sir," he said gallantly to the old man. "Do you think of anything else that Miss Gale ought to see? There is the Art Museum, if she hasn't been there already; all the pictures and statues and Egyptian things, you know."

There was much deference and courtesy in the young man's behavior to his senior. Uncle Ezra responded by a less suspicious look at him, but seemed to be considering this new proposition before he spoke. Uncle Ezra was evidently of the opinion that while it

might be a misfortune to be an old man, it was a fault to be a young one and good looking where girls were concerned. "Miss Gale's father and mother showed me so much kindness," Tom explained, seizing his moment of advantage, "I should like to be of some use: it may not be convenient for you to come into town again in this cold weather."

"Our folks have plenty to do all the time, that's a fact," acknowledged uncle Ezra less grimly, while Nancy managed to show the light of a very knowing little smile. "I don't know but she'd like to have a city man show her about, anyways. 'T ain't but four miles an' a half out to our place, the way we come, but while this weather holds I don't calculate to get into Boston more 'n once a week. I fetch all my stuff in to the Quincy Market myself, an' I've got to come in day after to-morrow mornin', but not till late, with a barrel o' nice winter pears I've been a-savin'. I can set the barrel right for'ard in the sleigh here, and I do' know but I can fetch Nancy as well as not. But how'd ye get home, Nancy? Could ye walk over to our place from the Milton depot, or couldn't ye?"

"Why, of course I could!" answered his niece, with a joy calmed by discretion.

""T ain't but a mile an' three quarters; 't won't hurt a State 'o Maine girl," said the old man, smiling under his great cap, so that his cold, shrewd eyes suddenly grew blue and boyish. "I know all about ye now, Mr. Aldis; I used to be well acquainted with your grandfather. Much obliged to you. Yes, I'll fetch Nancy. I'll leave her right up there to the Missionary Building, corner o' Somerset Street. She can wait in the bookstore; it's liable to be open early. After I get through business to-day, I'm goin' to leave the hoss, an' let her see Faneuil Hall, an' the market o' course, and I don't know but we shall stop in to the Old South Church; or you can show her that, an' tell her about any other curiosities, if we don't have time."

Nancy looked radiant, and Tom Aldis accepted his trust with satisfaction. At that moment the blockade was over and teams began to move.

"Not if it rains!" said uncle Ezra, speaking distinctly over his shoulder as they started. "Otherwise expect her about eight or a little"—but the last of the sentence was lost.

Nancy looked back and nodded from the tangle to Tom, who stood on the curbstone with his hands in his pockets. Her white hood bobbed out of sight the next moment in School Street behind a great dray.

"Good gracious! eight o'clock!" said Tom, a little daunted, as he walked quickly up the street. As he passed the Missionary Building and the bookstore, he laughed aloud; but as he came near the clubhouse again, in this victorious retreat, he looked up at a window of

one of the pleasant old houses, and then obeyed the beckoning nod of an elderly relative who seemed to have been watching for his return.

"Tom," said she, as he entered the library, "I insist upon it that I am not curious by nature or by habit, but what in the world made you chase that funny old horse and sleigh?"

"A pretty girl," said Tom frankly.

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II.

The second morning after this unexpected interview was sunshiny enough, and as cold as January could make it. Tom Aldis, being young and gay, was apt to keep late hours at this season, and the night before had been the night of a Harvard assembly. He was the kindest-hearted fellow in the world, but it was impossible not to feel a little glum and sleepy as he hurried toward the Missionary Building. The sharp air had urged uncle Ezra's white horse beyond his customary pace, so that the old sleigh was already waiting, and uncle Ezra himself was flapping his chilled arms and tramping to and fro impatiently.

"Cold mornin'!" he said. "She's waitin' for you in there. I wanted to be sure you'd come. Now I'll be off. I've got them pears well covered, but I expect they may be touched. Nancy counted on comin', an' I'd just as soon she'd have a nice time. Her cousin's folks'll see her to the depot," he added as he drove away, and Tom nodded reassuringly from the bookstore door.

Nancy looked up eagerly from beside a counter full of gayly bound books, and gave him a speechless and grateful good-morning.

"I'm getting some presents for the little boys," she informed him. "They're great hands to read. This one's all about birds, for Sam, and I don't know but this Life o' Napoleon'll please Asa as much as anything. When I waked up this morning I felt homesick. I couldn't see anything out o' the window that I knew. I'm a real home body."

"I should like to send the boys a present, myself," said Tom. "What do you think about jack-knives?"

"Asa'd rather have readin' matter; he ain't got the use for a knife that some boys have. Why, you're real good!" said Nancy.

"And your mother,—can't I send her something that she would like?" asked Tom kindly.

"She liked all those things that you and Mr. Carew sent at Christmas time. We had the loveliest time opening the bundles. You oughtn't to think o' doing anything more. I wish you'd help me pick out a nice large-print Bible for grandma; she's always wishing for a large-print Bible, and her eyes fail her a good deal."

Tom Aldis was not very fond of shopping, but this pious errand did not displease him in Nancy's company. A few minutes later, when they went out into the cold street, he felt warm and cheerful, and carried under his arm the flat parcel which held a large-print copy of the Scriptures and the little boys' books. Seeing Nancy again seemed to carry his thoughts back to East Rodney, as if he had been born and brought up there as well as she. The society and scenery of the little coast town were so simple and definite in their elements that one easily acquired a feeling of citizenship; it was like becoming acquainted with a friendly individual. Tom had an intimate knowledge, gained from several weeks' residence, with Nancy's whole world.

The long morning stretched before them like a morning in far Cathay, and they stepped off down the street toward the Old South Church, which had been omitted from uncle Ezra's scheme of entertainment by reason of difficulty in leaving the horse. The discovery that the door would not be open for nearly another hour only involved a longer walk among the city streets, and the asking and answering of many questions about the East Rodney neighbors, and the late autumn hunting and fishing which, with some land interests of his father's, had first drawn Tom to that part of the country. He had known enough of the rest of the world to appreciate the little community of fishermen-farmers, and while his friend Carew was but a complaining captive with a sprained ankle, Tom Aldis entered into the spirit of rural life with great zest; in fact he now remembered some boyish gallantries with a little uneasiness, and looked to Nancy to befriend him. It was easy for a man of twenty-two to arrive at an almost brotherly affection for such a person as Nancy; she was so discreet and so sincerely affectionate.

Nancy looked up at him once or twice as they walked along, and her face glowed with happy pride. "I'd just like to have Addie Porter see me now!" she exclaimed, and gave Tom a straightforward look to which he promptly responded.

"Why?" he asked.

Nancy drew a long breath of relief, and began to smile.

"Oh, nothing," she answered; "only she kept telling me that you wouldn't have much of anything to say to me, if I should happen to meet you anywhere up to Boston. I knew better. I guess you're all right, aren't you, about that?" She spoke with sudden impulse, but there was something in her tone that made Tom blush a little.

"Why, yes," he answered. "What do you mean, Nancy?"

"We won't talk about it now while we're full of seeing things, but I've got something to say by and by," said the girl soberly.

"You're very mysterious," protested Tom, taking the bundle under his other arm, and piloting her carefully across the street.

Nancy said no more. The town was more interesting now that it seemed to have waked up, and her eyes were too busy. Everything proved delightful that day, from the recognition of business signs familiar to her through newspaper advertisements, to the Great Organ, and the thrill which her patriotic heart experienced in a second visit to Faneuil Hall. They found the weather so mild that they pushed on to Charlestown, and went to the top of the monument, which Tom had not done since he was a very small boy. After this they saw what else they could of historic Boston, on the fleetest and lightest of feet, and talked all the way, until they were suddenly astonished to hear the bells in all the steeples ring at noon.

"Oh dear, my nice mornin' 's all gone," said Nancy regretfully. "I never had such a beautiful time in all my life!"

She looked quite beautiful herself as she spoke: her eyes shone with lovely light and feeling, and her cheeks were bright with color like a fresh-bloomed rose, but for the first time that day she was wistful and sorry.

"Oh, you needn't go back yet!" said Tom. "I've nothing in the world to do."

"Uncle Ezra thought I'd better go up to cousin Snow's in Revere Street. I'm afraid she'll be all through dinner, but never mind. They thought I'd better go there on mother's account; it's her cousin, but I never saw her, at least not since I can remember. They won't like it if I don't, you know; it wouldn't be very polite."

"All right," assented Tom with dignity. "I'll take you there at once: perhaps we can catch a car or something."

"I'm ashamed to ask for anything more when you've been so kind," said Nancy, after a few moments of anxious silence. "I don't know that you can think of any good chance, but I'd give a great deal if I could only go somewhere and see some pretty dancing. You know I'm always dreamin' and dreamin' about pretty dancing!" and she looked eagerly at Tom to see what he would say. "It must be goin' on somewhere in Boston," she went on with pleading eyes. "Could you ask somebody? They said at uncle Ezra's that if cousin Abby Snow wanted me to remain until to-morrow it might be just as well to stay; she

used to be so well acquainted with mother. And so I thought—I might get some nice chance to look on."

"To see some dancing," repeated Tom, mindful of his own gay evening the night before, and of others to come, and the general impossibility of Nancy's finding the happiness she sought. He never had been so confronted by social barriers. As for Nancy's dancing at East Rodney, in the schoolhouse hall or in Jacob Parker's new barn, it had been one of the most ideal things he had ever known in his life; it would be hard to find elsewhere such grace as hers. In seaboard towns one often comes upon strange foreign inheritances, and the soul of a Spanish grandmother might still survive in Nancy, as far as her light feet were concerned. She danced like a flower in the wind. She made you feel light of foot yourself, as if you were whirling and blowing and waving through the air; as if you could go out dancing and dancing over the deep blue sea water of the bay, and find floor enough to touch and whirl upon. But Nancy had always seemed to take her gifts for granted; she had the simplicity of genius. "I can't say now, but I am sure to find out," said Tom Aldis definitely. "I'll try to make some sort of plan for you. I wish we could have another dance, ourselves."

"Oh, not now," answered Nancy sensibly. "It's knowing 'most all the people that makes a party pleasant."

