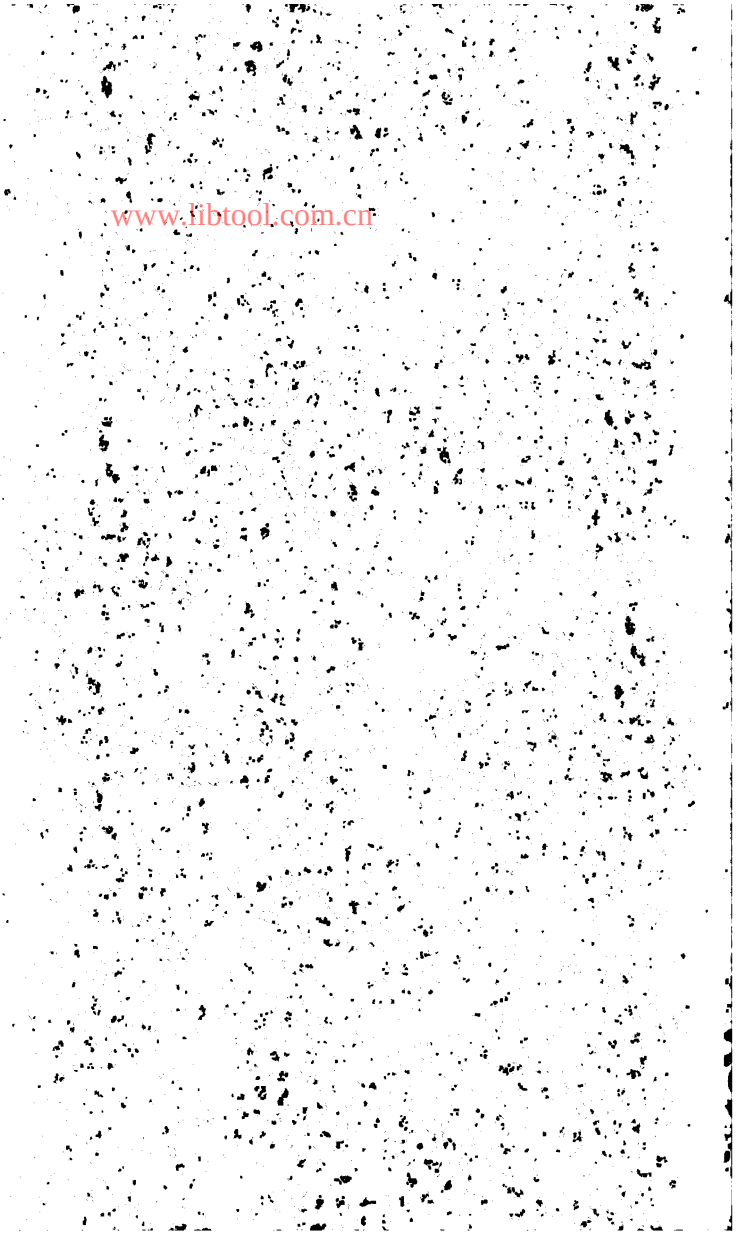
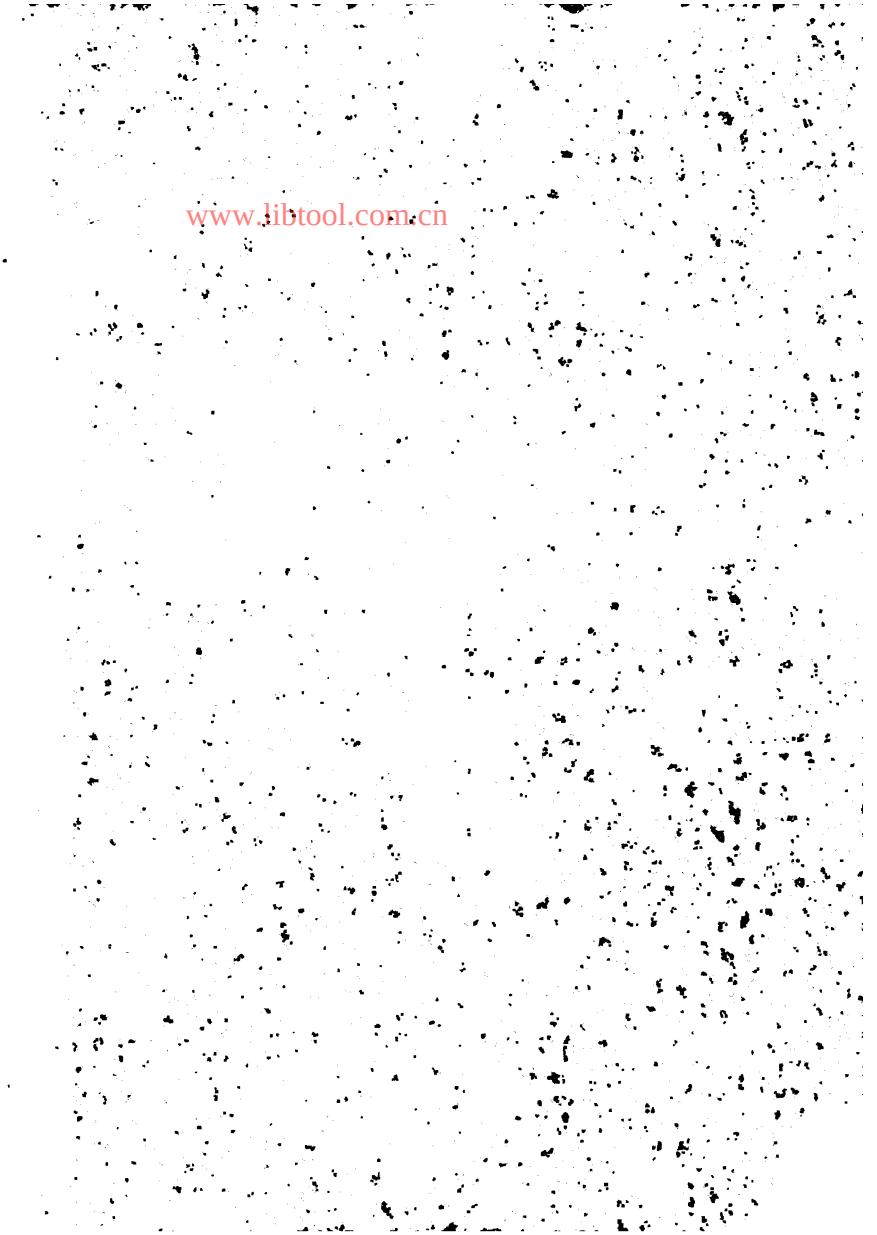
MARGARET THE MOONBEAM

by

C. Lusbington.





MARGARET THE MOONBEAM.

Frontispiece. *Page 42.*

"MARGARET THE MOONBEAM."

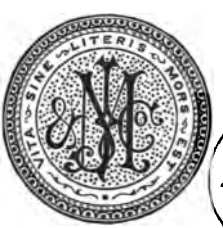
MARGARET THE MOONBEAM.

A Story for the Young.

BY

CECILIA LUSHINGTON,

AUTHOR OF "FIFTY YEARS IN SANDBOURNE."



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"You bear a gentle mind, and heavenly blessings
Follow such creatures."—*Shakespeare.*

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

THE LAST DAY AT THE OLD HOME.

"That orbèd maiden, with white fire laden,
Whom mortals call the moon."

—*Shelley.*

"I WONDER," thought little Margaret Esdaile, "whether the moon at Uncle Edward's home is the same as my moon here?"

It was a beautiful, crescent August moon, low in the deep blue southern sky, that was pouring its soft, full rays down upon the crystal face of the sleepy river, which flows with many a winding through green, flat meadows, outside the high, ancient wall of a great city of the North.

Some of the bright moonbeams found an open path to the solemn, dark, gigantic cathedral; sending shafts of weird colour through the stained windows upon the grand columns within, lighting up dark roof, and buttress, and tower, till they stood out in yet bolder relief than by day; and making the light filagree work of the pinnacles glisten as if frosted with silver.

There may have been thousands of busy (or idle) people, moving in the thronged streets or resting in their

houses, who never heeded the beauty that glowed above their heads, or the silver mantle thrown over the dark around them, or the glimmering flood of light that lay about their feet. But this was not the case in the one small house within the great city with which we have to do. Here the "silver-shafted queen" rained out her beams of brightness to no unseeing eyes, but to the earnest gaze of the child-dweller, whose nightly pleasure it was to watch for the coming of the moon.

As far as she could look back through the eight years which had formed her life hitherto, little Margaret Esdaile had always watched for the moon out of that same window of her nursery; and she could remember times when her father had comforted her upon her crying, because "her pretty, bright moon never came out for so many days." How often had this kind father, on his return from his work, looked up at the window to see the little moonlit figure watching for him, the fair, round child-face shining out of light, glossy hair like a moon among soft, fleecy clouds. It was of no use to watch now, for that dear father would never walk up the street again; and this was the last night that she would look out at her own moon from her own nursery window. A new home, far away in the south of England, seemed very strange and hazy to Margaret—far more strange than the thought of living with her great-uncle Edward alone; for she had never known any other companions han the father who had been everything to her, and her

nurse who would still be with her. Dreamily she gazed out upon the sky, while a whirl of unformed thoughts surged through her mind, till a sudden distinct one made her turn round and ask the question which was bewildering her.

"Nurse, will it be the same moon at Uncle Edward's home as my moon here?"

"Bless the child," answered a brisk voice from the kind-faced, middle-aged woman who sat working beside the table within; "there's only one moon in the world."

Margaret turned back again to the window for a few moments, but presently her ideas resulted in another question.

"The moon's in the sky, nurse. Is that being 'in the world?'"

"Bless the child," came the answer again, "any one need mind their words to answer you. There's only one moon in the sky that *we* ever see, my dear, wherever we be."

"I'm glad of that; I shouldn't like a new moon," said Margaret.

"How you do run on about the moon! I never did see such a child. Come in away from the window, do, there's a dear, and we'll think o' something else."

"Let me sit on your knee then, nursie, and tell me about your first coming to me," said Margaret, who was always obedient, but who, from the burden of the first sorrow she had ever known, felt strange with a craving

any questions till he should say something himself; and after we had talked a goodish bit about my circumstances, he sat looking in front of him with his hand half across his face, and then he says,—'Mrs Martin, I'm come to ask you a favour. Or rather to see whether you are willing to do what I believe would be a very great kindness. We have just had a sudden great sorrow come upon our family,—my nephew, Mr John Esdaile's young wife is dead.' That was your mother, my dear."

"Yes," whispered Margaret; "go on, please."

"Well, my dear, I can't tell you exactly what I did say, for I was so 'struck of a heap' as they say; but I know I did somehow express my sorrow as far as I could. But presently Mr Grant, he went back again to what he began with. 'You see, Mrs Martin,' he says, 'here's a little motherless baby left to be reared if it can be kept alive, and neither my nephew nor his wife having any sisters, there's no lady hardly in the family even to help. So it came into my mind this morning to ask you whether you would help your old friends.' 'I would, with all my heart, sir,' said I, 'but in what way do you mean?' 'I mean,' says he, 'whether you would go and nurse to my nephew's poor little girl. I know it's a great thing to ask of you after all these years of married life in a home of your own. Still, I thought, that you have no child living at home now, and it is not your husband's old home which you would leave, and I knew that, as a widow, you meant to go out nursing. So I

determined to ask you myself straight out—Will you do this great kindness? If you take the charge of this poor little baby, my nephew will know that his child has for her nurse one whom he can trust in every way, one who will give her the most loving care, and will watch over her like her own. He will be relieved of his greatest anxiety amidst his deep grief, and what a comfort it will be to him and me, I could not tell you. You see I can never forget what you were to my little Ada.'

"Well, to make a long story short, my dear, it was settled between us that I should think it over, for Mr Grant would not press me to give him an answer then and there. So I went to bed that night, but not a wink of sleep could I get for thinking of it all. I could see my little Miss Ada again, just as she was seven-and-twenty years before, a little round baby lying in my lap, cooing and smiling up in my face, with her pretty, bright eyes, and her plump, little hands patting one over another. And then I seemed to see a poor little hungry, pining baby, crying for what it couldn't have, and stretching out its tiny, wasted hands to me, as if it wanted me to take it up in my arms. So I says to myself, I can't bear this,—to think of this little motherless infant left to the care of only strange women, and my poor master John—him who was such a merry boy—left desolate with his young wife taken away, and no one to take care of his child. I must go, it seems like a call from the Lord, and go I must.

So I went off in the morning straight to Mr Grant, and I says to him, 'Sir,' said I, 'there's only one thing stands in my way, and that's a home for my daughter when she wants a holiday, or is out of place.' 'That's all been thought of, Mrs Martin,' says Mr Grant, quite quick; 'and Mr Esdaile says there shall always be a welcome in his house for your daughter when she comes to visit you.' 'Then I'm ready, sir,' said I. 'You are a true friend in need,' said he, 'and God bless you for it.'

"So I made haste then to be off here as fast as I could, for now that I was coming, I'd got it on my mind, and I was afraid every day I lost something might happen to the baby. But I won't deny that when I found myself in this strange town, all in the bustling, hustling, great railway station, with the guards and porters shouting out in their queer way of talking, so different from what I was used to down in the south, I did feel a bit lonely and dull."

"Was the moon shining?" asked Margaret, the question she always asked, knowing the answer to come.