"My aunt would have asked you to come to luncheon to-day, but she had to go out of town, and was afraid of not getting back in season. She would like to see you very much. You see, I'm only a bachelor in lodgings, this winter," explained Tom bravely.

"You've been just as good as you could be. I know all about Boston now, almost as if I lived here. I should like to see the inside of one of those big houses," she added softly; "they all look so noble as you go by. I think it was very polite of your aunt; you must thank her, Mr. Aldis." It seemed to Tom as if his companion were building most glorious pleasure out of very commonplace materials. All the morning she had been as gay and busy as a brook.

By the middle of the afternoon he knocked again at cousin Snow's door in Revere Street, and delivered an invitation. Mrs. Annesley, his aunt, and the kindest of women, would take Nancy to an afternoon class at Papanti's, and bring her back afterwards, if cousin Snow were willing to spare her. Tom would wait and drive back with her in the coupe; then he must hurry to Cambridge for a business meeting to which he had been suddenly summoned.

Nancy was radiant when she first appeared, but a few minutes later, as they drove away together, she began to look grave and absent. It was only because she was so sorry to think of parting.

"I am so glad about the dancing class," said Tom. "I never should have thought of that. They are all children, you know; but it's very pretty, and they have all the new dances. I used to think it a horrid penance when I was a small boy."

"I don't know why it is," said Nancy, "but the mere thought of music and dancin' makes me feel happy. I never saw any real good dancin', either, but I can always think what it ought to be. There's nothing so beautiful to me as manners," she added softly, as if she whispered at the shrine of confidence.

"My aunt thinks there are going to be some pretty figure dances to-day," announced Tom in a matter-of-fact way. There was something else than the dancing upon his mind. He thought that he ought to tell Nancy of his engagement,—not that it was quite an engagement yet,—but he could not do it just now. "What was it you were going to tell me this morning? About Addie Porter, wasn't it?" He laughed a little, and then colored deeply. He had been somewhat foolish in his attentions to this young person, the beguiling village belle of East Rodney and the adjacent coasts. She was a pretty creature and a sad flirt, with none of the real beauty and quaint sisterly ways of Nancy. "What was it all about?" he asked again.

Nancy turned away quickly. "That's one thing I wanted to come to Boston for; that's what I want to tell you. She don't really care anything about you. She only wanted to get you away from the other girls. I know for certain that she likes Joe Brown better than anybody, and now she's been going with him almost all winter long. He keeps telling round that they're going to be married in the spring; but I thought if they were, she'd ask me to get some of her best things while I was in Boston. I suppose she's intendin' to play with him a while longer," said Nancy with honest scorn, "just because he loves her well enough to wait. But don't you worry about her, Mr. Aldis!"

"I won't indeed," answered Tom meekly, but with an unexpected feeling of relief as if the unconscious danger had been a real one. Nancy was very serious.

"I'm going home the first of the week," she said as they parted; but the small hand felt colder than usual, and did not return his warm grasp. The light in her eyes had all gone, but Tom's beamed affectionately.

"I never thought of Addie Porter afterward, I'm afraid," he confessed. "What awfully good fun we all had! I should like to go down to East Rodney again some time."

"Oh, shan't you ever come?" cried Nancy, with a thrill in her voice which Tom did not soon forget. He did not know that the young girl's heart was waked, he was so busy with the affairs of his own affections; but true friendship does not grow on every bush, in Boston or East Rodney, and Nancy's voice and farewell look touched something that lay very deep within his heart.

There is a little more to be told of this part of the story. Mrs. Annesley, Tom's aunt, being a woman whose knowledge of human nature and power of sympathy made her a woman of the world rather than of any smaller circle,—Mrs. Annesley was delighted with Nancy's unaffected pleasure and self-forgetful dignity of behavior at the dancing-school. She took her back to the fine house, and they had half an hour together there, and only parted because Nancy was to spend the night with cousin Snow, and another old friend of her mother's was to be asked to tea. Mrs. Annesley asked her to come to see her again, whenever she was in Boston, and Nancy gratefully promised, but she never came. "I'm all through with Boston for this time," she said, with an amused smile, at parting. "I'm what one of our neighbors calls 'all flustered up,'" and she looked eagerly in her new friend's kind eyes for sympathy. "Now that I've seen this beautiful house, and you and Mr. Aldis, and some pretty dancin', I want to go right home where I belong."

Tom Aldis meant to write to Nancy when his engagement came out, but he never did; and he meant to send a long letter to her and her mother two years later, when he and his wife were going abroad for a long time; but he had an inborn hatred of letter-writing, and let that occasion pass also, though when anything made him very sorry or very glad, he had a curious habit of thinking of these East Rodney friends. Before he went to Europe he used to send them magazines now and then, or a roll of illustrated papers; and one day, in a bookstore, he happened to see a fine French book with colored portraits of famous dancers, and sent it by express to Nancy with his best remembrances. But Tom was young and much occupied, the stream of time floated him away from the shore of Maine, not toward it, ten or fifteen years passed by, his brown hair began to grow gray, and he came back from Europe after a while to a new Boston life in which reminiscences of East Rodney seemed very remote indeed.

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III.

One summer afternoon there were two passengers, middle-aged men, on the small steamer James Madison, which attended the comings and goings of the great Boston steamer, and ran hither and yon on errands about Penobscot Bay. She was puffing up a long inlet toward East Rodney Landing, and the two strangers were observing the green shores with great interest. Like nearly the whole stretch of the Maine coast, there was a house on almost every point and headland; but for all this, there were great tracts of untenanted country, dark untouched forests of spruces and firs, and shady coves where there seemed to be deep water and proper moorings. The two passengers were on the watch for landings and lookouts; in short, this lovely, lonely country was being frankly appraised at its probable value for lumbering or for building-lots and its relation to the real estate market. Just now there appeared to be no citizens save crows and herons, the sun was almost down behind some high hills in the west, and the Landing was in sight not very far ahead. "It is nearly twenty years since I came down here before," said the younger of the two men, suddenly giving the conversation a personal turn. "Just after I was out of college, at any rate. My father had bought this point of land with the islands. I think he meant to come and hunt in the autumn, and was misled by false accounts of deer and moose. He sent me down to oversee something or other; I believe he had some surveyors at work, and thought they had better be looked after; so I got my chum Carew to come along, and we found plenty of trout, and had a great time until he gave his ankle a bad sprain."

"What did you do then?" asked the elder man politely, keeping his eyes on the shore.

"I stayed by, of course; I had nothing to do in those days," answered Mr. Aldis. "It was one of those nice old-fashioned country neighborhoods where there was plenty of fun among the younger people,—sailing on moonlight nights, and haycart parties, and dances, and all sorts of things. We used to go to prayer-meeting nine or ten miles off, and sewing societies. I had hard work to get away! We made excuse of Carew's ankle joint as long as we could, but he'd been all right and going everywhere with the rest of us a fortnight before we started. We waited until there was ice alongshore, I remember."

"Daniel R. Carew, was it, of the New York Stock Exchange?" asked the listener. "He strikes you as being a very grave sort of person now; doesn't like it if he finds anybody in his chair at the club, and all that."

"I can stir him up," said Mr. Aldis confidently. "Poor old fellow, he has had a good deal of trouble, one way and another. How the Landing has grown up! Why, it's a good-sized little town!"

"I'm sorry it is so late," he added, after a long look at a farm on the shore which they were passing. "I meant to go to see the people up there," and he pointed to the old farmhouse, dark and low and firm-rooted in the long slope of half-tamed, ledgy fields. Warm thoughts of Nancy filled his heart, as if they had said good-by to each other that cold afternoon in Boston only the winter before. He had not been so eager to see any one for a long time. Such is the triumph of friendship: even love itself without friendship is the victim of chance and time.

When supper was over in the Knox House, the one centre of public entertainment in East Rodney, it was past eight o'clock, and Mr. Aldis felt like a dim copy of Rip Van Winkle, or of the gay Tom Aldis who used to know everybody, and be known of all men as the planner of gayeties. He lighted a cigar as he sat on the front piazza of the hotel, and gave himself up to reflection. There was a long line of lights in the second story of a wooden building opposite, and he was conscious of some sort of public interest and excitement.

"There is going to be a time in the hall," said the landlord, who came hospitably out to join him. "The folks are going to have a dance. The proceeds will be applied to buying a bell for the new schoolhouse. They'd be pleased if you felt like stepping over; there has been a considerable number glad to hear you thought of coming down. I ain't an East Rodney man myself, but I've often heard of your residin' here some years ago. Our folks is makin' the ice cream for the occasion," he added significantly, and Mr. Aldis nodded and smiled in acknowledgment. He had meant to go out and see the Gales, if the boat had only got in in season; but boats are unpunctual in their ways, and the James Madison had been unexpectedly signaled by one little landing and settlement after another. He remembered that a great many young people were on board when they arrived, and now they appeared again, coming along the street and disappearing at the steep stairway opposite. The lighted windows were full of heads already, and there were now and then preliminary exercises upon a violin. Mr. Aldis had grown old enough to be obliged to sit and think it over about going to a ball; the day had passed when there would have been no question; but when he had finished his cigar he crossed the street, and only stopped before the lighted store window to find a proper bank bill for the doorkeeper. Then he ran up the stairs to the hall, as if he were the Tom Aldis of old. It was an embarrassing moment as he entered the low, hot room, and the young people stared at him suspiciously; but there were also elderly people scattered about who were meekly curious and interested, and one of these got clumsily upon his feet and hastened to grasp the handsome stranger by the hand.

"Nancy heard you was coming," said Mr. Gale delightedly. "She expected I should see you here, if you was just the same kind of a man you used to be. Come let's set right down, folks is crowding in; there may be more to set than there is to dance."

"How is Nancy, isn't she coming?" asked Tom, feeling the years tumble off his shoulders.

"Well as usual, poor creatur," replied the old father, with a look of surprise. "No, no; she can't go nowhere."

At that moment the orchestra struck up a military march with so much energy that further conversation was impossible. Near them was an awkward-looking young fellow, with shoulders too broad for his height, and a general look of chunkiness and dullness. Presently he rose and crossed the room, and made a bow to his chosen partner that most courtiers might have envied. It was a bow of grace and dignity.