"No, it wasn't. It was as dark and murky a night as ever I see, and the streets were as muddy and sloppy as ever I see."

"You wouldn't have been so dull if my moon had been bright," said Margaret.

"I don't think of the moon like you, and I'd no thought for the moon nor nothing that night. You were my moon, my dear. For when I got here, who should

meet me at the door but your dear father himself, and first he thanked me so hearty and kind for coming, and then he asked me if I wouldn't get some supper before anything. But I said, 'No, sir, if you please I'll see my baby first of all,' for you see I felt as you were *my* baby already. So up we went to the nursery, Mr Esdaile himself showing me the way, and he opened the door so gently, and there I saw you."

"In this very room?" said Margaret.

"In this very room, lying on the nurse's knees. And your dear father took you up in his arms for to show you to me."

"And was I the little pining, crying baby?"

"No, you were quite another sort of baby from what I expected, all smooth and plump, and happy looking."

"Was I like Adelaide?"

"No; my Miss Ada was a rosy-faced baby, with very dark eyes and the darkest black hair. While you were the fairest child I ever saw, with soft, pale cheeks, just like a blush rose for colour, and blue eyes, and downy white hair, like a fluffy little duckling. I shall never forget what a little, soft, white thing you looked in your long, white night-gown lying against your father's black coat. Such a mite of a thing in those strong arms. I can see him now as he looked down on you with such love in his eyes, and said, before he gave you to me, 'My little Margaret, my own little pearl.'"

"And that was what he said when I saw him

before he went away to God," whispered Margaret, with tears in her voice, and in the eyes that were hidden on her nurse's shoulder.

"Yes, my treasure, so he did. I thought you might have cried when a stranger took you, but no, you were as good as gold with me, and after that I never felt dull or strange again, nor never regretted what I did, for I've had you to be my little darling."

"And I've got you to be my dear old Nursie," said Margaret, with a parting hug before getting into her little bed. "O Nurse, look at my beautiful moon! How red she looks so low down in the sky. Why does she look so big and red before she sets?"

"I don't know, love. You quite pose me when you ask those questions about the moon and the stars. You must ask Mr Grant, he knows all about those things. Go to sleep now; there's a dear."

Margaret's head was only lifted once more from the pillow. "Nurse, do you think papa can see how beautiful my moon looks?"

"I don't know, love. No one knows anything about what those who sleep in Jesus can see. Perhaps he sees something ever so much more beautiful."

Margaret did not think there could be anything more beautiful, but while she was pondering over it, sleep floated down, and gathered the child into her soft, deep arms of perfect rest.

After Margaret was asleep, the cook came up to look

at her, and to chat with Mrs Martin. For the cook was leaving the next day, and she had grown very fond of the child during the three years that she had been in the family. She set down her candle at a distance, and stepped on her heavy tip-toes to the bedside, to look at her "little Missy" for the last time.

"Bless her little heart," said cook, as she spread herself down beside Mrs Martin, "but I shall miss her bright little face, I shall. I always were fond of children, and this one most of all. Don't you recollect, Nurse, when I first came here, how she used to peep into my kitchen rather shy, and say, 'Please, cook, will you make me one little cake for my own self?' And she did talk so pretty. I've been making her a nice cake for her journey to-morrow, so she'll have something sweet to remember her old Cookie by. What a baby she is to be left an orphan, poor little dear! I hope she'll meet with kindness in her new home, I'm sure."

Mrs Martin smoothed down her work with great decision, and replied, rather loftily: "You *may* be sure, she's safe to have the best of everything that love can give her. There's not a kinder man in this world than my Mr Grant, and I've known him these forty years."

"O still beloved, for thine, meek power, are charms
That fascinate the very babe in arms,
While he, uplifted towards thee, laughs outright,
Spreading his little palms in his glad mother's sight."

—*Wordsworth.*

CHAPTER II.

THF FIRST DAY AT THE NEW HOME.

"The rising moon has hid the stars,
Her level rays, like golden bars,
Lie on the landscape green
With shadows brown between.

And silver white the river gleams,
As if Diana, in her dreams,
Had dropt her silver bow
Upon the meadows low."—*Longfellow.*

MR GRANT met Margaret and her nurse in London, where he had been hard at work. He had been travelling abroad for a holiday when Mr Esdaile died after only a few days of illness, and then the first letters missed him. So that when he did hurry home to England, he found himself involved in such an accumulation of business that he could only spend two days at Margaret's home, to make arrangements for her coming to live with him by the end of a month; and had ever since been in London, or at his own home near Adimstone, settling all the affairs left to his charge by his nephew.

But he wished to bring his little great-niece to his own

home himself, and though he had not the time to go to York for her, he met her at the station as she entered London, and they travelled together for the last part of the journey. At first Margaret was rather tired and sleepy after her many hours in the railway, but towards the end she was quite wakened up, and ready to look out of the window with interest, and then her uncle took her on his knee, and pointed out to her the places and things which he thought would amuse her.

Nearly all the way the railroad went by a river; first the Thames, growing wider and wider towards its mouth, and then, where its course was changed, the broad, shallow "Medway smooth," justifying Milton's epithet by its gentle invisible gliding, making the boats upon it look

> As idle as a painted ship
> Upon a painted ocean.

Margaret always hailed a river, and she was delighted to learn that this was the river near which her uncle lived.

"Shall I see it all big and broad like that, Uncle?" she asked with eyes of pleased surprise.

"Not like that, dear. Much less wide than this, but then it runs much faster than it does in this smooth, flat part. And there's a pretty waterfall to which you shall walk with me some day."

"And shall I see ships and boats go by?"

"Not ships, but boats; and mostly what we call

barges, those big, heavy boats with red sails, that you can see down there. Look, do you see those horses dragging ropes along that narrow path? That we call a towing path, because the barges are towed up and down by horses, or sometimes by men."

"How hard they seem to pull! Is it very heavy?"

"Very heavy against the stream, though easy enough down the stream. Sometimes I see the men nearly bent double when the current is very strong."

"How nice it must be to live by a river! I never could see the river at York till we had gone through several streets. What's the barge full of, Uncle?"

"Coal. The barges bring bricks and other things, but more coal than anything. All the coal in my coal-cellar comes up in barges. And do you know where the coal comes from?"

"Newcastle, doesn't it?"

"All the way from Newcastle, some of it. Now look over there at the other side of the river, do you see that large, white, old looking house? That used to be an old monastery, where monks lived. And in one part there are such a number of funny little old rooms, perhaps the cells in which the monks slept. I have heard it said that there were ninety-two rooms."

"How nice they must be to play hide and seek in! Have you seen them all?"

"No, dear, and I don't know that the number is right at all. The only rooms I have seen are a very large,

long drawing room, and some bedrooms where the walls are covered with tapestry instead of paper."

"Isn't tapestry what William the Conqueror's wife did so much of?"

"Yes, there was a famous piece of tapestry that she was supposed to work at with her ladies. But the tapestry in this old monastery is not nearly so old as that, only it looks very odd, and unlike the walls in our rooms. You see figures of enormous men and horses, fighting and prancing, and falling one over another, with such queer faces. Now that whistle means we are coming very near Adimstone."

"What *is* that funny, big house, Uncle, with all those rows of odd windows!"

"That 'funny big house' is the factory, where men and women work at making paper; and that great, tall chimney carries away the smoke from the mills."

"And can we see your house, Uncle? You have not shown me that?"

"You can't see that at all. You can only see in the distance over there some of the big trees behind which it is hidden—there—now they are quite gone, and here we come to the station."

"Dear me, sir!" exclaimed Mrs Martin, when they were settled in the carriage, "how natural it all seems, to be sure. I might only have left it a week ago."

It was rather amusing how the two elder people liked

to show off to the young new comer the town where they had been born and bred.

"Now, Margaret," said Mr Grant, "we are going to cross the river, and the bridge is at least five hundred years old—how much older no one knows."

"I wonder in what king's reign it was built," said Margaret.

"Look, my dear, look," exclaimed Mrs Martin on her side of the carriage; "that place down there is the Fair Meadow, where those great old trees are; that's where they sell the cattle, and have all sorts of things going on at fair-time."

Margaret's head was out of the left-hand window to follow the direction of nurse's finger, when Mr Grant touched her to turn her eyes the other way.

"There's the first sight of the old church, Margaret, standing right above the river. Such a fine old church it is, and has such a beautiful peal of bells that I can hear from my house."

"Not as big as the Minster," remarked Margaret. "But how pretty the river looks up at that corner, Uncle."

"So it is, and there's such a nice walk on its bank beyond that corner. That pretty old building beyond the church, covered with ivy, is an old college, and there's a school for boys there now. And on this side that other nice old house is called the Palace, because it used to be a palace for the Archbishops of Canterbury.

And in the garden is an old mulberry tree, which is said to have been planted by Archbishop Cranmer himself."

"The poor man who put his hand in the fire before he was burnt?" asked Margaret.

"There were six Kentish men and women burnt in that very Fair Meadow three hundred years ago for being Protestants," said Nurse.

"Now, Miss Margaret, don't miss the cannon that was taken from the Russians at Sebastopol."

After driving out of the town, they presently turned in at a gate under some large elms and limes, whence a noisy greeting from rooks met their ears.

"Is this 'The Limes?'" asked Margaret in a low voice, colouring up with a strange, shy feeling of excitement. She felt in a sort of dream, as her uncle led her by her little hand through the passages, till he came to an open door where he said—

"This is your nursery, my dear little girl, and I hope you will be very happy in it."

"What a pretty room," said Margaret, as they looked out of the window upon a bright garden, sloping lawn, and broad meadows, beyond which lay the river, now glowing ruby red from the rich colours of the sunset sky. "And O, Nurse, look at all the pictures and things from the nursery at home, all I saw you packing up last week. How kind of you to let them come here into your room, Uncle!"

"There's all your own old things, Miss Margaret, and

a heap of nice new ones too," said Nurse; "and here's tea ready, and then bed is the best place for you."

"Does it all seem quite strange, Margaret?" asked Mr Grant, noticing the child's look. "You were here once when you were three years old, dear. Do you remember it at all? Did you remember me?"

Margaret did not answer at once, and there was a play of changeful expression over her countenance, as if something half dawned within her, and then faded out of her grasp.

"I don't seem to know," she said at last, doubtfully; "it only doesn't seem quite all strange," looking up shyly at the tall, white-haired figure, whose kindly eyes were looking into hers so penetratingly. Uncle Edward stooped down, and took the little wistful, white face between his hands.

"We mustn't be at all strange in a few days, my child. Nurse will show you where to come for breakfast with me in the morning. Good-night, dear little girl, God bless you."

If Margaret felt confused and strange in her new home, her great-uncle too was full of manifold and mingled feelings at the change in his home; this entrance of his nephew's little orphan child into the place that had been empty since his own Adelaide had left it five-and-twenty years ago.

Five and twenty years ago!
Easy words from lips to flow.
How much life within them lies
Fathomed by no human eyes!

The moon had not risen this night when Margaret dropped off into her first sleep.

On her first awaking, she saw that there was lamp-light in the adjoining day nursery. But she also saw another light she knew so well lying faint and shadowy across the floor.

Half restless with the strangeness of everything, half curious to see the new place by moonlight, she crept out of bed, and peeped behind the window curtain. Yes! there it was—her own very same moon, just as nurse said it would be. How full and heavy it looked! Not red like last night when it was setting, but so golden and so near, as if it might drop down into that white, glimmering water below.

There was no change in the moon, the change was in herself. Where was the dear father who used to hold her up to the window when he gave her his last good-night kiss?

Why should he be taken away, and never, never come back, when the moon was always coming back the same?

"O Papa, my own Papa!"

And Margaret broke out into a passion of tears and moans, as the want smote upon her more painfully than

it had done at all. Utterly desolate she felt, crouching by that strange, moonlit window.

"O Nurse, I do so want my papa!" sobbed the child.

There was no nurse to hear her, for Mrs Martin had gone down stairs. But Uncle Edward from the passage had heard sounds of childish distress, and through the open door-way he saw the little form in white, shaken by heart-felt sorrow. Margaret felt herself gathered into two kind strong arms, and a deep tender man's voice said: "What is it, my child? What makes you cry so? Tell me what you want, darling?"

But the man's voice, and the man's arms folded around her, to which she was so well used, only made Margaret feel the more bitterly that it was not *the* one whom she so dearly loved, and so sorely needed.

"O, I want my own papa!" she cried again and again, and could not be comforted, though she clung to Uncle Edward, and hid her eyes in her hair, which streamed over his shoulder. All at once she felt a hot tear drop on her forehead, and looked up, startled, to see the kind eyes gazing upon her filled with tears. Somehow the sight checked her own. "Does it make you cry too, Uncle?" she asked, rather awestruck. "Are you so sorry?"

"Yes, darling. I loved your papa as if he had been my own son, and I love his dear little daughter, and want to comfort her. Your papa would have been grieved to see you crying so sadly darling,

wouldn't he? And you don't want to do what would have grieved him, do you?"

"No," replied Margaret, "but I do want him so," and her voice and lips trembled again.

"I know you do, dear little girl. But he is gone home to God, and we hope that you and I will both meet him again some day; only we must wait till God calls us, trying in the mean time to please Him in everything we do."

What other prospect could be offered that would be any true consolation to the loving orphan?

Margaret lay silent a few moments before she said: "I don't think God could want papa as badly as I do."

Poor little heart! sounding so early with weak and trembling line the fathomless depths of human sorrow!

Uncle Edward tenderly stroked the little head lying on his shoulder.

"Margaret, my child, we often cannot understand at all why God takes away those whom we love so dearly. But God is the loving Father of us all, and He loves you and your dear father better even than you love each other. I am sure you would have trusted your papa for everything, dear. And he would tell you to trust our heavenly Father, who loves us better than any one knows, even when we can't understand why He sends us troubles. Now you would like to do what would please your Papa, wouldn't you, darling? Do you know what I think would please him now? That we should say a little prayer

together, and then that you should get into bed and try to go to sleep again. And I will stay and sit by you till Nurse comes."

When Mrs Martin returned to her charge she found her quietly sleeping, with her left hand still clasping the right hand of her great-uncle, who was sitting beside her little bed.

" Moon of the summer night !
Far down yon western steeps,
Sink, sink in silver light !
She sleeps ! "

Longfellow.

CHAPTER III.

ROADSIDE AND RIVERSIDE.

" Or like the scattered shreds of fleecy cloud
Left by the Evening at the gate of Night,
To shimmer in the leaden-coloured sky,
And drink the splendour of the harvest moon."

Charles Mackay.

MR GRANT was right. In a few days Margaret lost all feeling of strangeness with him, and her life flowed on in a quiet course, very like that which she had always known in York. He engaged a pleasant daily governess to come to her for some hours in the day, and the two soon became fond of each other. Margaret was happy with her governess, happy with her nurse, happiest of all with uncle Edward, who gave her the mental companionship to which she had always been accustomed in her father. A walk with "Uncle" was a treat to which she looked forward for days, while it would have been difficult to decide to which of the two the evenings spent together gave the greatest pleasure.

"Uncle," said Margaret, one fine September morning, "when will you show me your waterfall?"

"My waterfall, childie, what do you mean? I've neither stream nor waterfall in my grounds."

"Don't you remember, Uncle, in the train you told me you would show me the place in the river where the bridge goes over the waterfall? I should like to see it *so* much?"

"So you shall. I know what you mean now," answered Mr Grant. "I'll take you there to-day."

So forth they sallied that afternoon, a happy trio of great-uncle, great-niece, and small dog, for Mr Grant's terrier was an unfailing companion in all her master's country walks. Luna had at first been rather puzzled by the presence of a child in her domains, but not finding herself teased or deposed from her rightful position, she soon acknowledged the new-comer as a personal friend and a legal member of the family. In lanes or fields the two were always having what Mr Grant called "six-footed races," but both child and dog were too well-bred to play when they reached the high road, and they walked steadily and calmly on at each side of Mr Grant, till Margaret stopped to look up a lane shaded by trees of many sorts, large and small.

"Not that way, little woman. That's a private road leading up to Colonel Richmond's house."

"It looks so pretty up that winding hill, so fresh, and green, and cool."

"We shall walk up there some day soon, I daresay. We must move on now, there's a carriage coming down

the lane. Do you see all those bushes overhanging the path, Margaret? These are all hawthorns, and in the spring you will see them all one mass of white—beautiful white May blossom. Do you know the May blossom?"

"Oh yes. There were some bushes of it on the other side of the Ouse, but I could hardly ever go where there was any to gather."

"We shall find plenty to gather near here. And these woods behind the hedge will be full of wild flowers in the spring. Wind flowers, cuckoo flowers, primroses, and white and blue violets in sheets all over the ground, and plenty of others besides. And then I shall ask Lady Selene * Richmond to let you walk about the woods and pick flowers."

"O, how delightful!" cried the town-bred child, before whose eyes arose, as a sort of Paradise, a vision of carpets of the freshest grass, wherein a wealth of flowers of every hue sparkled like countless gems of beauty.

But now there came a rapid pattering of ponies' feet up the road, and the carriage from the lane overtook them.

Mr Grant raised his hat, but the lady who was driving drew up suddenly, flung her reins to her old servant, and sprang out of her carriage and up the bank almost as swiftly and lightly as a bird.

"How do you do, Mr Grant? I could not go by without stopping to speak to you, it is such a time since

* *Selene*, Greek for Moon.

I have seen you. And so you have brought your little great-niece to live with you after all. Selene and I have been wanting to hear all about everything from you. You must come and see us, and bring the little girl too."

The words seemed to flow from her lips as in one breath, but without a shadow of hurried speech, and how musically soft and low-pitched was her voice! Mr Grant, who had known her all her life, looked at her with pleasure as she stood before him, the dark eyes lighted up at the unexpected sight of an old friend, the ivory cheek just tinted with rose, a few tresses of the dark, abundant hair playing in the wind, under the small hat and drooping feather; the slender, noble form, erect and tall, yet graceful and mobile as a flower. O, the beauty and grace of her in all the bright glory of her youth! Involuntarily there rose up in his mind Wordsworth's exquisite picture, of which she seemed to stand as a visible fulfilment:—

> She was a phanton of delight
> When first she gleamed upon my sight;
> A lovely apparition, sent
> To be a moment's ornament.
> Her eyes as stars of Twilight fair,
> Like Twilight's, too, her dusky hair;
> But all things else about her drawn
> From May-time and the cheerful Dawn.

Margaret felt as if suddenly brought face to face with

the fairy tale princess, from whose lips fell roses and diamonds with every word, as the liquid sounds floated forth once more.

"I wish I could stay now and walk with you, but I am really bound to a fixed time or I would. But do come and see us as soon as you can. And when do you expect Mrs William Grant for her regular visit? Not till December? I want so much to see Edward now he has been at a public school. But I must fly this afternoon or I shall be late."

And to fly she seemed as she escaped to her carriage, leaving, by the smile which she flashed back upon them, an impression as of the fragance wafted by some unseen flower.

"O, Uncle," said the child, "What a beautiful lady!"

"Do you think so?" said her Uncle with a smile. "So do I, dear. That is Lady Cynthia Mornington, who lives with her sister, Lady Selene Richmond."

"And she looks so"—Margaret hesitated, scarcely knowing the word 'amiable' well enough to use it. "I seem to like the look of her."

"So do I," was his answer again.

"Did you see the dear little ponies, Uncle?" she presently asked, "they looked so pretty and so tiny."

"They are Norwegian ponies, and they fly over the ground at a fine pace. Did you ever ride on a pony, Margaret?"

"No," she answered rather sadly, "I did so wish to

ride on a little Shetland pony, and Papa said that I should very soon."

Mr Grant fell into a train of thought which lasted till they left the high road.

"Now look over here," he said, as they entered a sandy footpath and suddenly found themselves on the top of a high hill-bank, from which there was an abrupt, steep descent straight down to the water-side.

Margaret looked. Below her lay the smooth, silvery river, winding between green grass-fields and overhanging woods, while full before her on the other side stood the gray ancient ruins of a castle, half hidden among overgrowing ivy, half rising boldly out from fresh meadows against the clear blue sky. What a picture it was! The child had the feeling, though she had not exactly the power of thought or of word to express it.

"It makes me think of my hymn, uncle—

> 'To fertile vales and dewy meads
> My weary, wandering steps he leads,
> Where peaceful rivers soft and slow
> Amid the verdant landscape flow.'"

"Green pastures—still waters," thought Mr Grant.

"I never knew there was an old castle here," she said. "Does anyone live in it now, Uncle, or is it all ruin?"

"No one lives in the ruins, but there is a small farm-house built in among them. It is a very famous old castle, and has been mentioned in poetry, which some

day I hope you will read. There was a famous man here who used to keep a tame lion for a pet. And long before him, there was another of the family who was imprisoned—in the Tower, I believe—who was fed, how do you think? by his pet cat, who used to kill pigeons and bring them to his window."

"What a dear cat to be so good to her master," cried Margaret. "And did he get out and live with his nice cat again? And who put him in a dungeon? and why was he put there?"

"I know nothing more of his history, but I believe he was afterwards released. What became of the faithful puss I don't know, but a figure was made of her on a monument which was long after put up to the memory of several people of her master's family."

"I should have liked her better than the lion. Is there a dungeon in this castle, Uncle, and is there much to see inside?"

"There is a remnant of a dungeon partly filled up, and a gateway with a deep mark of the place where the portcullis used to be. Nothing else to see inside. The ruins themselves are the things to see."

"How very smooth the water is! I never saw the Ouse look so very soft and smooth."

"I suppose the river must always have been thought remarkably smooth, dear. For do you know what its old name of Medway means? Water of honey. Honey stream. That was the name which the old Britons gave

it perhaps more than two thousand years ago. So they must have thought it more smooth than most of the rivers they knew. The Medway is also mentioned in poetry. Milton calls it 'Medway smooth,' in writing of a great number of rivers. Do you know who Milton was, dear?"

"O yes, I know—the blind poet who used to play the organ for Oliver Cromwell. Papa used to read pieces of his poems to me, and I learned some of the bits I liked best. I do like them so much!"

"Why, what pieces do you know?"

"There was some of the poem about the merry nymph, which has—

> 'Meadows trim with daisies pied,
> Shallow brooks and rivers wide.'

And some of the one about—

> 'There let the pealing organ blow.'

And papa used to read me some bits out of the long poem.

"O Luna, Luna, what is it you are asking for? I've nothing for you. What does she want, Uncle?"

"She wants you to throw that big stick into the river for her to swim after. I can throw it the farthest, I suppose. Here Luna, fetch it, good dog."

And between the recovered stick, the dripping dog, and the laughing child, there was plenty of racing, barking, and diversion, till the fall was reached. Then

Margaret was glad to be held by her uncle's hand as they walked over the narrow plank-bridges. The river here was widened, and divided by an island, on the farther side of which were the lock-gates, through which a barge was just passing. It was very interesting to watch the "water-box," as Margaret called it, in which the barge was shut up as the water rose gradually higher and higher from the pouring sluices, till at last the barge was on a level with the upper part of the river, while a few minutes before it had been twenty feet below, with a "great steep step up which it could not possibly climb." But she liked still better the other division of the river, where the water rolled over the steep step like a "smooth, green wheel," or else rushed through an opening like a rapid, foaming and roaring below in a whirlpool. This was a little dazzling and deafening to watch, and she clung pretty tight to her uncle's hand; but still it was a sight which fascinated, it was so grand, and the great, green, solid mass of water above broke into such beautiful white masses of foam below, with ever-changing flashes of rainbow hues.

Luna, who was far too much accustomed to crossing by this bridge to see any occasion for stopping so long looking at nothing of consequence, stood waiting, not impatiently, but with a certain tinge of contempt about her eyes and her attitude, and when they did move on, her ears remarked, "At last; I hope you've been long enough at that stupid business, that's all." She was not,

however, at first uppermost in Margaret's mind, for when out of the rush of the water the child remarked, "It looks just like the poem of the fall of Lodore, uncle,—

'Here it comes sparkling,
And there it lies darkling.'

Have you seen any *very* big waterfalls, Uncle? Have you seen Lodore, or that great, *great* one called Ni——"

"Niagara, you mean. No, dear, I have seen neither Niagara nor Lodore, but I have seen some very beautiful falls in Wales."

"What should we have come to on the other side of the river if we hadn't turned back, Uncle?"

"We should have come directly to a wood full of deep dells and steep banks, and little paths crossing one another. At this time of year nothing particular grows there, but in the spring it is a mass of flowers. It is partly cut up now by the railroad, the very line by which we came from London. But twenty years ago, before there was any railroad through it, it was the largest and richest wood for flowers for miles around. We used to stand and look round hardly able to see the grass for the clumps of primroses and the periwinkles."

"Do you remember the railway being made, Uncle, so far off?"

"Remember, my dear child! If I didn't remember, it would only be from the time being too near to remember, not too far off. I recollect very particularly the first time that I walked on that new line, before it

was opened at all, when the cuttings were quite fresh. For it was only a little while after the battle of Alma, and I know the exact spot to this day where I said aloud to myself—

'Gray, gray morn o'er the hollow dark is creeping.'"

"Oh, what are those splendid purple flowers close to the water? May I get some?"

"I'll get them for you, dear. It's rather too slippery for you on that steep edge. Now if I tumble in, you and Luna will have to pick me out."

"O, Nurse," cried Margaret, rushing into the nursery when they reached home, holding up a handful of glorious 'long purples,' "look what we have found. We've been for such a delightful long walk, and I saw a ruined castle, and a barge going through the lock, and the beautiful waterfall, and all sorts of things. And Luna swam in the river, and hunted the rats; and what do you think? Uncle is going to give me a real little pony to ride on—a Shetland pony of my very own—only think!"

"Only think, indeed! Well, you *have* had a nice time, and you've brought home quite a colour in your cheeks."

The result of the long expedition was such extreme quietness on Margaret's part after tea, that Mr Grant fancied she must be tired, when on turning round to look at her, he perceived her knitting her brows in deep thought over a paper and pencil.

"Why, what are you scribbling at so hard, little woman?" he asked.

With a little shy hesitation she put into his hands her paper with the following lines:—

Honey-stream, how smooth you look
Smoother far than rill or brook,
Medway smooth is still your name,
For two thousand years the same.

O, how green your waters flow
Where they rush and fall below;
But the foam is snowy white,
Or its colours sparkle bright.

Medway smooth, go on and flow
By the castle gliding slow,
On your banks long purples grow,
And cool evening breezes blow.

"It's a singular thing," remarked Mr Grant a few minutes later, "a very singular thing, that two young persons should write verses on this very same evening in this room. We have had yours first, Margaret. Now do you think you could listen to the other young person's poem put into my hands?"