"Pretty well done!" said Tom Aldis aloud.

Mr. Gale was beaming with smiles, and keeping time to the music with his foot and hand. "Nancy done it," he announced proudly, speaking close to his companion's ear. "That boy give her a sight o' difficulty; he used to want to learn, but 'long at the first he'd turn red as fire if he much as met a sheep in a pastur'. The last time I see him on the floor I went home an' told her he done as well as any. You can see for yourself, now they're all a-movin'."

The fresh southerly breeze came wafting into the hall and making the lamps flare. If Tom turned his head, he could see the lights out in the bay, of vessels that had put in for the night. Old Mr. Gale was not disposed for conversation so long as the march lasted, and when it was over a frisky-looking middle-aged person accosted Mr. Aldis with the undimmed friendliness of their youth; and he took her out, as behoved him, for the Lancers quadrille. From her he learned that Nancy had been for many years a helpless invalid; and when their dance was over he returned to sit out the next one with Mr. Gale, who had recovered a little by this time from the excitement of the occasion, and was eager to talk about Nancy's troubles, but still more about her gifts and activities. After a while they adjourned to the hotel piazza in company, and the old man grew still more eloquent over a cigar. He had not changed much since Tom's residence in the family; in fact, the flight of seventeen years had made but little difference in his durable complexion or the tough frame which had been early seasoned by wind and weather.

"Yes, sir," he said, "Nancy has had it very hard, but she's the life o' the neighborhood yet. For excellent judgment I never see her equal. Why, once the board o' selec'men took

trouble to meet right there in her room off the kitchen, when they had to make some responsible changes in layin' out the school deestricts. She was the best teacher they ever had, a master good teacher; fitted a boy for Bowdoin College all except his Greek, that last season before she was laid aside from sickness. She took right holt to bear it the best she could, and begun to study on what kind o' things she could do. First she used to make out to knit, a-layin' there, for the store, but her hands got crippled up with the rest of her; 't is the wust kind o' rheumatics there is. She had me go round to the neighborin' schools and say that if any of the child'n was backward an slow with their lessons to send 'em up to her. Now an' then there'd be one, an' at last she'd see to some class there wasn't time for: an' here year before last the town voted her fifty dollars a year for her services. What do you think of that?"

Aldis manifested his admiration, but he could not help wishing that he had not seemed to forget so pleasant an old acquaintance, and above all wished that he had not seemed to take part in nature's great scheme to defraud her. She had begun life with such distinct rights and possibilities.

"I tell you she was the most cut up to have to stop dancin'," said Mr. Gale gayly, "but she held right on to that, same as to other things. 'I can't dance myself,' she says, 'so I'm goin' to make other folks.' You see right before you how she's kep' her word, Mr. Aldis? What always pleased her the most, from a child, was dancin'. Folks talked to her some about letting her mind rove on them light things when she appeared to be on a dyin' bed. 'David, he danced afore the Lord,' she'd tell 'em, an' her eyes would snap so, they didn't like to say no more."

Aldis laughed, the old man himself was so cheerful.

"Well, sir, she made 'em keep right on with the old dancin'-school she always took such part in (I guess 't was goin', wa'n't it, that fall you stopped here?); but she sent out for all the child'n she could get and learnt 'em their manners. She can see right out into the kitchen from where she is, an' she has 'em make their bows an' take their steps till they get 'em right an' feel as good as anybody. There's boys an' girls comin' an' goin' two or three times a week in the afternoon. It don't seem to be no hardship: there ain't no such good company for young or old as Nancy."

"She'll be dreadful glad to see you," the proud father ended his praises. "Oh, she's never forgot that good time she had up to Boston. You an' all your folks couldn't have treated her no better, an' you give her her heart's desire, you did so! She's never done talkin' about that pretty dancin'-school with all them lovely little child'n, an' everybody so elegant and pretty behaved. She'd always wanted to see such a lady as your aunt was. I don't know but she's right: she always maintains that when folks has good manners an'

good hearts the world is their 'n, an' she was goin' to do everything she could to keep young folks from feelin' hoggish an' left out."

Tom walked out toward the farm in the bright moonlight with Mr. Gale, and promised to call as early the next day as possible. They followed the old shore path, with the sea on one side and the pointed firs on the other, and parted where Nancy's light could be seen twinkling on the hill.

The Life of Nancy by Sarah Orne Jewett

IV.

It was not very cheerful to look forward to seeing a friend of one's youth crippled and disabled; beside, Tom Aldis always felt a nervous dread in being where people were ill and suffering. He thought once or twice how little compassion for Nancy these country neighbors expressed. Even her father seemed inclined to boast of her, rather than to pity the poor life that was so hindered. Business affairs and conference were appointed for that afternoon, so that by the middle of the morning he found himself walking up the yard to the Gales' side door. There was nobody within call. Mr. Aldis tapped once or twice, and then hearing a voice he went through the narrow unpainted entry into the old kitchen, a brown, comfortable place which he well remembered.

"Oh, I'm so glad to see you," Nancy was calling from her little bedroom beyond. "Come in, come in!"

He passed the doorway, and stood with his hand on hers, which lay helpless on the blue-and-white coverlet. Nancy's young eyes, untouched by years or pain or regret, looked up at him as frankly as a child's from the pillow.

"Mother's gone down into the field to pick some peas for dinner," she said, looking and looking at Tom and smiling; but he saw at last that tears were shining, too, and making her smile all the brighter. "You see now why I couldn't write," she explained. "I kept thinking I should. I didn't want anybody else to thank you for the books. Now sit right down," she begged her guest. "Father told me all he could about last night. You danced with Addie Porter."

"I did," acknowledged Tom Aldis, and they both laughed. "We talked about old times between the figures, but it seemed to me that I remembered them better than she did."

"Addie has been through with a good deal of experience since then," explained Nancy, with a twinkle in her eyes.

"I wish I could have danced again with you," said Tom bravely, "but I saw some scholars that did you credit."

"I have to dance by proxy," said Nancy; and to this there was no reply.

Tom Aldis sat in the tiny bedroom with an aching heart. Such activity and definiteness of mind, such power of loving and hunger for life, had been pent and prisoned there so many years. Nancy had made what she could of her small world of books. There was something very uncommon in her look and way of speaking; he felt like a boy beside her, he to whom the world had given its best luxury and widest opportunity. As he looked out of the small window, he saw only a ledgy pasture where sheep were straying along the slopes among the bayberry and juniper; beyond were some balsam firs and a glimpse of the sea. It was a lovely bit of landscape, but it lacked figures, and Nancy was born to be a teacher and a lover of her kind. She had only lacked opportunity, but she was equal to meeting whatever should come. One saw it in her face.

"You don't know how many times I have thought of that cold day in Boston," said Nancy from her pillows. "Your aunt was beautiful. I never could tell you about the rest of the day with her, could I? Why, it just gave me a measure to live by. I saw right off how small some things were that I thought were big. I told her about one or two things down here in Rodney that troubled me, and she understood all about it. 'If we mean to be happy and useful,' she said, 'the only way is to be self-forgetful.' I never forgot that!"

"The seed fell upon good ground, didn't it?" said Mr. Aldis with a smile. He had been happy enough himself, but Nancy's happiness appeared in that moment to have been of another sort. He could not help thinking what a wonderful perennial quality there is in friendship. Because it had once flourished and bloomed, no winter snows of Maine could bury it, no summer sunshine of foreign life could wither this single flower of a day long past. The years vanished like a May snowdrift, and because they had known each other once they found each other now. It was like a tough little sprig of gray everlasting; the New England edelweiss that always keeps a white flower ready to blossom safe and warm in its heart.

They entertained each other delightfully that late summer morning. Tom talked of his wife and children as he had seldom talked of them to any one before, and afterward explained the land interests which had brought him back at this late day to East Rodney.

"I came down meaning to sell my land to a speculator," he said, "or to a real estate agency which has great possessions along the coast; but I'm very doubtful about doing it, now that I have seen the bay again and this lovely shore. I had no idea that it was such a magnificent piece of country. I was going on from here to Mount Desert, with a half idea of buying land there. Why isn't this good enough that I own already? With a yacht or a good steam launch we shouldn't be so far away from places along the coast, you know. What if I were to build a house above Sunday Cove, on the headland, and if we should be neighbors! I have a friend who might build another house on the point beyond; we came home from abroad at about the same time, and he's looking for a place to build, this side

of Bar Harbor." Tom was half confiding in his old acquaintance, and half thinking aloud. "These real estate brokers can't begin to give a man the value of such land as mine," he added.

"It would be excellent business to come and live here yourself, if you want to bring up the value of the property," said Nancy gravely. "I hear there are a good many lots staked out between here and Portland, but it takes more than that to start things. There can't be any prettier place than East Rodney," she declared, looking affectionately out of her little north window. "It would be a great blessing to city people, if they could come and have our good Rodney air."

The friends talked on a little longer, and with great cheerfulness and wealth of reminiscence. Tom began to understand why nobody seemed to pity Nancy, though she did at last speak sadly, and make confession that she felt it to be very hard because she never could get about the neighborhood to see any of the old and sick people. Some of them were lonesome, and lived in lonesome places. "I try to send word to them sometimes, if I can't do any more," said Nancy. "We're so apt to forget 'em, and let 'em feel they aren't useful. I can't bear to see an old heart begging for a little love. I do sometimes wish I could manage to go an' try to make a little of their time pass pleasant."

"Do you always stay just here?" asked Tom with sudden compassion, after he had stood for a moment looking out at the gray sheep on the hillside.

"Oh, sometimes I get into the old rocking-chair, and father pulls me out into the kitchen when I'm extra well," said Nancy proudly, as if she spoke of a yachting voyage or a mountaineer's exploits. "Once a doctor said if I was only up to Boston"—her voice fell a little with a touch of wistfulness—"perhaps I could have had more done, and could have got about with some kind of a chair. But that was a good while ago: I never let myself worry about it. I am so busy right here that I don't know what would happen if I set out to travel."