Mr Grant's voice was quite grave, but there was a twinkle about his eyes which made Margaret a little suspicious as he read:—

Why Master, good Master, wherefore do you stop?
What can you be looking at there?
Did you never see water spin round like a top,
That at it you stupidly stare?

It's that new little girl who has made you so queer,
Why can't she come on and make haste?
I would not for worlds disrespectful appear,
But I'm really surprised at your taste.

I'm ready to swim, or to race at your call,
Or to leap to and fro like a frog,
But to stand idly staring at nothing at all
Is too much for a sensible dog.

"I know who made that poem," said Margaret, with a merry face. "Luna, you good doggie, did you find it so very dull to wait on the bridge?" But you know you wouldn't understand how pretty the waterfall was. And you don't care a bit to look at the beautiful harvest moon either, so I don't think you are such a sensible dog after all. O, Uncle, may we go out on the terrace to watch the full harvest moon? I can see her coming up."

"Moon of harvest, I do love
O'er the uplands now to rove,
While thy modest ray serene
Gilds the wide surrounding scene;
And to watch thee riding high
In the blue vault of the sky,
Where no thin vapour intercepts thy ray,
But in unclouded majesty thou walkest on thy way."

—*Kirke White.*

CHAPTER IV.

DIANA, AND THE HILL SIDE.

"Ere in the northern gale
The summer tresses of the trees are gone,
The woods of autumn, all around our vale,
Have put their glory on.

I roam the woods that crown
The upland, where the mingled splendours glow,
Where the gay company of trees look down
On the green fields below."—*Bryant.*

"O UNCLE," cried Margaret, as they sat down to breakfast one October morning, "what a thick fog! I'm afraid we shan't get out at all to-day."

"Don't be so sure of that, little woman. I should not wonder if we have bright sunshine before twelve o'clock. It is a dry, frosty fog, and not a damp one, so very likely it will clear off before long."

"Why, I can't see the river or anything, Uncle. And the fog came in at the window like white smoke before Nurse shut it."

"Nevertheless I suspect that by the time Miss Willis and you have done with lessons, the sun will be ready and waiting for you. This is not like a London fog."

"What is a London fog like, Uncle?"

"One of the queerest things you ever see, dear. You seem to be surrounded by a thick, murky yellowness every where. I remember well the first London fog that I ever saw. I looked out of my window upon this blank, yellow wall, and all I saw was a rusty, coppery ball below which I knew there were houses, and at first I did not know whether it was the sun or the moon. Of course it was the sun; but it was so small and of so strange a colour that it reminded me of some lines which a poet wrote:

'All in a hot and copper sky
The bloody sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand
No bigger than the moon.'"

"Was the poem about a fog in London, Uncle?"

"No, dear. Some of it is about a fog, but it was a fog in the midst of a great ocean. And this verse is about a very different sun from ours, the burning sun of the parts of the world near the equator. But still these lines came into my head at that time, and always have done so ever since when I see a London fog."

"Does the poem say any more about the moon?"

"Yes, little moon-beam, I remember one verse about the moon:

'The moving moon went up the sky,
And nowhere did abide;
Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside.'"

"How pretty!" said Margaret, with beaming eyes, "Will you read me all the poem, Uncle? And may I learn it?"

"You shall hear and learn some of it, my dear, but not all. Part of it is too terrible for you till you are older."

Mr Grant was right in his prognostications, for while Margaret was reading history aloud, the waves of white fog suddenly rolled away as if swept from the earth before a most brilliant sunshine; the air became instantly clear, and the sky intensely blue.

Margaret went bounding into the study ready dressed for her morning walk, and was looking out of the window while waiting for her Uncle, when the door was silently flung open, and in came Lady Cynthia Mornington.

"I knew this was your free morning, Mr Grant, and I have just caught you in time. We all came home only yesterday, and both Charles and Selene are most anxious to see you. So I have come with my ponies to try to persuade you to come up at once with your little niece to take luncheon with us, and then to go up the hills this most delightful day. The woods are just in the flush of their glory, and you may not have such another day this autumn. Do come, won't you? Ecco la fanciulla," she continued, "come ella parla cogli occhi."

Margaret's eyes were indeed speaking for her unconsciously. It is delightful enough to be suddenly brought

face to face with your vision of beauty, unseen since that one rapid meeting a few weeks before, but stamped upon memory in fairest lines, dreamed of as a treasure never to be lost. But to have this fairy princess standing before you, dropping from her lips such jewels as words of invitation to her own home, this was almost too entrancing to be believed! And then to find yourself actually seated opposite her in her light carriage, drawn by those swift-footed, mouse-coloured ponies—it was as good as being in Cinderella's pumpkin-coach, drawn by the six mice steeds. What wonder that in Margaret's eyes the light should "sparkle and spin?"

"Do you like my pretty ponies, Margaret?" asked Lady Cynthia. "My brother-in-law calls my little carriage 'Cynthia's car,' and my ponies are called Hesper and Phospher—the evening and morning star."

"Uncle gave me a dear little pony too," said the child, "and her name is Peggy."

Lady Cynthia turned to Mr Grant with her little wave of rippling laughter.

"It seems so strange to see you with a child about you. I have not realised till now that you had a great-niece."

She was only nineteen, this fair young Cynthia, and his Ada had been gone for five and twenty years. Yet, as that morning's mist had vanished before the might of the sunbeams, so to him at this moment

The *five and twenty* years were a mist that rolled away.

But his answer was a smile, which held no bitterness for either the child, who was smiling up at him with pleasure, or for the bright being beside him, who went on to tell him of many things in her own sphere of interest.

"And how is Diana of the Ephesians?" enquired Mr Grant, as the ponies dropped into a walk up a steep bit of hill.

"Oh, wonderfully active and bright, dear old thing, though she does grow older every day."

"Is Diana another dog?" asked Margaret, as Luna's ears were seen to quiver among the fallen leaves.

Lady Cynthia's joyous laugh broke forth again.

"No, not a dog, but a nice old woman, to whom I will take you; and I'll ask her to tell you why she is called Diana of the Ephesians. Now, look at our great elm trees down there. Don't you think the place deserves our name of Elmhurst, with that winding avenue of fine elms, even though the largest trees of all are limes?"

"Yes," answered Margaret; "I never saw such very big ones. Are those branches really growing in the grass?"

"No; but they are so large and heavy that they are bent down with their own weight, till they look as if they grew out of the ground."

"There come your grey walls, all lit up with crimson creepers and late roses," said Mr Grant. "How well

I remember the first time I caught sight of that grey house."

"Before either I or Selene were born," said Cynthia.

"Before your mother was born, my dear."

"No, No!"

"I assure you, it was. Your mother was eight years younger than myself, and I was seven years old when first I saw this place. Five and twenty years later I saw her come here as a bride, and twenty years after that I saw your sister go forth as a bride from this door."

"And here is Selene herself to meet you and greet you," said Cynthia.

And a lady came forward, whom you would at once read as Cynthia's sister, for though form and face bore signs of her sixteen elder years, yet everything in type and voice, manner and expression, betokened that she was but an older phase of the same nature.

After a kind greeting to the little stranger child, she took her old friend indoors to her husband, and the three were immediately deep in their mutual history since their last meeting.

Meanwhile, Cynthia, at the library door, beckoned to Margaret, who was only delighted to wander with her fairy princess round about her pleasant abode, down sloping lawns shaded by grand beeches, past sunny plots of flower garden still bright with chrysanthemums and autumn flowers, and through a wilderness of shrubbery and luxuriant half-wild growth.

"You should see it all in spring," said Lady Cynthia, as she glided from spot to spot, "when all this wild part is covered with primroses, and wind flowers, and periwinkles at your feet; and the lilacs, and laburnums, and acacias are all in bloom overhead. And then in summer, when white and red roses are climbing over those high walls, and that tall tree will be all wrapt round with sweet honey-suckle hanging in great festoons amongst the ivy forty feet above our heads. The prettiest thing you can see now is all that clematis twining in soft, fluffy masses among the white thorns. In spring, too, I find so many nests of dear little eggs, or fluffy little birds. What do you think I once saw just at that corner? A little brown nightingale mother sitting on her nest; and she was so tame and trustful that she never moved when she saw me close to her, but stayed looking at me out of her dark, bright eyes."

"Oh, I should have liked to see her; I never saw a nightingale at all," cried Margaret.

"That comes of having had your home in Yorkshire, where nightingales are very seldom seen or heard. Now, next spring, if you walk up this lane you may hear half-a-dozen all at once, between The Limes and this. And then you will see dozens of little chicks and yellow ducklings all about this stackyard, instead of these strutting cocks, and selfish drakes, who are, I think, the most greedy creatures I know."

"They are always greedy in Andersen's fairy tales,"

said Margaret, whose thoughts had turned to the "Ugly Duck."

"And you as a town child know more about ducks in Andersen than ducks in real life. Ah! you are a happy child to like those fairy tales. And here comes one who might be a kind fairy godmother. How do you do, Mrs Knox? I hardly expected to see you to-day."

"Well, I did think I could hardly climb the hill, my dear; but then, my lady, your sister, she asked me to come to dinner if I could, so I managed, coming gently. And who is this little lady with you? I don't seem to know her face before."

"This is little Miss Esdaile, great-niece to Mr Grant of The Limes; she lives now with him."

"O yes; I remember I heard tell she was coming. I can recollect her father too as a little boy no bigger than her. You come from out of the north, don't you, dear? And how do you like Kent, Miss? I suppose you never saw hops before, did you?"

"No, she came just in time for the great sight of the hop-gathering as quite a new thing. And now she wants to know why we call you Diana of the Ephesians."

"O, Lady Cynthia, how you do love to tell that tale. You must know it as well as me now, you have heard it so often."

"Never mind, let me hear it again, that Miss Esdaile may know it."

"Well, my dear, you must know, my poor father—he

was the kindest father as ever was—but he couldn't read, for they hadn't learned him to read nor write when he was a boy. Nor he didn't very often go to church neither, for he couldn't rightly understand what they said, and there wasn't no one in those days where he came from to make things easy for poor folk, let alone that he lived ever so far up the hill away from the church. But when I was born, my mother she got him to go to church the first Sunday to give thanks like, and she says to him: 'You listen when Parson reads, and perhaps you'll hear a nice Scripture name to give to our baby!' So father he goes to church, and, as he says, 'I lays up my legs an' thinks o' nothin' till the parson begun to read,' the lesson, you know. So father listens then, and by-and-bye he hears the name 'Diana,' and presently the words came, quite loud, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians.' So he listens again, and presently he hears again, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians.' So father he makes up his mind, and he settles to sleep quite comfortable; and when he gets home, he says to my mother: 'I've found a name for the baby, an' a fine Scriptur' name too—Diana o' the Phesians.' My mother called out at that, for she knew it wasn't a right kind of Christian name, for as you know, Miss, it's a heathen sort of name though it does come in the Bible; and she could read, mother could. However my father was a set-tempered man, and he stuck to it. He says: 'I heard parson read it right out of the Scriptur', and he said, Great is Diana o' the

Phesians; an' the baby shall have that name, an' perhaps she'll *be* great. So poor mother was in quite a taking about it, and when the parson came to see her, she told him all about it. So he smiled, and he said: 'Well, Mrs Moon, if your husband will have Diana, we must try to persuade him to let the child be Phœbe also; for that is a real Scripture name, and of a good Christian woman too.' Well, miss, father had got his way about Diana, so he said there wasn't much difference between 'Phesians and Phœbe,' and mother could call me Phœbe if she liked. So there, my dear, I was christened Diana Phœbe; and parson, who was always a jokesome gentleman, he used to laugh and tell me I was little Threemoons; for he says Diana means the moon, and Phœbe means the moon, and my surname was Moon. But then you see I lost the last when I married."

"Which did you like best?" asked Margaret, "Diana or Phœbe?"

"Phœbe, my dear, I liked Phœbe best. And except for Lady Cynthia's fun, nobody hardly ever called me Diana after I was married."

"And how long ago was that?" asked Cynthia.

"Sixty years ago, come next January, my lady. And my husband, he has been gone these fifteen years. I can't say like Jacob 'Few and evil have been the days of my pilgrimage,' for I have had a long life, and I have a many blessings. Why, though I'm in my eighty-four now, I can see how to read without any glasses, and I

can walk up here, and down street too, if I take my time. And to think what kind friends I have in you all, I may well be thankful."

"Where do you live?" asked Margaret, looking shyly up into the old woman's pretty, aged face; a very pretty, youthful face it must have been sixty years before.

"Down on the Hatcham high road, my dear, next door to the post-office."

"Don't you know the pretty cottage just beyond the carpenter's shop?" said Lady Cynthia, "where there's a vine growing over the old white walls, and a great mass of sweet peas by the gate? Do you know, Margaret, a learned architect told me one day that he thought that cottage was built in the time of Henry VIII. Only think, Mrs Knox, of your cottage being three hundred and fifty years old!"

"Dear, dear! What a many people must have lived in it all that time!"

"Never any Diana, perhaps, before you, and never any dearer old woman than you, Mrs Knox. Now I am keeping you from your dinner all this time, and Miss Esdaile must make a good dinner too, before we go up to the top of the Brooksley hills. So good-bye for to-day, Diana o' the Phesians."

The lively mouse ponies were again in requisition to take Cynthia and her little guest to the foot of the hills, while Mr Grant went with Colonel and Lady Selene Richmond. But all five left the carriages to walk together

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Brin**gs** fresh into my mind
A day **like** this which I have left
Full **thirty** years behind.

And just above yon slope of corn,
Such colours, and no other,
Were in the sky, that April morn,
Of this the very brother."

Lady Selene and her husband looked at each other, and moved a little apart together, both full of remembrance of the day when these very woods had witnessed their betrothal sixteen years ago.

Cynthia was the only one whose mind was free enough to watch any other. She saw Margaret slip her little hand into her uncle's, from a half-awakened sense of the unusual emotion created in her by the grandeur she beheld. Feeling the sublime, yet only half conscious of it, and wholly unable to express it, she had a sort of longing for a human touch, to give her a home feeling amidst the almost overpowering sense of awe and isolation, which an entirely unknown burst of beauty gives.

"This is a grand, new sight for you, little one," said Mr Grant, tenderly capturing the hand timidly thrust into his.

"I never, never saw any thing like it," said Margaret with a long breath, from a sort of relief at the silence being broken.

"No," continued Mr Grant, noticing Cynthia's look of surprise, "she has hardly ever been away from York, and certainly never upon any hill like this. So no wonder it breaks upon her like a sort of New World."

"I wish a New World could break upon me like a

vision," exclaimed Cynthia. "Do you know, I could often and often wish that I had never seen the sea, but that I might be taken blindfold to the top of some great cliff, and then suddenly have my eyes set free for the whole unknown sight of the vast ocean to burst upon me unawares. O, I think such a feeling would be too delightful almost to be conceived. I feel a touch of it whenever I see any quite unexpected scene of beauty in a new place, just enough to make me long for its intensity."

"I know well what you mean, but the love of the sea as known from childhood seems to me an equally intense feeling."

"Yes. Only a perfectly different one. None of the overwhelming sense of a glory which you had never been able to imagine, while you had a dim conception. Only fancy, if one were a child from the heart of a great city, who had never seen a tree or a field, or anything but streets and houses, then to be taken away blindfold, and set down here for instance, or right in front of the ocean, what would it be. One feels as if one would give almost any thing for such an experience."

"Only it might be almost too overwhelming for human nature to bear."

"Yes; I can imagine being almost

'Blinded by excess of light,'

through the rush of awful beauty and grandeur."

That idea of the child from the murky cellar being

transplanted—say to see the sunrise from the Righi, or a glorious sunset in the ocean, gives me a sort of vision of what may come in one lightning flash upon our spirit when

> "Like the hand which ends the dream,
> Death, with the might of his sunbeam,
> Touches the flesh, and the soul awakes—
> Then—ay then."

They wandered gently onwards under a group of fine fir-trees, where the wind was never silent, but always whivering among the broad fir-heads.

"Hark, the wind whispers just like the hushed sound of the distant sea," said Cynthia; and as she stood still to listen, her companions saw how

> Beauty born of murmuring sound
> *Did* pass into her face.

Colonel Richmond's voice broke in upon them from behind, "Do you know what time it is,

> 'Good people all,
> Both great and small?'"

"No, Sir, nor don't want to know neither," said Cynthia, with a comical change of look and tone.

"Nevertheless, even if 'ignorance is bliss,' I must remind you that we are not in the long days of June, which 'give ample room and verge enough' for lingering among the trees. Is this little girl tired?"

"O no, not a bit," was Margaret's eager denial, "and now it is all down hill, and I can run ever so fast."

"I'll challenge you to a race. You run your 'ever so fast,' and I will see if my seven leagued boots can keep up with you walking."

"But you have got your shadow, Peter Schlemihl, and that is out of the bargain," Mr Grant called after him, as child and colonel started.

"Not Peter Schlemihl but Hop-o'-my-Thumb, a much more fitting associate for my youthful companion," the colonel called back, as he cleared the ground with swift, long strides.

"When does your schoolboy make the holiday raid upon you, Mr Grant?" asked Cynthia, when they were driving home.

"Edward joins his mother on the 15th of December, and both come on to me the next day, I hope."

"Have either of them ever seen Margaret?"

"No. She has a new aunt and cousin to learn to know."

"Uncle," said Margaret, entering upon a subject which had perplexed her all day, "is Cousin Edward the same nephew to you as I am?"

"Not exactly, my dear, for he is my nephew, and you are my niece."

"But that isn't what I mean, Uncle. I know that we are not of the same—the same genus ——, but there's

something else. Are you the same uncle to him as to me?"

"Why, can I be two uncles? Do you think I am double, or what?"

"No, Uncle, you are laughing at me, and I can't explain."

"I know what she means," said Cynthia, suppressing her secret amusement at the "genus." "You mean to ask if Mr Grant is great-uncle to Edward as he is to you, don't you?"

"O, that is the question. I see. No, dear. Edward is my nephew, my own brother's son; while you are the grandchild of my own sister, and therefore my great-niece. A grandchild, or great-niece, is of a younger generation than a child or niece."

"But you say *grand*-father; why don't you say grand-uncle; or *great*-father as well as *great*-uncle? And why am I your great-niece? I should have thought it would have been little-niece, when I am younger than the real niece."

"That is an original puzzle which never entered my dull brain," remarked Cynthia.

"I can't tell you, dear," said Mr Grant thoughtfully, "how the two terms 'grand' and 'great' came to be used in this way. I daresay I can find out from some learned writer on language. English has grown up to be what it is from the mingling of so many different peoples or tribes, that it has a great many odd

varieties of words, of which we can't always trace the history."

"Besides, Miss Margaret," said Cynthia, "I doubt if you would like to be *little*-niece to your uncle when you come to be as old and tall as I am."

Margaret looked at her tall, stately, slender princess,

"Queen lily and rose in one,"

and wondered, but did not speak.

"What a number of flowers you have found, dear," remarked Cynthia, "I suppose you gathered these while we were talking."

"Lady Selene gave me most of these," replied Margaret. "I was picking my daisies, but she had such a handful of berries and flowers."

"Picking *your* daisies?"

"Miss Willis told me the daisy was my flower, and since I learnt my poem about it, we try to find daisies every time we go out, and we are to see if we can find one every week all the year round."

"Which poem?

'Bright flower! whose home is everywhere!'

or

'Small, modest, crimson tipped flower?'"

"O, I know that too; but the one I meant was where it says at the end

'The daisy never dies.'"

"I know. James Montgomery's 'Daisy,'

'There is a flower, a little flower,
With silver crest, and golden eye,
That welcomes every changing hour
And weathers every sky.

It smiles upon the lap of May,
To sultry August spreads its charms,
Lights pale October on his way,
And twines December's arms.'"

"Now, Mr Grant, you are laughing at me for my usual bad habit of quoting, but it is your own great-niece's fault. How could I tell you that she was going to entrap me into poetry?"

"But, Uncle, I wanted to ask you, why does it say—

'Lights *pale* October on his way?'

All the trees are so bright in October."

"I suppose it means the sunlight, my dear, which is less bright and strong than during the summer."

"Rather a misnomer to-day, certainly," remarked Cynthia. "Between the brilliant sunshine, the glowing colouring, and the intense blue of the sky, I never saw a day to which 'pale' could be less truly applied."

"Except to that big, white moon up there, which might be a white cloud but for its shape."

"'Sailing high, but faint and white,
As a schoolboy's paper kite.'

You see you have stirred me up again, Mr Grant. This

evening gives a literal fulfilment to those beautiful lines of Keats, about the sun and moon :—

> 'When thy gold breath is misting in the west,
> She unobservèd steals unto her throne,
> And there she sits most meek and most alone.'

Something in that meek day-moon, waiting for the time to be useful, always makes me think of her as looking in through prison bars upon sad prisoners. No doubt Wordsworth meant the bright night-moon when he wrote—

> 'The aspiring mountains and the winding streams,
> Empress of Night! are gladdened by thy beams,
> A look of thine the wilderness pervades,
> And penetrates the forest's inmost shades;
> Thou, chequering peaceably the minster's gloom,
> Guid'st the pale mourner to the lost one's tomb;
> Canst reach the prisoner—to his grated cell
> Welcome, though silent and intangible!'

But the mild, white moon like this suggests something more pitying and tender, than when she reigns over the night in all her glory."

"Yet if you did not know her in her glory, you would hardly care about her in that pale cloud-like state. Is it not the promise of her at night that makes you so much drawn to her now?"

"Perhaps it is. I don't know. It must be night for the prisoner to say—

'Smile of the Moon! for so I name
That silent greeting from above,
A gentle flash of light that came
From her whom drooping captives love.'"

"Uncle," asked Margaret, "do you think that poor negro chief whom Napoleon treated so cruelly could see the moon from his prison? I hope he could."

"Toussaint, the most unhappy man of men!"

"What do you know about him, dear?" asked Cynthia.

"Miss Willis was reading about him yesterday. Don't you think it was the worst thing Napoleon ever did, Uncle?"

"I hardly know, my dear. I think the murder of D'Enghien was the worst."

"Josephine! Josephine, surely, Mr Grant! To turn off that faithful wife of his adversity just for his vile ambition—I never could forgive him for that."

"It is but a choice of evils, I am afraid, my dear. But do you know, I think the ponies find your quotations an excellent excuse for creeping, and it grows late, and really you ought to make *way* while the sun shines."

Cynthia lightly touched her ponies with the whip.

"Quote no more, lady, quote no more,

'Nags are deceivers ever,'

is what you meant to say."

"No parodies for me, if you please, I like them worse than ever."

"I hardly ever indulge in them, only when I cannot resist."

"Using the tyrant's plea, necessity."

"Is not that the shadow of a quotation?"

"Well, when you steal so many horses, I think I might be allowed to look over the hedge now and then."

"We are quite bewildering the child with our conversation, a motley combination of proverbs and poetry," said Cynthia, with her laugh like a fairy peal rung by the harebells among the heather.

"'A fool! a motley fool!
I met a fool in the forest!'

There it comes again, you see. How can I help quoting? Are you fond of poetry, Margaret?"

"Yes, *very*."

"That *very* sounds as if it meant something. Then we two shall agree. However, I shall be stopped now, for here we are at your door."

She stooped to kiss the child who sat opposite to her.

"Come again very soon to see me, Margaret. Lady Selene and I often want a little girl very much, having only a great, big schoolboy at home to play with. Good-bye."

Suddenly turning round as the ponies had started,

"'When shall we three meet again?'"

she called back gaily.

"A treacherous Parthian shaft," answered Mr Grant.

"What could I say more simple, matter of fact, and to the point? It is not my fault if Shakespeare said it before me."

Mr Grant watched her as long as she was within his sight, while the unspoken quotation rose unbidden in his mind—

> "Sweet *English* girl, a very shower
> Of beauty is thy earthly dower.
>
> . . . . .
>
> But, O fair creature! in the light
> Of common day, so heavenly bright,
> I bless thee, vision as thou art,
> I bless thee with a human heart;
> God shield thee to thy latest years!"

"Uncle," said Margaret, when she rejoined him after her tea, "it seems such a long day. It seems such a long time since we saw the fog this morning."

"That is because you have seen so much that is new, dear. New places and new people. I don't think you will ever forget this day of going to the top of those hills and seeing that beautiful sight of the country all round."

"O, I must remember it. But O, Uncle, do look at the moon now! I must love her better like that, when she is so very bright, than like the pale moon as we came home."

"So must every one really. When you are older you may understand better what Lady Cynthia meant. But this beautiful moon is a pleasant ending to your long, delightful day."

"Can you tell me a new verse about her, Uncle, before I go to bed?"

"I think this little sleepy maiden wants her bed more than verses. Don't you think it is time for sleep, Nurse, after the walk up those hills?"

"Yes, sir, it's time now that Miss Margaret went up the wooden hills, across the fields, and into Bedfordshire."

"Only one little verse, Uncle."

"Well, then, here is one I remember—

"Lo! where the moon along the sky,
Sails with her happy destiny,
Oft is she hid from mortal eye
Or dimly seen,
But when the clouds asunder fly,
How bright her mien!"

Wordsworth.

CHAPTER V.

SUNDAY MEMORIES.

" 'Twas when the op'ning dawn was still,
I took my lonely road, up hill,
Towards the eastern sky, in gloom,
Or touched with palest primrose bloom;
And there the moon, at morning break,
Though yet unset, was gleaming weak,
And fresh'ning air began to pass
All voiceless, over darksome grass,
Before the sun
Had yet begun
To dazzle down the morning moon."

Barnes.

MARGARET was happy every day, but if there was one day of the week when she was happier than another, it was Sunday. For on that day her great-uncle was completely at leisure, so that they could be together more entirely than on any week-day. He took her to church with him, he took her for walks with him, and then in the evening he would read to her, or tell her stories, while, on her part, she had always hymns and verses to say to him. Perhaps the two learned to know each other more by the long children's hour on Sundays

than by all the rest of their time together. It was often spent by Margaret upon her uncle's knee, in the cosy room lighted only by the warm, softly, moving glow of the fire, time and place so well fitted for confidences, the quiet and the half-light making her feel free and brave.

One Sunday evening, when Mr Grant came in from looking at the pale yellow sunset of a November sky, he found his little niece kneeling on the floor beside a chair, on which lay a large book in which she was so deeply absorbed that she did not hear him enter or see him stand over her.

"Why, Margaret, what have you found there so very interesting?" he asked.

She looked up dreamily for a moment before answering. "Such a beautiful verse, Uncle, all about my moon. I have been looking for it such a long time, because I knew a little bit of it, and now I've found it at last."