The Life of Nancy by Sarah Orne Jewett

V.

A year later the East Rodney shore looked as green as ever, and the untouched wall of firs and pines faithfully echoed the steamer's whistle. In the twelve months just past Mr. Aldis had worked wonders upon his long-neglected estate, and now was comfortably at housekeeping on the Sunday Cove headland. Nancy could see the chimneys and a gable of the fine establishment from her own little north window, and the sheep still fed undisturbed on the slopes that lay between. More than this, there were two other new houses, to be occupied by Tom's friends, within the distance of a mile or two. It would be difficult to give any idea of the excitement and interest of East Rodney, or the fine effect and impulse to the local market. Tom's wife and children were most affectionately befriended by their neighbors the Gales, and with their coming in midsummer many changes for the better took place in Nancy's life, and made it bright. She lost no time in starting a class, where the two eldest for the first time found study a pleasure, while little Tom was promptly and tenderly taught his best bow, and made to mind his steps with such interest and satisfaction that he who had once roared aloud in public at the infant dancing-class, now knew both confidence and ambition. There was already a well-worn little footpath between the old Gale house and Sunday Cove; it wound in and out among the ledges and thickets, and over the short sheep-turf of the knolls; and there was a scent of sweet-brier here, and of raspberries there, and of the salt water and the pines, and the juniper and bayberry, all the way.

Nancy herself had followed that path in a carrying-chair, and joy was in her heart at every step. She blessed Tom over and over again, as he walked, broad-shouldered and strong, between the forward handles, and turned his head now and then to see if she liked the journey. For many reasons, she was much better now that she could get out into the sun. The bedroom with the north window was apt to be tenantless, and where-ever Nancy went she made other people wiser and happier, and more interested in life.

On the day when she went in state to visit the new house, with her two sober carriers, and a gay little retinue of young people frisking alongside, she felt happy enough by the way; but when she got to the house itself, and had been carried quite round it, and was at last set down in the wide hall to look about, she gave her eyes a splendid liberty of enjoyment. Mrs. Aldis disappeared for a moment to give directions in her guest's behalf, and the host and Nancy were left alone together.

"No, I don't feel a bit tired," said the guest, looking pale and radiant. "I feel as if I didn't know how to be grateful enough. I have everything in the world to make me happy. What does make you and your dear family do so much?"

"It means a great deal to have friends, doesn't it?" answered Tom in a tone that thanked her warmly. "I often wish"—

He could not finish his sentence, for he was thinking of Nancy's long years, and the bond of friendship that absence and even forgetfulness had failed to break; of the curious insistence of fate which made him responsible for something in the life of Nancy and brought him back to her neighborhood. It was a moment of deep thought; he even forgot Nancy herself. He heard the water plashing on the shore below, and felt the cool sea wind that blew in at the door.

Nancy reached out her bent and twisted hand and began to speak; then she hesitated, and glanced at her hand again, and looked straight at him with shining eyes.

"There never has been a day when I haven't thought of you," she said.

The Life of Nancy by Sarah Orne Jewett

Fame's Little Day.

I.

Nobody ever knew, except himself, what made a foolish young newspaper reporter, who happened into a small old-fashioned hotel in New York, observe Mr. Abel Pinkham with deep interest, listen to his talk, ask a question or two of the clerk, and then go away and make up an effective personal paragraph for one of the morning papers. He must have had a heart full of fun, this young reporter, and something honestly rustic and pleasing must have struck him in the guest's demeanor, for there was a flavor in the few lines he wrote that made some of his fellows seize upon the little paragraph, and copy it, and add to it, and keep it moving. Nobody knows what starts such a thing in journalism, or keeps it alive after it is started, but on a certain Thursday morning the fact was made known to the world that among the notabilities then in the city, Abel Pinkham, Esquire, a distinguished citizen of Wetherford, Vermont, was visiting New York on important affairs connected with the maple-sugar industry of his native State. Mr. Pinkham had expected to keep his visit unannounced, but it was likely to occasion much interest in business and civic circles. This was something like the way that the paragraph started; but here and there a kindred spirit of the original journalist caught it up and added discreet lines about Mr. Pinkham's probable stay in town, his occupation of an apartment on the fourth floor of the Ethan Allen Hotel, and other circumstances so uninteresting to the reading public in general that presently in the next evening edition, one city editor after another threw out the item, and the young journalists, having had their day of pleasure, passed on to other things.

Mr. and Mrs. Pinkham had set forth from home with many forebodings, in spite of having talked all winter about taking this journey as soon as the spring opened. They would have caught at any reasonable excuse for giving it up altogether, because when the time arrived it seemed so much easier to stay at home. Mrs. Abel Pinkham had never seen New York; her husband himself had not been to the city for a great many years; in fact, his reminiscences of the former visit were not altogether pleasant, since he had foolishly fallen into many snares, and been much gulled in his character of honest young countryman. There was a tarnished and worthless counterfeit of a large gold watch still concealed between the outer boarding and inner lath and plaster of the lean-to bedroom which Mr. Abel Pinkham had occupied as a bachelor; it was not the only witness of his being taken in by city sharpers, and he had winced ever since at the thought of their wiles. But he was now a man of sixty, well-to-do, and of authority in town affairs; his children were all well married and settled in homes of their own, except a widowed

daughter, who lived at home with her young son, and was her mother's lieutenant in household affairs.

The boy was almost grown, and at this season, when the maple sugar was all made and shipped, and it was still too early for spring work on the land, Mr. Pinkham could leave home as well as not, and here he was in New York, feeling himself to be a stranger and foreigner to city ways. If it had not been for that desire to appear well in his wife's eyes, which had buoyed him over the bar of many difficulties, he could have found it in his heart to take the next train back to Wetherford, Vermont, to be there rid of his best clothes and the stiff rim of his heavy felt hat. He could not let his wife discover that the noise and confusion of Broadway had the least power to make him flinch: he cared no more for it than for the woods in snow-time. He was as good as anybody, and she was better. They owed nobody a cent; and they had come on purpose to see the city of New York.

They were sitting at the breakfast-table in the Ethan Allen Hotel, having arrived at nightfall the day before. Mrs. Pinkham looked a little pale about the mouth. She had been kept awake nearly all night by the noise, and had enjoyed but little the evening she had spent in the stuffy parlor of the hotel, looking down out of the window at what seemed to her but garish scenes, and keeping a reproachful and suspicious eye upon some unpleasantly noisy young women of forward behavior who were her only companions. Abel himself was by no means so poorly entertained in the hotel office and smoking-room. He felt much more at home than she did, being better used to meeting strange men than she was to strange women, and he found two or three companions who had seen more than he of New York life. It was there, indeed, that the young reporter found him, hearty and country-fed, and loved the appearance of his best clothes, and the way Mr. Abel Pinkham brushed his hair, and loved the way that he spoke in a loud and manful voice the belief and experience of his honest heart.

In the morning at breakfast-time the Pinkhams were depressed. They missed their good bed at home; they were troubled by the roar and noise of the streets that hardly stopped over night before it began again in the morning. The waiter did not put what mind he may have had to the business of serving them; and Mrs. Abel Pinkham, whose cooking was the triumph of parish festivals at home, had her own opinion about the beefsteak. She was a woman of imagination, and now that she was fairly here, spectacles and all, it really pained her to find that the New York of her dreams, the metropolis of dignity and distinction, of wealth and elegance, did not seem to exist. These poor streets, these unlovely people, were the end of a great illusion. They did not like to meet each other's eyes, this worthy pair. The man began to put on an unbecoming air of assertion, and Mrs. Pinkham's face was full of lofty protest.

"My gracious me, Mary Ann! I am glad I happened to get the 'Tribune' this mornin'," said Mr. Pinkham, with sudden excitement. "Just you look here! I'd like well to know how they found out about our comin'!" and he handed the paper to his wife across the table. "There—there 't is; right by my thumb," he insisted. "Can't you see it?" and he smiled like a boy as she finally brought her large spectacles to bear upon the important paragraph.

"I guess they think somethin' of us, if you don't think much o' them," continued Mr. Pinkham, grandly. "Oh, they know how to keep the run o' folks who are somebody to home! Draper and Fitch knew we was comin' this week: you know I sent word I was comin' to settle with them myself. I suppose they send folks round to the hotels, these newspapers, but I shouldn't thought there'd been time. Anyway, they've thought 't was worthwhile to put us in!"

Mrs. Pinkham did not take the trouble to make a mystery out of the unexpected pleasure. "I want to cut it out an' send it right up home to daughter Sarah," she said, beaming with pride, and looking at the printed names as if they were flattering photographs. "I think 't was most too strong to say we was among the notables. But there! 'tis their business to dress up things, and they have to print somethin' every day. I guess I shall go up and put on my best dress," she added, inconsequently; "this one's kind of dusty; it's the same I rode in."

"Le' me see that paper again," said Mr. Pinkham jealously. "I didn't more 'n half sense it, I was so taken aback. Well, Mary Ann, you didn't expect you was goin' to get into the papers when you came away. 'Abel Pinkham, Esquire, of Wetherford, Vermont.' It looks well, don't it? But you might have knocked me down with a feather when I first caught sight of them words."

"I guess I shall put on my other dress," said Mrs. Pinkham, rising, with quite a different air from that with which she had sat down to her morning meal. "This one looks a little out o' style, as Sarah said, but when I got up this mornin' I was so homesick it didn't seem to make any kind o' difference. I expect that saucy girl last night took us to be nobodies. I'd like to leave the paper round where she couldn't help seein' it."

"Don't take any notice of her," said Abel, in a dignified tone. "If she can't do what you want an' be civil, we'll go somewheres else. I wish I'd done what we talked of at first an' gone to the Astor House, but that young man in the cars told me 't was remote from the things we should want to see. The Astor House was the top o' everything when I was here last, but I expected to find some changes. I want you to have the best there is," he said, smiling at his wife as if they were just making their wedding journey. "Come, let's

be stirrin'; 't is long past eight o'clock," and he ushered her to the door, newspaper in hand.

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II.

Later that day the guests walked up Broadway, holding themselves erect, and feeling as if every eye was upon them. Abel Pinkham had settled with his correspondents for the spring consignments of maple sugar, and a round sum in bank bills was stowed away in his breast pocket. One of the partners had been a Wetherford boy, so when there came a renewal of interest in maple sugar, and the best confectioners were ready to do it honor, the finest quality being at a large premium, this partner remembered that there never was any sugar made in Wetherford of such melting and delicious flavor as from the trees on the old Pinkham farm. He had now made a good bit of money for himself on this private venture, and was ready that morning to pay Mr. Abel Pinkham cash down, and to give him a handsome order for the next season for all he could make. Mr. Fitch was also generous in the matter of such details as freight and packing; he was immensely polite and kind to his old friends, and begged them to come out and stay with him and his wife, where they lived now, in a not far distant New Jersey town.

"No, no, sir," said Mr. Pinkham promptly. "My wife has come to see the city, and our time is short. Your folks'll be up this summer, won't they? We'll wait an' visit then." "You must certainly take Mrs. Pinkham up to the Park," said the commission merchant. "I wish I had time to show you round myself. I suppose you've been seeing some things already, haven't you? I noticed your arrival in the 'Herald.'"

"The 'Tribune' it was," said Mr. Pinkham, blushing through a smile and looking round at his wife.

"Oh no; I never read the 'Tribune,'" said Mr. Fitch. "There was quite an extended notice in my paper. They must have put you and Mrs. Pinkham into the 'Herald' too." And so the friends parted, laughing. "I am much pleased to have a call from such distinguished parties," said Mr. Fitch, by way of final farewell, and Mr. Pinkham waved his hand grandly in reply.

"Let's get the 'Herald,' then," he said, as they started up the street. "We can go an' sit over in that little square that we passed as we came along, and rest an' talk things over about what we'd better do this afternoon. I'm tired out a-trampin' and standin'. I'd rather have set still while we were there, but he wanted us to see his store. Done very well, Joe Fitch has, but 't ain't a business I should like." There was a lofty look and sense of behavior about Mr. Pinkham of Wetherford. You might have thought him a great

politician as he marched up Broadway, looking neither to right hand nor left. He felt himself to be a person of great responsibilities.

"I begin to feel sort of at home myself," said his wife, who always had a certain touch of simple dignity about her. "When we was comin' yesterday New York seemed to be all strange, and there wasn't nobody expectin' us. I feel now just as if I'd been here before."

They were now on the edge of the better-looking part of the town; it was still noisy and crowded, but noisy with fine carriages instead of drays, and crowded with well-dressed people. The hours for shopping and visiting were beginning, and more than one person looked with appreciative and friendly eyes at the comfortable pleased-looking elderly man and woman who went their easily beguiled and loitering way. The pavement peddlers detained them, but the cabmen beckoned them in vain; their eyes were busy with the immediate foreground. Mrs. Pinkham was embarrassed by the recurring reflection of herself in the great windows.

"I wish I had seen about a new bonnet before we came," she lamented. "They seem to be havin' on some o' their spring things."

"Don't you worry, Mary Ann. I don't see anybody that looks any better than you do," said Abel, with boyish and reassuring pride.

Mr. Pinkham had now bought the "Herald," and also the "Sun," well recommended by an able newsboy, and presently they crossed over from that corner by the Fifth Avenue Hotel which seems like the very heart of New York, and found a place to sit down on the Square—an empty bench, where they could sit side by side and look the papers through, reading over each other's shoulder, and being impatient from page to page. The paragraph was indeed repeated, with trifling additions. Ederton of the "Sun" had followed the "Tribune" man's lead, and fabricated a brief interview, a marvel of art and discretion, but so general in its allusions that it could create no suspicion; it almost deceived Mr. Pinkham himself, so that he found unaffected pleasure in the fictitious occasion, and felt as if he had easily covered himself with glory. Except for the bare fact of the interview's being imaginary, there was no discredit to be cast upon Mr. Abel Pinkham's having said that he thought the country near Wetherford looked well for the time of year, and promised a fair hay crop, and that his income was augmented one half to three fifths by his belief in the future of maple sugar. It was likely to be the great coming crop of the Green Mountain State. Ederton suggested that there was talk of Mr. Pinkham's presence in the matter of a great maple-sugar trust, in which much of the capital of Wall Street would be involved.

"How they do hatch up these things, don't they?" said the worthy man at this point. "Well, it all sounds well, Mary Ann."

"It says here that you are a very personable man," smiled his wife, "and have filled some of the most responsible town offices" (this was the turn taken by Goffey of the "Herald"). "Oh, and that you are going to attend the performance at Barnum's this evening, and occupy reserved seats. Why, I didn't know—who have you told about that?—who was you talkin' to last night, Abel?"

"I never spoke o' goin' to Barnum's to any livin' soul," insisted Abel, flushing. "I only thought of it two or three times to myself that perhaps I might go an' take you. Now that is singular; perhaps they put that in just to advertise the show."

"Ain't it a kind of a low place for folks like us to be seen in?" suggested Mrs. Pinkham timidly. "People seem to be payin' us all this attention, an' I don't know's 't would be dignified for us to go to one o' them circus places."

"I don't care; we shan't live but once. I ain't comin' to New York an' confine myself to evenin' meetin's," answered Abel, throwing away discretion and morality together. "I tell you I'm goin' to spend this sugar-money just as we've a mind to. You've worked hard, an' counted a good while on comin', and so've I; an' I ain't goin' to mince my steps an' pinch an' screw for nobody. I'm goin' to hire one o' them hacks an' ride up to the Park."

"Joe Fitch said we could go right up in one o' the elevated railroads for five cents, an' return when we was ready," protested Mary Ann, who had a thriftier inclination than her husband; but Mr. Pinkham was not to be let or hindered, and they presently found themselves going up Fifth Avenue in a somewhat battered open landau. The spring sun shone upon them, and the spring breeze fluttered the black ostrich tip on Mrs. Pinkham' s durable winter bonnet, and brought the pretty color to her faded cheeks.

"There! this is something like. Such people as we are can't go meechin' round; it ain't expected. Don't it pay for a lot o' hard work?" said Abel; and his wife gave him a pleased look for her only answer. They were both thinking of their gray farmhouse high on a long western slope, with the afternoon sun full in its face, the old red barn, the pasture, the shaggy woods that stretched far up the mountain-side.

"I wish Sarah an' little Abel was here to see us ride by," said Mary Ann Pinkham, presently. "I can't seem to wait to have 'em get that newspaper. I'm so glad we sent it right off before we started this mornin'. If Abel goes to the post-office comin' from school, as he always does, they'll have it to read to-morrow before supper-time."

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III.

This happy day in two plain lives ended, as might have been expected, with the great Barnum show. Mr. and Mrs. Pinkham found themselves in possession of countless advertising cards and circulars next morning, and these added somewhat to their sense of responsibility. Mrs. Pinkham became afraid that the hotel-keeper would charge them double. "We've got to pay for it some way; there. I don't know but I'm more 'n willin'," said the good soul. "I never did have such a splendid time in all my life. Findin' you so respected 'way off here is the best of anything; an' then seein' them dear little babies in their nice carriages, all along the streets and up to the Central Park! I never shall forget them beautiful little creatur's. And then the houses, an' the hosses, an' the store windows, an' all the rest of it! Well, I can't make my country pitcher hold no more, an' I want to get home an' think it over, goin' about my housework."

They were just entering the door of the Ethan Allen Hotel for the last time, when a young man met them and bowed cordially.

He was the original reporter of their arrival, but they did not know it, and the impulse was strong within him to formally invite Mr. Pinkham to make an address before the members of the Produce Exchange on the following morning; but he had been a country boy himself, and their look of seriousness and self-consciousness appealed to him unexpectedly. He wondered what effect this great experience would have upon their after-life. The best fun, after all, would be to send marked copies of his paper and Ederton's to all the weekly newspapers in that part of Vermont. He saw before him the evidence of their happy increase of self-respect, and he would make all their neighborhood agree to do them honor. Such is the dominion of the press.

"Who was that young man?—he kind of bowed to you," asked the lady from Wetherford, after the journalist had meekly passed; but Abel Pinkham, Esquire, could only tell her that he looked like a young fellow who was sitting in the office the evening that they came to the hotel. The reporter did not seem to these distinguished persons to be a young man of any consequence.

The Life of Nancy by Sarah Orne Jewett

A War Debt.

I.

There was a tinge of autumn color on even the English elms as Tom Burton walked slowly up Beacon Street. He was wondering all the way what he had better do with himself; it was far too early to settle down in Boston for the winter, but his grandmother kept to her old date for moving up to town, and here they were. As yet nobody thought of braving the country weather long after October came in, and most country houses were poorly equipped with fireplaces, or even furnaces: this was some years ago, and not the very last autumn that ever was.

There was likely to be a long stretch of good weather, a month at least, if one took the trouble to go a little way to the southward. Tom Burton quickened his steps a little, and began to think definitely of his guns, while a sudden resolve took shape in his mind. Just then he reached the doorsteps of his grandmother's fine old-fashioned house, being himself the fourth Thomas Burton that the shining brass door-plate had represented. His old grandmother was the only near relative he had in the world; she was growing older and more dependent upon him every day. That summer he had returned from a long wandering absence of three years, and the vigorous elderly woman whom he had left, busy and self-reliant, had sadly changed in the mean time; age had begun to strike telling blows at her strength and spirits. Tom had no idea of leaving her again for the long journeys which had become the delightful habit of his life; but there was no reason why he should not take a fortnight's holiday now and then, particularly now.

"Has Mrs. Burton come down yet, Dennis? Is there any one with her?" asked Tom, as he entered.

"There is not, sir. Mrs. Burton is in the drawing-room," answered Dennis precisely. "The tea is just going up; I think she was waiting for you." And Tom ran upstairs like a schoolboy, and then walked discreetly into the drawing-room. His grandmother gave no sign of having expected him, but she always liked company at that hour of the day: there had come to be too many ghosts in the empty chairs.