"In the Bible, my dear?"

"No, Uncle, in the Ap—the set of books that doesn't quite belong to the Bible."

And she read out from Ecclesiasticus, "The month is called from her name, increasing wonderfully in her changing, being an instrument of the armies above, shining in the firmament of heaven.

The beauty of heaven, the glory of the stars, an ornament giving light in the highest places of the Lord."

"I do like that so much," she ended, with a long breath. "Don't you, Uncle?"

"It is a grand description, dear. What made you think of it to-day?"

"I think it was that pretty verse in the hymn at church—

'And the silver moon by night,
Shining with her gentle light,
For His mercies aye endure,
Ever faithful, ever sure.'

That put into my head, 'The beauty of heaven, the glory of the stars,' and Nurse said, I should find it somewhere in this part."

"What makes you so fond of the moon, little moonbeam?" asked her Uncle, "You like me to call you moonbeam, don't you, dear?"

"Yes," answered Margaret, earnestly, "Papa always called me his little moonbeam."

"I know he did, darling."

And Mr Grant unlocked a drawer in his writing-table, and took out some papers.

"Look here, my dear little girl, I think you may like, when you are a woman perhaps, to remember my showing you this. It is the last letter which your dear father wrote to me, and this is what he said in it about his dear little daughter.

'Margaret spent her birthday in a hay-field, to her great delight, and was as happy as child could be. In truth, my little Moonbeam becomes more and more every month the very sunshine of the house.'

"That was a beautiful thing for him to write of you, dear, a thing to remember all your life, and think of with love, even if you should ever be an old, old woman. But do you know why your father called you Moonbeam?"

"He said it was partly because I was so fond of the moon when I was a little baby, and partly because my own mamma was so fond of it too. He used to tell me about the beautiful moon which mamma saw the last night she was with him, before she died."

"How was that, dear?"

"Nurse can tell you best, Uncle; she often tells me about it, and there she is by the door. Nursie, do come and tell Uncle about my moon that mamma saw."

"Well, Sir," said Mrs Martin, "you know I was not in the house at that time, but I have heard Mr Esdaile speak of it many a time, besides the nurse who had Miss Margaret then.

It seems that Mrs Esdaile, before she was taken so ill that night, was looking out of the window to see the moon rise. It was a very warm August night, and she stood out on the balcony in the warm air, just as the large, full moon rose up low in the sky. And Mr Esdaile, he was just coming along the street below, and he could see her standing there looking out, but he couldn't see what she was looking at, because of the houses, Sir, you see. So he looked up and asked her what it was she was watching; and she smiled down on

him, and said something out of a poem—Miss Margaret, my dear, you know that, you can tell your Uncle the line of poetry."

"'And some one pacing there alone,
Who paced for ever in a glimmering land,
Lit with a low, large moon.'"

"Yes, I knew you would have it at the tip of your tongue, my dear. Well, Sir, as I was saying, she said this to him, and then Mr Esdaile, he came up, and they both watched the moon rise for a few minutes, and then he took her in, and he said, 'A very fine night it is for the eclipse, and we shall see it splendidly, I hope.' Poor man, he didn't know how full his thoughts would be of something else by the time the eclipse came. For Miss Margaret's mother turned ill all of a sudden, and Mr Esdaile was thinking of her, and not of the moon at all, when twelve o'clock came. However she never seemed to forget it, and she would have the curtains all open, and she seemed to miss it and be quite uneasy like if the light were shut out. And when the black shadow had all gone by, and the moon was all clear and full again, she pointed it out to her husband, and said, 'Look, how she hangs so full and high, like a golden lamp in the deep, blue sky. The lesser light to rule the night!' She sometimes seemed to speak all in rhyme, Sir, as sick people often do. At last she roused a little and asked for 'Baby,' and when she felt little Miss Margaret beside her, she said, 'Little pearl, little moon-

beam child, be father's comfort till we meet again.' Then sometimes they could only catch a few words of what she said, like 'glimmering land,' and once she said out quite plain some of the words of that verse which Miss Margaret was looking for this evening, 'the beauty of heaven, the glory of the stars;' and whether it was the moonlight or heaven itself that she was thinking of, Mr Esdaile said *he* could not tell, but he thought it was both together. These were almost the last words he could hear, Sir, for very soon after the Lord took her to Himself, and who knows what beauty and glory she did see before morning?"

"Who indeed!" said Mr Grant softly, as he gently stroked the little moonbeam head, which rested on his arm.

"Miss Margaret has a little book, Sir, in which her father wrote down for her some beautiful lines which he found one day in a book, while she was still quite a baby."

"He used to write down all the poems which mamma had marked;" said Margaret, "for he said, I should like to read them when I was grown up, but I like some of them now."

And she drew from her pocket the much prized little red volume, and laid it shyly in her uncle's hand, who opened upon these words:

"O child! O new born denizen
Of life's great city! on thy head
The glory of the moon is shed
Like a celestial benison.

Here at the portal thou dost stand,
And with thy little hand
Thou openest the mysterious gate
Into the future's undiscovered land.

. . . . . .

Like the new moon thy life appears
A little strip of silver light,
And widening outward into night
The shadowy disk of future years;
And yet upon its outer rim
A luminous circle faint and dim,
And scarcely visible to us here,
Rounds and completes the perfect sphere,
A prophecy and intimation,
A pale and feeble adumbration,
Of the great world that lies
Behind all human destinies."

Here followed a little piece marked as befitting Margaret's mother.

"The moon was pallid but not faint,
And beautiful as some fair saint,
Serenely moving on her way
In hours of trial and dismay

. . . . . .

That were to prove her strength, and try
Her holiness and her purity."

Laying aside the book for further perusal at another time, Mr Grant sat silently gazing at the glowing fire-shapes before him, while in his heart thought linked itself with thought, forming a chain of entwined memories

and feelings, a ladder, as of mingled gold and clay, whereon glistening shapes moved up and down between heaven and earth, now with hidden countenance, and now with beaming smile of recognition. He was roused by Margaret's gentle call.

"Uncle—I should like—only would you mind—" she paused.

"Mind what, my dear?"

"I want to know ——, only I hardly like to ask you."

"Ask me what? Don't be afraid to tell me, little one!"

Margaret had long wished to ask a particular question, and had felt too shy to do so, but the fire light, wherein faces were more hidden than by day, gave her more courage.

"Would it hurt you to tell me something about your Ada, Uncle?"

Mr Grant felt the delicate, reverential tone of voice and of feeling with which this child touched upon the subject of his own little child so long ago parted from him.

"What do you want to know about her, darling?"

"Nurse has often told me things about her, but I thought you and she were something like my papa and me. And I see her pretty picture in the nursery; and then Nurse says she would have been grown up, like papa, to take care of me. But I can only fancy her a little girl to play with me. How do you think of her, Uncle, as a

little girl, or like a grown-up lady, as Nurse says she would have been, much older than Lady Cynthia?"

Mr Grant was silent again; for one of the brightest visions hovering over his Jacob's ladder had been his own child, as a being moulded both by Memory and Hope—one hand still touching the Past, one pointing forward to the Future—creating within himself an ideal somewhat resembling the beautiful picture in Longfellow's "Resignation."

"Day after day we think what she is doing
In the bright realms of air;
Year after year, her tender steps pursuing,
Behold her grown more fair.

Not as a child shall we again behold her;
For when with raptures wild,
In our embraces we again enfold her,
She will not be a child.

But a fair maiden in her father's mansion,
Clothed with celestial grace;
And beautiful with all the soul's expansion
Shall we behold her face."

And yet withal she was his own little light-hearted child, merrily bounding among the new-piled haycocks, swiftly racing over the lawn to meet him, her whole face alight with pleasure, her whole form afloat with healthful, child-like glee.

The answer for which Margaret was waiting came at last.

"I think of her most as a little girl like you, my dear. And I will tell you something about her and her pets. She was always remarkably fond of birds; even before she could walk she would stretch after them and try to catch them. The winter after she was just a year old, she used at her breakfast to hold out some of her bread and milk in her little fingers to the window, and call, 'Robby, Robby,' to the hungry robins who came to the sill outside. And if one had flown into the nursery, and was shut in, she would shriek and clap her hands with delight as he flew about the room; and when Nurse opened the window to let him fly out, she would say, 'Robby stay, Robby stay!' in such an entreating voice."

"Had she any pet birds of her own?"

"Yes; generally one or two canaries. But she cared much more for all the wild birds in the garden. She used to feed them, and to imitate them, and watch them, till many of them learned to know her, and come at her call to be fed. Do you remember the pretty nursery rhyme where a little girl is feeding the birds out of a basket, and says--

'Come hither, sweet Robin,
And be not afraid,
I would not hurt even a feather;
Come hither, sweet Robin,
And pick up some bread,
To feed you this very cold weather!'

Ada used to sing that nearly every day to her birds, and

certainly they understood how she meant to coax them not to fear her. All her relations grew to know her fondness for birds, and it became quite a joke, and they would all tell her every bird story they knew."

"Can you tell me any?"

"One of her aunts had lived in the West Indies, and told her of the cunning of a parrot or cockatoo which belonged to her. There was a certain time of day when all the fowls, of whom there were a great number, were collected and fed in a court by their master. One day the master was absent, and this lady, Mrs Wilmot, was resting in her room, when, just at the usual time, she heard a voice giving all the calls to the fowls, as her husband always did; and then she heard the usual clucking and bustling of the fowls as they assembled for their meal. She peeped out from behind the jalousies to see who could possibly be acting her husband's part, and who should it be but Mr Cockatoo or Parrot, who was amusing himself by imitating his master's daily performance. And when he had collected all the poor hungry fowls around him, he gave a loud ha-ha of laughter at their coming for nothing at all; and Mrs Wilmot herself was so much amused by his malice and cleverness that she joined in the laugh."

"It must have been funny to see it all, but he was very mischievous. Can you tell me any more?"

"I can tell you the prettiest story of robins that we ever heard—the one that Ada was the most fond of,

and used to call her Sunday bird story. There was an English cathedral on which, for a great number of years, some robins had always built their nests; and year after year, every Sunday, a robin used to fly into the choir while service was going on, perch on the bishop's throne, and sing out loud with his little voice as if he were joining in the praises. This went on from robin-father to robin-son, and robin-grandson, and so on for several generations, till every one about the cathedral grew to love the chorister robins."

"I should have loved them too. I wish they would have come to York Minster."

"Then there was a nice story about a goose which a clergyman used to see in his churchyard every Sunday waiting about all the time of service, and he found out that she acted just like a dog to a poor blind woman whom she led to and from the church by a string, for a long distance, quite safely."

"That *was* a wise goose. But didn't Ada like robins the best of all the birds, Uncle?"

"Yes, dear. I remember the last piece of poetry she said to me was about the robin. I can see her now as she stood repeating it.

'Robin, Robin Redbreast,
O Robin dear!
Robin sings so sweetly
In the falling of the year.'"

"May I learn that poem, Uncle? or would you rather not?"

"I will show it you, my dear, and you may learn to say it to me if you like."

"What do you think is the prettiest poem you know, Uncle?"

"My dear child, I could not possibly say. There are so many poems, all so beautiful."

"But what is the prettiest verse you know about the moon, Uncle? Couldn't you tell me just that?"

"Just that I think I can tell you. Perhaps it may be in your book, or perhaps you may never have heard it. Two verses belong to each other. They give a picture of the beautiful moonlight night of the Holy Land, supposed to be spoken by Jephtha's poor daughter—

'The torrent brooks of hallowed Israel,
From craggy hollows pouring, late and soon,
Sound all night long, in falling thro' the dell,
Far heard beneath the moon.

The balmy moon of blessed Israel
Floods all the deep blue gloom with beams divine,
All night the splintered crags that wall the dell
With spires of silver shine.'"

"How very beautiful," cried Margaret, sitting bolt upright with pleasure. "'Spires of silver' sounds like the Minster when the moon shines upon it."

"Yes. Whenever I see a cathedral, as I did last year

at Gloucester, with its pinnacles lighted up by the moonlight, I think of those lines. And when I see great crags of cliff or rock gleaming under the moon, they remind me of a cathedral."

When left alone again that evening, Mr Grant opened the little book of extracts, one of which was specially marked as expressive of the feelings of Margaret's own father, when left with his little motherless daughter:—

"Hast thou then survived—
Mild Offspring of infirm humanity,
Meek Infant! among all forlornest things
The most forlorn—one life of that bright star,
The second glory of the Heavens? Thou hast.
Already hast survived that great decay,
That transformation through the wide earth felt,
And by all nations. In that Being's sight
From Whom the race of human kind proceed,
A thousand years are but as yesterday;
And one day's narrow circuit is to Him
Not less capacious than a thousand years.
But what is time? What outward glory? neither
A measure is of Thee, whose claims extend
Through Heaven's eternal year! Yet hail to thee,
Frail, feeble Monthling!

. . . . . .

Even now—to solemnise thy helpless state,
And to enliven in the mind's regard
Thy passive beauty—parallels have risen,
Resemblances or contrasts, that connect,
Within the region of a father's thoughts,

Thee with thy mate and sister of the sky.
And first—thy sinless progress through the world,
By sorrow darkened and by care disturbed,
Apt likeness bears to hers, through gathered clouds,
Moving untouched in silver purity,
And cheering oft-times their reluctant gloom."

— *Wordsworth.*

CHAPTER VI.