"Can I have two cups?" demanded the grandson, cheerfully. "I don't know when I have had such a walk!" and they began a gay gossiping hour together, and parted for a short season afterward, only to meet again at dinner, with a warm sense of pleasure in each other's company. The young man always insisted that his grandmother was the most

charming woman in the world, and it can be imagined what the grandmother thought of Tom. She was only severe with him because he had given no signs of wishing to marry, but she was tolerant of all delay, so long as she could now and then keep the subject fresh in his mind. It was not a moment to speak again of the great question that afternoon, and she had sat and listened to his talk of people and things, a little plaintive and pale, but very handsome, behind the tea-table.

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II.

At dinner, after Dennis had given Tom his cup of coffee and cigars, and disappeared with an accustomed air of thoughtfully leaving the family alone for a private interview, Mrs. Burton, who sometimes lingered if she felt like talking, and sometimes went away to the drawing-room to take a brief nap before she began her evening book, and before Tom joined her for a few minutes to say good-night if he were going out,—Mrs. Burton left her chair more hurriedly than usual. Tom meant to be at home that evening, and was all ready to speak of his plan for some Southern shooting, and he felt a sudden sense of disappointment.

"Don't go away," he said, looking up as she passed. "Is this a bad cigar?"

"No, no, my dear," said the old lady, hurrying across the room in an excited, unusual sort of way. "I wish to show you something while we are by ourselves." And she stooped to unlock a little cupboard in the great sideboard, and fumbled in the depths there, upsetting and clanking among some pieces of silver. Tom joined her with a pair of candles, but it was some moments before she could find what she wanted. Mrs. Burton appeared to be in a hurry, which almost never happened, and in trying to help her Tom dropped much wax unheeded at her side.

"Here it is at last," she said, and went back to her seat at the table. "I ought to tell you the stories of some old silver that I keep in that cupboard; if I were to die, nobody would know anything about them."

"Do you mean the old French spoons, and the prince's porringer, and those things?" asked Tom, showing the most lively interest. But his grandmother was busy unfastening the strings of a little bag, and shook her head absently in answer to his question. She took out and handed to him a quaint old silver cup with two handles, that he could not remember ever to have seen.

"What a charming old bit!" said he, turning it about. "Where in the world did it come from? English, of course; and it looks like a loving-cup. A copy of some old Oxford thing, perhaps; only they didn't copy much then. I should think it had been made for a child." Tom turned it round and round and drew the candles toward him. "Here's an inscription, too, but very much worn."

"Put it down a minute," said Mrs. Burton impatiently. "Every time I have thought of it I have been more and more ashamed to have it in the house. People weren't so shocked by such things at first; they would only be sentimental about the ruined homes, and say that, 'after all, it was the fortune of war.' That cup was stolen."

"But who stole it?" inquired Tom, with deep interest.

"Your father brought it here," said Mrs. Burton, with great spirit, and even a tone of reproach. "My son, Tom Burton, your father, brought it home from the war. I think his plan was to keep it safe to send back to the owners. But he left it with your mother when he was ordered suddenly to the front; he was only at home four days, and the day after he got back to camp was the day he was killed, poor boy"—

"I remember something about it now," Tom hastened to say. "I remember my mother's talking about the breaking up of Southern homes, and all that; she never believed it until she saw the cup, and I thought it was awfully silly. I was at the age when I could have blown our own house to pieces just for the sake of the racket."

"And that terrible year your grandfather's and your mother's death followed, and I was left alone with you—two of us out of the five that had made my home"—

"I should say one and a half," insisted Tom, with some effort. "What a boy I was for a grandson! Thank Heaven, there comes a time when we are all the same age! We are jolly together now, aren't we? Come, dear old lady, don't let's think too much of what's gone by;" and he went round the table and gave her a kiss, and stood there where she need not look him in the face, holding her dear thin hand as long as ever she liked.

"I want you to take that silver cup back, Tom," she said presently, in her usual tone. "Go back and finish your coffee." She had seldom broken down like this. Mrs. Burton had been self-possessed, even to apparent coldness, in earlier life.

"How in the world am I going to take it back?" asked Tom, most businesslike and calm. "Do you really know just where it came from? And then it was several years ago."

"Your grandfather knew; they were Virginia people, of course, and happened to be old friends; one of the younger men was his own classmate. He knew the crest and motto at once, but there were two or three branches of the family, none of them, so far as he knew, living anywhere near where your father was in camp. Poor Tom said that there was a beautiful old house sacked and burnt, and everything scattered that was saved. He happened to hear a soldier from another regiment talking about it, and saw him tossing

this cup about, and bought it from him with all the money he happened to have in his pockets."

"Then he didn't really steal it himself!" exclaimed Tom, laughing a little, and with a sense of relief.

"No, no, Tom!" said Mrs. Burton impatiently. "Only you see that it really is a stolen thing, and I have had it all this time under my roof. For a long time it was packed away with your father's war relics, those things that I couldn't bear to see. And then I would think of it only at night after I had once seen it, and forget to ask any one else while you were away, or wait for you to come. Oh, I have no excuse. I have been very careless, but here it has been all the time. I wish you would find out about the people; there must be some one belonging to them—some friend, perhaps, to whom we could give it. This is one of the things that I wish to have done, and to forget. Just take it back, or write some letters first: you will know what to do. I should like to have the people understand."

"I'll see about it at once," said Tom, with great zest. "I believe you couldn't have spoken at a better time. I have been thinking of going down to Virginia this very week. I hear that they are in a hurry with fitting out that new scientific expedition in Washington that I declined to join, and they want me to come on and talk over things before they are off. One of the men is a Virginian, an awfully good fellow; and then there's Clendennin, my old chum, who's in Washington, too, just now; they'll give me my directions; they know all Virginia between them. I'll take the cup along, and run down from Washington for a few days, and perhaps get some shooting."

Tom's face was shining with interest and satisfaction; he took the cup and again held it under the candle-light. "How pretty this old chasing is round the edge, and the set of the little handles! Oh, here's the motto! What a dear old thing, and enormously old! See here, under the crest," and he held it toward Mrs. Burton:—

"Je vous en prie
Bel-ami."

Mrs. Burton glanced at it with indifference. "Yes, it is charming, as you say. But I only wish to return it to its owners, Tom."

"Je vous en prie
Bel-ami."

Tom repeated the words under his breath, and looked at the crest carefully.

"I remember that your grandfather said it belonged to the Bellamys," said his grandmother. "Of course: how could I forget that? I have never looked at it properly since the day I first saw it. It is a charming motto—they were very charming and distinguished people. I suppose this is a pretty way of saying that they could not live without their friends. I beg of you, Belami;—it is a quaint fancy; one might turn it in two or three pretty ways."

"Or they may have meant that they only looked to themselves for what they wanted, Je vous en prie Bellamy!" said Tom gallantly. "All right; I think that I shall start to-morrow or next day. If you have no special plans," he added.

"Do go, my dear; you may get some shooting, as you say," said Mrs. Burton, a little wistfully, but kindly personifying Tom's inclination.

"You've started me off on a fine romantic adventure," said the young man, smiling. "Come; my cigar's gone out, and it never was good for much; let's go in and try the cards, and talk about things; perhaps you'll think of something more about the Bellamys. You said that my grandfather had a classmate"—

Mrs. Burton stopped to put the cup into its chamois bag again, and handed it solemnly to Tom, then she took his arm, and dismissing all unpleasant thoughts, they sat down to the peaceful game of cribbage to while away the time. The grandson lent himself gayly to pleasure-making, and they were just changing the cards for their books, when one of the elder friends of the house appeared, one of the two or three left who called Mrs. Burton Margaret, and was greeted affectionately as Henry in return. This guest always made the dear lady feel young; he himself was always to the front of things, and had much to say. It was quite forgotten that a last charge had been given to Tom, or that the past had been wept over. Presently, the late evening hours being always her best, she forgot in eager talk that she had any grandson at all, and Tom slipped away with his book to his own sitting-room and his pipe. He took the little cup out of its bag again, and set it before him, and began to lay plans for a Southern journey.

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III.

The Virginia country was full of golden autumn sunshine and blue haze. The long hours spent on a slow-moving train were full of shocks and surprises to a young traveler who knew almost every civilized country better than his own. The lonely look of the fields, the trees shattered by war, which had not yet had time enough to muffle their broken tops with green; the negroes, who crowded on board the train, lawless, and unequal to holding their liberty with steady hands, looked poor and less respectable than in the old plantation days—it was as if the long discipline of their former state had counted for nothing. Tom Burton felt himself for the first time to have something of a statesman's thoughts and schemes as he moralized along the way. Presently he noticed with deep sympathy a lady who came down the crowded car, and took the seat just in front of him. She carried a magazine under her arm a copy of—"Blackwood," which was presently proved to bear the date of 1851, and to be open at an article on the death of Wordsworth. She was the first lady he had seen that day—there was little money left for journeying and pleasure among the white Virginians; but two or three stations beyond this a group of young English men and women stood with the gay negroes on the platform, and came into the train with cheerful greetings to their friends. It seemed as if England had begun to settle Virginia all over again, and their clear, lively voices had no foreign sound. There were going to be races at some court-house town in the neighborhood. Burton was a great lover of horses himself, and the new scenes grew more and more interesting. In one of the gay groups was a different figure from any of the fresh-cheeked young wives of the English planters—a slender girl, pale and spirited, with a look of care beyond her years. She was the queen of her little company. It was to her that every one looked for approval and sympathy as the laugh went to and fro. There was something so high-bred and elegant in her bearing, something so exquisitely sure and stately, that her companions were made clumsy and rustic in their looks by contrast. The eager talk of the coming races, of the untried thoroughbreds, the winners and losers of the year before, made more distinct this young Virginia lady's own look of high-breeding, and emphasized her advantage of race. She was the newer and finer Norman among Saxons. She alone seemed to have that inheritance of swiftness of mind, of sureness of training. It was the highest type of English civilization refined still further by long growth in favoring soil. Tom Burton read her unconscious face as if it were a romance; he believed that one of the great Virginia houses must still exist, and that she was its young mistress. The house's fortune was no doubt gone; the long-worn and carefully mended black silk gown that followed the lines of her lovely figure told plainly enough that worldly prosperity was a thing of the past. But what nature could give of its best, and only age and death could take away, were hers. He watched her more and more; at one moment

she glanced up suddenly and held his eyes with hers for one revealing moment. There was no surprise in the look, but a confession of pathos, a recognition of sympathy, which made even a stranger feel that he had the inmost secret of her heart.