EDWARD THE ELDER AND EDWARD THE YOUNGER.

The moon seemed above me to float in cloud-streamings,
As over its face they would flit in its beamings.

—*Barnes.*

"It was only a schoolboy singing a song,
But he sang it not loud and he sang it not long,
And he carolled a cheerful ditty.
O, December's sky it is clear and still,
And the ice is so thick on the pond by the mill,
That if I don't skate it's a pity!"

"IS that native genius?" asked Mr Grant of his nephew, as his ears were saluted by the above tune on his entering the breakfast room.

"Extempore effusion by Edward Grant, junior, improvised upon the occasion of his forming preliminary arrangements with reference to undertaking a skating expedition upon the congelated surface of an ornamental sheet of water."

"Alias a mill pond. The ice is all right there for you, and you had better make the most of it, for I think we shall have a fall of snow soon."

"And, Mother, won't you come out and see us presently, and bring Margaret with you?" asked the boy.

"O do, Aunt Bessie, please!"

Aunt Bessie and her boy had now been for some days at The Limes, and Margaret, who had at first been extremely quiet and shy before them, was beginning to feel them no longer strangers. Her awe at the "unknown quantity" which a boy was to her had vanished rapidly before Edward's fun; while he, on his part, found an entirely new and entertaining amusement in playfully half teasing and wholly petting his little girl cousin. By the end of a week they were fast friends. He delighted to find new names for her, often the more far-fetched the better. No sooner, on this occasion, did he hear her gentle but eager "O do, Aunt Bessie, please," than he pretended not to have been aware of her presence, and raised his hands to his eyes in circular form as if he wanted an opera-glass.

"What! are you there, you marmoset, you mountain marmoot, you meadow mouse, you microscopic midge?"

"Yes, I'm here," answered Margaret with dignity, "but I'm none of those things."

"What name will you own to, minnikin? Will you be Meg Merrilies?"

"I don't know who she was."

"She was as like you as two peas. She is described as a tall, masculine woman, with long, tangled elf locks

of raven hair, and piercing black eyes. You are the very image of her, I assure you."

"No, I'm not a bit like her," and Margaret's merry laugh shook her glossy, fair hair, and made her blue eyes shine in open defiance of his declaration.

"What are you then?

'O sweet pale Margaret,
O rare pale Margaret?'"

"I'm a little young moon, and a pearl, and a daisy."

"Come now, I can't give in to that, it is too much. How can you be the day's eye and the moon at one and the same time? If you like to call yourself the night's eye, well and good, but even you can't be sun and moon both at once."

"I'm a daisy because of my name."

"I have no notion how or why the daisy became associated with the name Marguerite. Do you know, Uncle?" asked Edward.

"I do not know, my boy. But I strongly suspect it was the connection only of the little meek, innocent flower with the idea of maidenly innocence and meekness, of which the original, early St. Margaret was the type. I believe some people have fancied a supposed likeness between a daisy and the pearl Margaret means. But I think it most probable that the whiteness and lowliness of the flower made it an emblem of purity and humility first, and then the name of the Saint was affixed to it later."

"I know nothing of the story of the Saint except that she tramples upon a dragon."

"The legend is a very wild and obscure one, which was brought from the East by early crusaders in the eleventh century, when the name first grew popular in Europe. Whatever was the real origin of the story, its meaning is most obvious as the triumph of spiritual strength, through meekness and purity, over the brute force of worldly power. I recollect two old legendary lines about her which I met somewhere:

> Mild Margarete, that was God's maid,
> Maid Margarete, that was so meeke and mild."

"I must read up the legend," said Edward.

"I can't think of any historical Margaret except Margaret of Angou. Would you like to be Mrs Henry the Sixth, Margaret?"

"I won't be Margaret of Angou; she was a cruel, fierce woman. I'll be somebody nice or nobody at all."

"There was one very good Margaret, Edward," said his mother, "and an English one too. The sister of Edgar Atheling, who married the king of Scotland. She was really a very fine and beautiful character, and was so much loved that she made her name both popular and sacred in Scotland and England."

"Then there was a Princess Margaret of Bohemia, who married a king of Denmark, and persuaded her husband to grant some great boon to the Danes, remov-

ing a bread-tax, I think, whereby she became their most beloved and sainted queen, only they changed her name to Dagmar, which is said to mean Daylight, to show that she was the light of their country. Another Margaret of fame too was a great Scandinavian queen, who had the triple crown of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark."

"Then there was a Huguenot princess, Margaret of Navarre, a very noble woman, I believe," said Edward's mother, "and the wife of St. Louis was Marguerite."

"And we have our two English ladies, Margaret More, and Margaret Godolphin," added Mr Grant, "so you see we have found a respectable choice for our little woman."

"I've found the right Margaret for you," exclaimed Edward. "I knew there was another. Margaret of Branksome, of course.

> Why does fair Margaret so early awake
> And don her kirtle so hastilie?
> Why does she stop and look often around
> As she glides down the secret stair?

Then in a measured and solemn voice he uttered—

> "Tears of an imprisoned maiden,
> Mix with my polluted stream;
> Margaret of Branksome, sorrow-laden
> Mourns beneath the moon's pale beam."

"But I'm not an imprisoned maiden!"

"Are you not? What does imprisoned mean, if you please?"

"Shut up where you can't get out."

"Well, can you get out of my arms? You may try as hard as you like. Now will you say you are not imprisoned?"

"At any rate I don't drop any tears into the river."

"Come, you minstrel young or old, the way may be long, and the wind may be cold, but time and ice wait for no boy."

"Minstrel!" said Mrs William Grant, "he is much more a 'stark moss trooper' like William of Deloraine:

> Alike to him was time and tide,
> December's snow, or July's pride.

"I'm not quite such a donkey as to try to skate in July, though, mother."

And off he started, followed by Luna and Margaret, the latter calling out from the doorway,

"How shall he skate without any ice?"

"What a boy it is!" said the mother fondly, as she watched him from the window.

"Bessie," said his uncle, laying down his paper, "the boy reminds me of his father in our boyhood every day. All that fun bubbling up incessantly, and then the sudden taking up of a serious subject with his whole mind thrown into it. And when I see him with that child, I could often almost call out 'Will, my boy,' as I used to do forty years ago."

"I am glad that he and Margie are such friends. She is a very dear little girl."

There was a short silence before Mr Grant said, "I am especially glad that my brother's boy should know and like my sister's little grand-daughter. I know how Will himself would have wished it. And Edward may be a most valuable friend to that orphan when I am no longer here."

His sister-in-law looked at him affectionately. She was a silent woman, and all her reply was, "Edward may well love any one who is dear to his own kind uncle."

Presently she asked, "Is Margaret like her mother? I can see a likeness to John Esdaile often, but I never saw his young wife."

"Margaret is most like our John when she is most animated, either when amused as she was just now, or when very earnest over something she wants to do. At such times I can see in her John's expression over a game of cricket, or a tough piece of Greek. But that rather peculiar, pensive expression she has when quiet, which is lighted up as by a flash of sunlight when she smiles, comes from her mother. I remember remarking it before she was engaged to John, almost the first time I had a conversation with her. Her gentle expression was almost touched with melancholy, till something I said interested her strongly, and I saw her whole countenance change in an instant. I know it reminded me of a soft breeze suddenly rippling a still lake, with the sun

gleaming in every drop of the water. Ah, she was a most loveable being, and *how* John loved her!"

"Their child has a strong title to your affection through them certainly. But it was a little strange at first to see a little girl here again after so many years. It is not every one who could have taken her as you have, Edward. I have heard some say that they could not —— in your home."

"She is just like a grandchild. John was all the son I ever had, and few sons are as much to their fathers as he was to me. Besides," said Mr Grant, rising to end the conversation, "it was a simple case of its being my duty to have the child."

Edward's skating was duly inspected and admired by his mother and Margaret in the midst of their noonday walk. After which he was invisible till after sunset, when he and his uncle came home together.

"I am sorry to have left you so long alone, Bessie," said Mr Grant, "but I was unexpectedly asked in to luncheon by a friend with whom I especially wanted to talk; and then I took a walk to Edward's pond, and was beguiled into waiting for him."

"I have not been at all lonely," she answered, "nor have Margie and I even been left to our two selves all the time, for I have had a long visit from Lady Selene and Cynthia. We had plenty to talk about, of course; and then Lady Selene gave her usual invitation for Edward to stay with them for a few days, including New

Year's Day. They were both, also, full of entreaties to have Margie also. But about that I said I could give no answer; I must refer it to you entirely. And, of course, the child has heard nothing of it."

Margaret, at this moment, came into the room. "Oh, Uncle," she exclaimed, in a plaintive tone of voice, "I do wish I was a lady!"

"A lady, my dear little girl! You are a lady by birth, and I hope you will always be one in every way."

"Oh, but, Uncle, I mean a lady like Lady Cynthia. It *does* sound so nice! It would be so stupid if she was only Miss Cynthia. And I should so like to be Lady Margaret!"

"No one is called by the title of Lady with their Christian name, unless their father is an Earl at least."

"But why shouldn't they be, Uncle? If I am a lady, as you say, why shouldn't I be Lady Margaret? It seems such a pity when it sounds so much nicer than Miss. Look, Uncle," and she held up an envelope on which she had written in pencil, "it would look so pretty as the direction—

LADY MARGARET ESDAILE,
THE LIMES,
ADIMSTONE.

And Miss Margaret sounds so full of m's and so stupid!"

Mr Grant could not help laughing a little at her eagerness; but he so entirely sympathised with the child's feeling, that he did not quite know what to say. There

was no moral reason why the graceful title of Lady should not be worn by every lady. And he could not answer any one, especially a child, by some stupid platitude about one name being really just as good as another; a sort of answer which, though literal truth, is not true, and is, to the spirit which feels the difference, like a stone given for bread.

"Well, little woman," he said, taking her up on his knee, "no one has every thing they wish for in this world. So if you cannot be Lady Margaret as you would like, you will still be as much my little moonbeam. And I think you ought to know what the beautiful word lady means. Did you ever hear?"

"No, Uncle, will you tell me?"

"It means 'loaf-giver,' because the rich, noble women of old times used to give out loaves to the poor people round their castles. I think it looks as if these 'ladies' of rank and wealth must have been usually very kind and ready to help the poor, or they would have had some other name fixed upon them in times when names were given to people for what they really did. It seems to me a very pleasant thing that the word 'lady,' which has grown to be our highest English word for everything that is nicest and most refined in a woman, should have so good and kind a meaning. And, do you know, I think every lady now can be a 'loaf-giver' in some way. She may or may not have any actual loaves to give away, but she can always wish and try to help the poor somehow

or other. And I hope my Margaret will always be a lady and a loaf-giver too."

"I should like to be both," replied Margaret; "But I wish I could be Lady Margaret as well," she added *sotto voce.*

"You remind me, Edward," said Mrs William Grant, "of a sort of 'loaf-giving' about which I wanted to ask you. I called at the farm to-day, and found poor little Delia Knight very weakly again. The child cannot fancy any food, and I thought, perhaps, you would let me order some nice, little tempting things for her."

"Certainly. Deborah will make any thing you think best for the child."

"Is that the little girl in a blue hood, who often follows the cows?" asked Margaret.

"Yes, dear. She is never strong, and sometimes ill for a long time."

"I wish I could give her something, Uncle."

"You can go with Aunt Bessie to give her the jelly or whatever is made for her, my dear."

"But that won't be my giving her anything; you give her those things, Uncle. And I've no money to buy her anything."

"Well, that can be mended at any rate," said Mr Grant, putting his hand into his pocket.

"If I give you half-a-crown, you can get something for Delia."

"O, but uncle, still that isn't giving her anything of

my very own. Nurse says that giving away other persons' money is a very shabby sort of charity."

"I will tell you what you can do, Margie," suggested her aunt. "The other day you asked me to teach you to crotchet a little cross-over. If Uncle gives us the money to buy the wool, you can make a cross-over for Delia, which will help to keep her warm, and then you will give some time and pains to the work for her. People who have no money to give away can often give their work."

"O, that will be very nice," cried Margaret joyfully. "Will you teach me now, Aunt Bessie? I should like to begin it this very minute."

"I have no wool yet, and it is too late to send out for any to-night; we must wait till to-morrow."

Margaret thought this an interminable time to wait, and her mind being set on the new occupation, she could not settle to her book or anything. A quarter of an hour later her uncle found her aimlessly wandering about. "Why, what is the matter, Moonbeam?"

"The time seems *so* long to wait, Uncle. I wish I knew how to make it quicker."

Mr Grant considered for a few minutes.

"I think I know a receipt for making the time pass quickly," he said. "Come along to my study, and we will look for it."

Margaret followed, and with some curiosity watched

her uncle unlock and open some cupboard doors. Suddenly a whole heap of papers fell down.

"Dear, dear," exclaimed Mr Grant, "now all these will have to be arranged. Come and help me with them ;. that's a good child."

They sat down, one in an arm-chair, the other on the floor, and a long piece of work they had, and a very happy piece of work it became.

The papers were full of pictures, about which Margaret found many questions to ask, and Uncle Edward many interesting or funny stories to tell. Time was flying past Margaret with very swift wings long before her aunt and cousin appeared from the drawing-room to ask what was going on.

"Mother," said Edward abruptly, "there's something very much the matter with my pockets."

"Matter!" said his mother laughing, "I suppose the matter is that there are small holes which let things out."