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IV.

The next day our hero, having hired a capital saddle-horse, a little the worse for age, was finding his way eastward along the sandy roads. The country was full of color; the sassafras and gum trees and oaks were all ablaze with red and yellow. Now and then he caught a glimpse of a sail on one of the wide reaches of the river which lay to the northward; now and then he passed a broken gateway or the ruins of a cabin. He carried a light gun before him across the saddle, and a game-bag hung slack and empty at his shoulder except for a single plump partridge in one corner, which had whirred up at the right moment out of a vine-covered thicket. Something small and heavy in his coat pocket seemed to correspond to the bird, and once or twice he unconsciously lifted it in the hollow of his hand. The day itself, and a sense of being on the road to fulfill his mission, a sense of unending leisure and satisfaction under that lovely hazy sky, seemed to leave no place for impatience or thought of other things. He rode slowly along, with his eye on the roadside coverts, letting the horse take his own gait, except when a ragged negro boy, on an unwilling, heavy-footed mule, slyly approached and struck the dallying steed from behind. It was past the middle of the October afternoon.

"'Mos' thar now, Cun'l," said the boy at last, eagerly. "See them busted trees pas' thar, an' chimblies? You tu'n down nax' turn; ride smart piece yet, an' you come right front of ol' Mars Bell'my's house. See, he comin' 'long de road now. Yas, 'tis Mars Bell'my shore, an' 's gun."

Tom had been looking across the neglected fields with compassion, and wondering if such a plantation could ever be brought back to its days of prosperity. As the boy spoke he saw the tall chimneys in the distance, and then, a little way before him in the shadow of some trees, a stately figure that slowly approached. He hurriedly dismounted, leading his horse until he met the tall old man, who answered his salutation with much dignity. There was something royal and remote from ordinary men in his silence after the first words of courteous speech.

"Yas, sir; that's Mars Bell'my, sir," whispered the boy on the mule, reassuringly, and the moment of hesitation was happily ended.

"I was on my way to call upon you, Colonel Bellamy; my name is Burton," said the younger man.

"Will you come with me to the house?" said the old gentleman, putting out his hand cordially a second time; and though he had frowned slightly at first at the unmistakable Northern accent, the light came quickly to his eyes. Tom gave his horse's bridle to the boy, who promptly transferred himself to the better saddle, and began to lead the mule instead.

"I have been charged with an errand of friendship," said Tom. "I believe that you and my grandfather were at Harvard together." Tom looked boyish and eager and responsive to hospitality at this moment. He was straight and trim, like a Frenchman. Colonel Bellamy was much the taller of the two, even with his bent shoulders and relaxed figure. "I see the resemblance to your grandfather, sir. I bid you welcome to Fairford," said the Colonel. "Your visit is a great kindness."

They walked on together, speaking ceremoniously of the season and of the shooting and Tom's journey, until they left the woods and overgrown avenue at the edge of what had once been a fine lawn, with clusters of huge oaks; but these were shattered by war and more or less ruined. The lopped trunks still showed the marks of fire and shot; some had put out a fresh bough or two, but most of the ancient trees stood for their own monuments, rain-bleached and gaunt. At the other side of the wide lawn, against young woodland and a glimpse of the river, were the four great chimneys which had been seen from the highroad. There was no dwelling in sight at the moment, and Tom stole an apprehensive look at the grave face of his companion. It appeared as if he were being led to the habitation of ghosts, as if he were purposely to be confronted with the desolation left in the track of Northern troops. It was not so long since the great war that these things could be forgotten.

The Colonel, however, without noticing the ruins in any way, turned toward the right as he neared them, and passing a high fragment of brick wall topped by a marble ball or two—which had been shot at for marks—and passing, just beyond, some huge clumps of box, they came to a square brick building with a rude wooden addition at one side, and saw some tumble-down sheds a short distance beyond this, with a negro cabin.

They came to the open door. "This was formerly the billiard-room. Your grandfather would have kept many memories of it," said the host simply. "Will you go in, Mr. Burton?" And Tom climbed two or three perilous wooden steps and entered, to find himself in a most homelike and charming place. There was a huge fireplace opposite the door, with a thin whiff of blue smoke going up, a few old books on the high chimney-piece, a pair of fine portraits with damaged frames, some old tables and chairs of different patterns, with a couch by the square window covered with a piece of fine tapestry folded together and still showing its beauty, however raveled and worn. By the opposite window, curtained only by vines, sat a lady with her head muffled in lace, who

greeted the guest pleasantly, and begged pardon for not rising from her chair. Her face wore an unmistakable look of pain and sorrow. As Tom Burton stood at her side, he could find nothing to say in answer to her apologies. He was not wont to be abashed, and a real court could not affect him like this ideal one. The poor surroundings could only be seen through the glamour of their owner's presence—it seemed a most elegant interior.

"I am sorry to have the inconvenience of deafness," said Madam Bellamy, looking up with an anxious little smile. "Will you tell me again the name of our guest?"

"He is my old classmate Burton's grandson, of Boston," said the Colonel, who now stood close at her side; he looked apprehensive as he spoke, and the same shadow flitted over his face as when Tom had announced himself by the oak at the roadside.

"I remember Mr. Burton, your grandfather, very well," said Madam Bellamy at last, giving Tom her hand for the second time, as her husband had done. "He was your guest here the autumn before we were married, my dear; a fine rider, I remember, and a charming gentleman. He was much entertained by one of our hunts. I saw that you also carried a gun. My dear," and she turned to her husband anxiously, "did you bring home any birds?"

Colonel Bellamy's face lengthened. "I had scarcely time, or perhaps I had not my usual good fortune," said he. "The birds have followed the grain-fields away from Virginia, we sometimes think."

"I can offer you a partridge," said Tom eagerly. "I shot one as I rode along. I am afraid that I stopped Colonel Bellamy just as he was going out."

"I thank you very much," said Madam Bellamy. "And you will take supper with us, certainly. You will give us the pleasure of a visit? I regret very much my granddaughter's absence, but it permits me to offer you her room, which happens to be vacant." But Tom attempted to make excuse. "No, no," said Madam Bellamy, answering her own thoughts rather than his words. "You must certainly stay the night with us; we shall make you most welcome. It will give my husband great pleasure; he will have many questions to ask you."

Tom went out to search for his attendant, who presently clattered away on the mule at an excellent homeward pace. An old negro man servant led away the horse, and Colonel Bellamy disappeared also, leaving the young guest to entertain himself and his hostess for an hour, that flew by like light. A woman who is charming in youth is still more charming in age to a man of Tom Burton's imagination, and he was touched to find how

quickly the first sense of receiving an antagonist had given way before a desire to show their feeling of kindly hospitality toward a guest. The links of ancient friendship still held strong, and as Tom sat with his hostess by the window they had much pleasant talk of Northern families known to them both, of whom, or of whose children and grandchildren, he could give much news. It seemed as if he should have known Madam Bellamy all his life. It is impossible to say how she illumined her poor habitation, with what dignity and sweetness she avoided, as far as possible, any reference to the war or its effects. One could hardly remember that she was poor, or ill, or had suffered such piteous loss of friends and fortune.

Later, when Tom was walking toward the river through the woods and overgrown fields of the plantation, he came upon the ruins of the old cabins of what must have been a great family of slaves. The crumbling heaps of the chimneys stood in long lines on either side of a weed-grown lane; not far beyond he found the sinking mounds of some breastworks on a knoll which commanded the river channel. The very trees and grass looked harrowed and distressed by war; the silence of the sunset was only broken by the cry of a little owl that was begging mercy of its fears far down the lonely shore.

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V.

At supper that night Burton came from his room to find Colonel Bellamy bringing his wife in his arms to the table, while the old bent-backed and gray-headed man servant followed to place her chair. The mistress of Fairford was entirely lame and helpless, but she sat at the head of her table like a queen. There was a bunch of damask-roses at her plate. The Colonel himself was in evening dress, antique in cut, and sadly worn, and Tom heartily thanked his patron saint that the boy had brought his portmanteau in good season. There was a glorious light in the room from the fire, and the table was served with exquisite care, and even more luxurious delay, the excellent fish which the Colonel himself must have caught in his unexplained absence, and Tom's own partridge, which was carved as if it had been the first wild turkey of the season, were followed by a few peaches touched with splendid color as they lay on a handful of leaves in a bent and dented pewter plate. There seemed to be no use for the stray glasses, until old Milton produced a single small bottle of beer, and uncorked and poured it for his master and his master's guest with a grand air. The Colonel lifted his eyebrows slightly, but accepted its appearance at the proper moment.

They sat long at table. It was impossible to let one's thought dwell upon any of the meagre furnishings of the feast. The host and hostess talked of the days when they went often to France and England, and of Tom's grandfather when he was young. At last Madam Bellamy left the table, and Tom stood waiting while she was carried to her own room. He had kissed her hand like a courtier as he said good-night. On the Colonel's return the old butler ostentatiously placed the solitary bottle between them and went away. The Colonel offered some excellent tobacco, and Tom begged leave to fetch his pipe. When he returned he brought with it the chamois-skin bag that held the silver cup, and laid it before him on the table. It was like the dread of going into battle, but the moment had arrived. He laid his hand on the cup for a moment as if to hide it, then he waited until his pipe was fairly going.

"This is something which I have come to restore to you, sir," said Tom presently, taking the piece of silver from its wrappings. "I believe that it is your property."

The old Colonel's face wore a strange, alarmed look; his thin cheeks grew crimson. He reached eagerly for the cup, and held it before his eyes. At last he bent his head and kissed it. Tom Burton saw that his tears began to fall, that he half rose, turning toward the door of the next room, where his wife was; then he sank back again, and looked at his guest appealingly.

"I ask no questions," he faltered; "it was the fortune of war. This cup was my grandfather's, my father's, and mine; all my own children drank from it in turn; they are all gone before me. We always called it our lucky cup. I fear that it has come back too late"—The old man's voice broke, but he still held the shining piece of silver before him, and turned it about in the candle-light.

"Je vous en prie Bel-ami."

he whispered under his breath, and put the cup before him on the scarred mahogany.

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VI.

"Shall we move our chairs before the fire, Mr. Burton? My dear wife is but frail," said the old man, after a long silence, and with touching pathos. "She sees me companioned for the evening, and is glad to seek her room early; if you were not here she would insist upon our game of cards. I do not allow myself to dwell upon the past, and I have no wish for gay company;" he added, in a lower voice, "My daily dread in life is to be separated from her."

As the evening wore on, the autumn air grew chilly, and again and again the host replenished his draughty fireplace, and pushed the box of delicious tobacco toward his guest, and Burton in his turn ventured to remember a flask in his portmanteau, and begged the Colonel to taste it, because it had been filled from an old cask in his grandfather's cellar. The butler's eyes shone with satisfaction when he was unexpectedly called upon to brew a little punch after the old Fairford fashion, and the later talk ranged along the youthful escapades of Thomas Burton the elder to the beauties and the style of Addison; from the latest improvement in shot-guns to the statesmanship of Thomas Jefferson, while the Colonel spoke tolerantly, in passing, of some slight misapprehensions of Virginia life made by a delightful young writer, too early lost—Mr. Thackeray.

Tom Burton had never enjoyed an evening more; the romance, the pathos of it, as he found himself more and more taking his grandfather's place in the mind of this hereditary friend, waked all his sympathy. The charming talk that never dwelt too long or was hurried too fast, the exquisite faded beauty of Madam Bellamy, the noble dignity and manliness of the old planter and soldier, the perfect absence of reproach for others or whining pity for themselves, made the knowledge of their regret and loss doubly poignant. Their four sons had all laid down their lives in what they believed from their hearts to be their country's service; their daughters had died early, one from sorrow at her husband's death, and one from exposure in a forced flight across country; their ancestral home lay in ruins; their beloved cause had been put to shame and defeat—yet they could bow their heads to every blast of misfortune, and could make a man welcome at their table whose every instinct and tradition of loyalty made him their enemy. The owls might shriek from the chimneys of Fairford, and the timid wild hares course up and down the weed-grown avenues on an autumn night like this, but a welcome from the Bellamys was a welcome still. It seemed to the young imaginative guest that the old motto of the house was never so full of significance as when he fancied it exchanged between the Colonel and himself, Southerner and Northerner, elder and younger man,

conquered and conqueror in an unhappy war. The two old portraits, with their warped frames and bullet-holes, faded and gleamed again in the firelight; the portrait of an elderly man was like the Colonel himself, but the woman, who was younger, and who seemed to meet Tom's eye gayly enough, bore a resemblance which he could only half recall. It was very late when the two men said good-night. They were each conscious of the great delight of having found a friend. The candles had flickered out long before, but the fire still burned, and struck a ray of light from the cup on the table.

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VII.

The next morning Burton waked early in his tiny sleeping-room. The fragrance of ripe grapes and the autumn air blew in at the window, and he hastened to dress, especially as he could hear the footstep and imperious voice of Colonel Bellamy, who seemed to begin his new day with zest and courage in the outer room. Milton, the old gray-headed negro, was there too, and was alternately upbraided and spoken with most intimately and with friendly approval. It sounded for a time as if some great excitement and project were on foot; but Milton presently appeared, eager for morning offices, and when Tom went out to join the Colonel he was no longer there. There were no signs of breakfast. The birds were singing in the trees outside, and the sun shone in through the wide-opened door. It was a poor place in the morning light. As he crossed the room he saw an old-fashioned gift-book lying on the couch, as if some one had just laid it there face downward. He carried it with him to the door; a dull collection enough, from forgotten writers of forgotten prose and verse, but the Colonel had left it open at some lines which, with all their faults, could not be read without sympathy. He was always thinking of his wife; he had marked the four verses because they spoke of her.

Tom put the old book down just as Colonel Bellamy passed outside, and hastened to join him. They met with pleasure, and stood together talking. The elder man presently quoted a line or two of poetry about the beauty of the autumn morning, and his companion stood listening with respectful attention, but he observed by contrast the hard, warriorlike lines of the Colonel's face. He could well believe that, until sorrow had softened him, a fiery impatient temper had ruled this Southern heart. There was a sudden chatter and noise of voices, and they both turned to see a group of negroes, small and great, coming across the lawn with bags and baskets, and after a few muttered words the old master set forth hurriedly to meet them, Tom following.

"Be still, all of you!" said the Colonel sternly. "Your mistress is still asleep. Go round to Milton, and he will attend to you. I'll come presently."

They were almost all old people, many of them were already infirm, and it was hard to still their requests and complaints. One of the smaller children clasped Colonel Bellamy about the knees. There was something patriarchal in the scene, and one could not help being sure that some reason for the present poverty of Fairford was the necessity for protecting these poor souls. The merry, well-fed colored people, who were indulging their late-won liberty of travel on the trains, had evidently shirked any responsibilities for such stray remnants of humanity. Slavery was its own provider for old age. There

had once been no necessity for the slaves themselves to make provision for winter, as even a squirrel must. They were worse than children now, and far more appealing in their helplessness.

The group slowly departed, and Colonel Bellamy led the way in the opposite direction, toward the ruins of the great house. They crossed the old garden, where some ancient espaliers still clung to the broken brick-work of the walls, and a little fruit still clung to the knotted branches, while great hedges of box, ragged and uncared for, traced the old order of the walks. The heavy dew and warm morning sun brought out that antique fragrance,—the faint pungent odor which wakes the utmost memories of the past. Tom Burton thought with a sudden thrill that the girl with the sweet eyes yesterday had worn a bit of box in her dress. Here and there, under the straying boughs of the shrubbery, bloomed a late scarlet poppy from some scattered seed of which such old soil might well be full. It was a barren, neglected garden enough, but still full of charm and delight, being a garden. There was a fine fragrance of grapes through the undergrowth, but the whole place was completely ruined; a little snake slid from the broken base of a sun-dial; the tall chimneys of the house were already beginning to crumble, and birds and squirrels lived in their crevices and flitted about their lofty tops. At some distance an old negro was singing,—it must have been Milton himself, still unbesought by his dependents, and the song was full of strange, monotonous wails and plaintive cadences, like a lament for war itself, and all the misery that follows in its train.

Colonel Bellamy had not spoken for some moments, but when they reached the terrace which had been before the house there were two flights of stone steps that led to empty air, and these were still adorned by some graceful railings and balusters, bent and rusty and broken.

"You will observe this iron-work, sir," said the Colonel, stopping to regard with pride almost the only relic of the former beauty and state of Fairford. "My grandfather had the pattern carefully planned in Charleston, where such work was formerly well done by Frenchmen." He stopped to point out certain charming features of the design with his walking-stick, and then went on without a glance at the decaying chimneys or the weed-grown cellars and heaps of stones beneath.

The lovely October morning was more than half gone when Milton brought the horse round to the door, and the moment came to say farewell. The Colonel had shown sincere eagerness that the visit should be prolonged for at least another day, but a reason for hurry which the young man hardly confessed to himself was urging him back along the way he had come. He was ready to forget his plans for shooting and wandering eastward on the river shore. He had paid a parting visit to Madam Bellamy in her own room, where she lay on a couch in the sunshine, and had seen the silver cup—a lucky cup he

devoutly hoped it might indeed be—on a light stand by her side. It held a few small flowers, as if it had so been brought in to her in the early morning. Her eyes were dim with weeping. She had not thought of its age and history, neither did the sight of such pathetic loot wake bitter feelings against her foes. It was only the cup that her little children had used, one after another, in their babyhood; the last and dearest had kept it longest, and even he was dead—fallen in battle, like the rest.

She wore a hood and wrapping of black lace, which brought out the delicacy of her features like some quaint setting. Her hand trembled as she bade her young guest farewell. As he looked back from the doorway she was like some exiled queen in a peasant's lodging, such dignity and sweet patience were in her look. "I think you bring good fortune," she said. "Nothing can make me so happy as to have my husband find a little pleasure."

As the young man crossed the outer room the familiar eyes of the old portrait caught his own with wistful insistency. He suddenly suspected the double reason: he had been dreaming of other eyes, and knew that his fellow-traveler had kept him company. "Madam Bellamy," he said, turning back, and blushing as he bent to speak to her in a lower voice,—"the portrait; is it like any one? is it like your granddaughter? Could I have seen her on my way here?"

Madam Bellamy looked up at his eager face with a light of unwonted pleasure in her eyes. "Yes," said she, "my granddaughter would have been on her way to Whitfields. She has always been thought extremely like the picture: it is her great-grandmother. Good-by; pray let us see you at Fairford again;" and they said farewell once more, while Tom Burton promised something, half to himself, about the Christmas hunt,

"Je vous en prie,
Belle amie,"

he whispered, and a most lovely hope was in his heart.

"You have been most welcome," said the Colonel at parting. "I beg that you will be so kind as to repeat this visit. I shall hope that we may have some shooting together."

"I shall hope so too," answered Tom Burton, warmly. Then, acting from sudden impulse, he quickly unslung his gun, and begged his old friend to keep it—to use it, at any rate, until he came again.

The old Virginian did not reply for a moment. "Your grandfather would have done this, sir. I loved him, and I take it from you both. My own gun is too poor a thing to offer in return." His voice shook; it was the only approach to a lament, to a complaint, that he had made.

This was the moment of farewell; the young man held the Colonel's hand in a boyish eager grasp. "I wish that I might be like a son to you," he said. "May I write, sometimes, and may I really come to Fairford again?" The old Colonel answered him most affectionately, "Oh yes; we must think of the Christmas hunt," he said, and so they parted.

Tom Burton rode slowly away, and presently the fireless chimneys of Fairford were lost to sight behind the clustering trees. The noonday light was shining on the distant river; the road was untraveled and untenanted for miles together, except by the Northern rider and his Southern steed.


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