"On the contrary, there are large holes which let things in so very tightly that I can't get them out without assistance. Margie, I wish you would come and help me."

Margaret came readily enough, and helped to remove the "obstructive substances" as he called them, in innocent ignorance of anything behind.

But when on Edward's gravely requesting her to open the soft parcels which had made him a "beast of burden," a "sumpter mule," she found a quantity of skeins of

wool of two pretty, harmonious colours, a faint light dawned upon her, which showed itself in a rising blush, and a glance at the three faces watching her made her suspicion a certainty.

"Did you go out to get the wool for me?" she asked. "O, thank you, thank you, Edward, how kind of you!"

Edward replied in a solemn sing-song :—

> "The knight he went forth on the winter's night,
> And he trod the streets by the pale moonlight,
> And he chose him wools by the gas so bright,
> To take to the maiden fair."

"But Uncle," exclaimed Margaret, "you never found the receipt for making the time go quickly after all."

"Yes, we did, my dear. When the time goes slowly, try to do something to help some one else. That was my receipt, and you tried it, for you helped me to arrange my papers."

"Uncle," said Edward, when Margaret had disappeared with her treasures; "do you never find time go slowly?"

"I couldn't say that, my boy. Why do you ask?"

"You never ought, if your receipt works well for yourself, for I am sure you act upon it towards everybody. What made all those papers want arranging at that individual moment? I don't believe it was chance."

"I don't believe in any such thing as chance, my boy," answered Mr Grant, with a quaint look upon his face of being "found out." "Chance is only a name for causes of effects which we cannot in any way trace."

"But in this case, I think there was a very evident and traceable cause which produced the effect."

"What would be the good of an old man, who always preached and never practised?" said Mr Grant, as he walked away.

"It's all very well to retreat from your own praises," said Edward, sententiously, "but I hear with my ears, and I see with my eyes, and I know what I know. Mother, I do think he is a wonderful man, he seems always thinking of the thing to help every person whom he comes across."

"Your father always said that your uncle had more influence for good over others than anyone he ever knew, that no one ever could be with him for even an hour without being the better for it."

"What did my father think it came from? His unselfishness, or his manner?"

"Both, no doubt. Something indescribably attractive in the manner, and something so pure and noble in the character that it ennobles all that it comes in contact with. Your father used to tell me many a story, showing how his brother always brought out the good side of every one unconsciously, even of very shallow, worldly characters. His influence as an elder brother must have been very remarkable; for your father was, no doubt, as he afterwards called himself, a very strong-willed boy, with a difficult temper, and boys are not apt to like the authority of brothers a dozen years or so older than

themselves. Yet there never was more devoted affection than between those two. Your father would have rejoiced that you should notice your uncle's character."

"What made me notice him to-day particularly was that in our walk home, we came upon a labouring man to whom Uncle Edward spoke. He seemed a grumpy sort of fellow, and answered in rather a surly manner at first. But somehow, in a very few minutes, Uncle seemed to get hold of him and draw him out. It was not much he said, and I couldn't make out why his few sentences should impress the man, only they did, so that he grew quite sociable. And then as soon as we came in, there was Uncle Edward giving his mind to pleasing and helping little Margie. It made me think of St Paul's 'all things to all men.'"

"So it does. And also he never could bear to see a child in trouble, even before he had his own dear little girl, and his love for her makes him still more tender-hearted. I must try to persuade your uncle to lend Margie to me sometimes during your school-days. I should very much like to have her with me."

"I like that, Mother! I wouldn't have believed it of you! Just to make me miss her, instead of having her during my holidays."

"But it is just during your schooldays that I want somebody, you selfish boy!"

"Have as many somebodies as you like, only not *my* little cousin."

"Come Edward! come Auntie!" cried Margaret, running in from the drawing-room in some excitement, "Uncle has fixed the telescope, and the moon looks so strange through it. Do come and see!"

"I come, Gray-malkin," replied her cousin.

"Look, Uncle," said Margaret, "I can hardly see the marks on the moon's face at all now. Why do they show so much more some nights than others? To-night she looks all made of bright shining like a lamp, and sometimes I seem to see a face quite smiling at me."

"Why of course," said Edward, "sometimes the man in the moon is asleep, and sometimes he wakes up and grins at you, and then you see him more plainly."

"But why is it, Uncle? You told me the marks came from deep valleys and mountains in the moon."

"I cannot tell you positively, my dear, but I imagine it must depend upon the way in which the light falls on the hollows and heights. You know the moon only shines because the sun shines upon her; and, probably, just as we see on our own earth, sometimes the lights are much brighter, and the shadows much deeper than at other times, and then we may see the depths or the mountain peaks more plainly."

"Besides," said Edward, "perhaps the moon keeps only one set of features for her two faces, and when she doesn't want them for the face we see, sends them over to the other side. You couldn't have a face without eyes and nose, you see."

"She must have eyes, or she couldn't look down at us and tell us 'What the moon saw.' But what *do* you mean by the moon having two faces, Edward?"

"Why, she always keeps one face turned to us, so that we never see what the other is like. Look here, I'll move you round the lamp as the moon moves round the earth. She keeps gently turning so—and so—and so—never twirling right round, so that one face is always turned to the lamp, do you see?"

"Yes, I see. But I haven't two faces. The other side isn't another face, but the back of my head. Why shouldn't the moon's other face be the back of her head?"

Edward laughed heartily.

"That's the first time I ever heard of the moon having a back to her head. You have hit upon a most original idea, Margie, and an Irish bull into the bargain."

"I never heard of a bull in the moon," said Margaret, half puzzled, seeing that a joke was meant, but not understanding it.

"No, it was the cow that jumped over the moon."

And forthwith he concluded Margaret's evening by acting the part of the famous dish towards its weaker companion the spoon.

"The moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare."

—*Wordsworth.*

CHAPTER VII.

FIRE.

"Deep on the convent roof the snow
Lies sparkling to the moon."

—*Tennyson.*

NEW Year's Day found all around Elmhurst a white world, wherein the grand old trees stood out bold and black above the soft, folded snow-wreaths. The air was soundless and motionless, yet with that peculiar muffled keenness which belongs to snow alone. A dim brightness still lingered in the sunset sky, while the rising flood of moonlight was stealing over the whole landscape with ever-growing power and brilliancy, striking on the snow-crystals till they glittered like myriads of scattered diamonds.

Within the house, the reign of calm, cold silence was exchanged for all the life and warmth and motion of a large, busy, and happy household.

Grown-up guests and children had been arriving all day, and preparations were being made for a kind of mixed party of all ages, with impromptu charades, and informal dancing. Margaret had been playing with

some other children staying in the house, but being unused to them as companions, she was shy and easily tired, and was delighted to creep after Lady Cynthia into the small drawing-room, where she went to play and sing alone by moonlight and firelight.

How pleasant it was to sit quietly curled up in a corner of a sofa, either reading a New Year's Day present of an interesting book, or listening to the rich harmonies that seemed to flow from the very fingers of the player, or to the soft, full melody of her voice. Now the book fell down unregarded, for what was that? A deep, tender, slow melody, in a wild yet chastened key, with a muffled ring about its measured rise and fall—

> "Soft and slow,
> Soft and slow,
> Ever a gentle underflow
> Murmuring peacefully on below."

This was the refrain it seemed to say over and over again, as Margaret sat perfectly entranced. What was the spell which bound her? She could not tell why the tears rose in her eyes, as the air so "piercing sweet" came thrilling through her. A pause—a hush—and then a sudden breaking forth of a wild, clear, joyous strain, like the notes of a bugle. "Awake, awake!" it seemed to repeat, till the imperious call awakened Cynthia's voice to its pure and mellowed beauty.

Even when the song and air were over, both listener and singer were so absorbed as not to see a new comer

who had entered the room, until, when close to the piano, he spoke to Cynthia.

"The queen of night singing songs by the light of the moon to the Moonlight Sonata!"

Cynthia had turned round rather suddenly at the first sound of the voice, and now she answered, "I did not know you were come. My own noise must have drowned the noise of the carriage."

"The snow was quite a sufficient soporific for the carriage wheels. Your brother told me to come here, and I followed my ears also, drawn by the 'music of one sphere.' Who is your little companion?" he added, in a low soft voice; "not one of the cousins I ought to know, is she?"

"This is a younger queen of night than I, for she calls herself a little young moon. She is Margaret Esdaile, Mr Grant's great-niece. Margaret, dear, will you come and shake hands with Mr Vernon, who is a friend of your uncle."

"Your uncle has been a very kind friend to me," answered the stranger, with kindly courtesy shaking hands with the child, who came modestly forward without anything of awkward shyness. Then he turned again to the piano, saying, "Will you sing that song over again? I never heard words set to the Moonlight Sonata before."

"They are only my own," replied Cynthia, with rising colour. "I always longed to put words to that air."

"What are they? an address to the moon?"

"A kind of mingled idea of the moon and my sister. They came to me one time when I was away from Selene, and feeling very lonely. And that exquisite little piece of music seemed to give something of expression to my longing."

"You lonely, you bright being!" thought Mr Vernon, but he said aloud, "Would you mind singing it once more that I may hear the words?"

Cynthia felt a little nervous, but she never liked to appear to wish to be pressed. So she sat down to the piano, and sang, though with a less steady voice than before—

"Come forth, sweet Moon, with thy pure light,
To cheer the darkness of the night.
Selene, come forth!
Sweet Moon, come forth!
Send down thy rays of silver bright,
Break through the clouds, unveil thy might.
Sweet Moon, come forth!
Selene, come forth!
To cheer the darkness, Queen of Night!"

Mr Vernon thanked her quietly, but with obvious pleasure. She was rising again, when the soft little voice at her left hand said imploringly,

"Won't you sing my favourite hymn that you made, Lady Cynthia? You promised the next time we were alone."

"But we are not alone, dear."

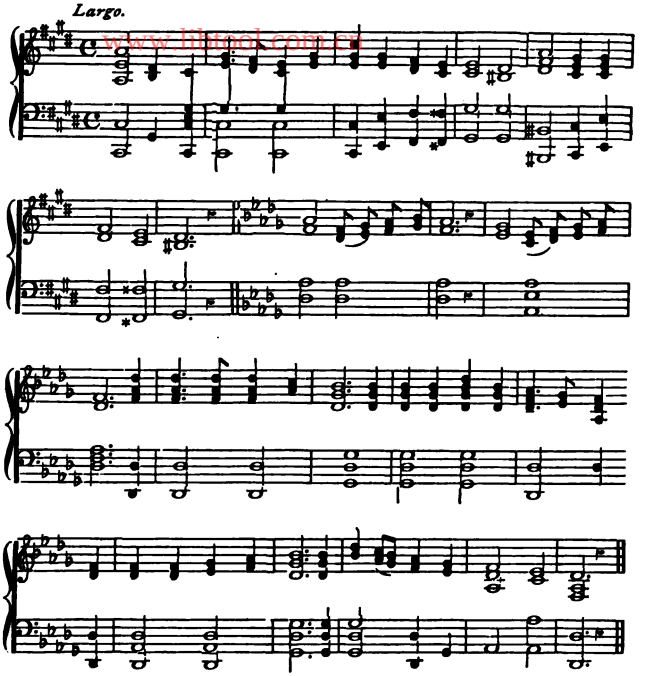
"Never mind," said Mr Vernon. "Don't let me destroy the promised pleasure. May not I hear the hymn as well as the song?"

"I never meant my attempts to be betrayed in this way," answered Cynthia, suddenly blushing ruby-red again; "I wanted some words for a magnificent French chant, and these seemed naturally to grow out of it one day."

She then sang once more, her feeling of the words overcoming all nervousness.

"Pilgrim! thou weary one,
Who seekest help divine,
Wilt thou my servant be?
Child! come unto Me!
Child! come unto Me!
Stand fast, and watch and pray,
And be thou alway wholly mine.
Stand fast, and hope, and pray,
I am thy Lord and King Divine.

Saviour! thou Holy One,
My Christ and King Divine,
Wilt thou my Master be!
Lord! I follow Thee,
Lord! I follow Thee.
Be Thou my strength and stay,
And make me alway wholly Thine.
Be Thou my hope and stay,
O Thou! my Lord and King Divine!"



There was a hush after the last grand chord had died away, and then Cynthia resolutely closed the piano. "I must go to my duties now," she said. "I came away when every one was occupied, but Selene will want me, and I must idle no longer. Come, Margaret, you can help me if you will."

Some time later the guests were all collected, watching

or sharing in some rapidly improvised charades, when a servant hurried in to Lady Selene.

"O, if you please, my lady, I think there's a great fire in the town. It does flare so out of the lobby window."

There was a general rush of every one to the windows, from whence they could see all that was to be seen. Against the darkest part of the low sky a strong, lurid glare was hovering, across which long tongues of flame darted up in flashes of brighter fire. With the window open, they could hear the incessant crash of falling timber, the surging roar of the burning masses, and a dull sound of people, varied now and then by a shout. As one after another pressed forward to look out, Edward Grant suddenly checked a half-uttered exclamation, and then, shaking off the hold of his friend Henry Richmond, went straight to the boy's father. "Colonel Richmond," he said in a low voice, "that fire is close to where my uncle's house must be, and he and my mother were expected nearly an hour ago. I must go to see where it is."

"I will come with you, my boy," replied Colonel Richmond in the same tone, not wishing to spread among others the alarm which had struck them both.

Several other gentlemen decided to go instantly to the spot, to find out the whereabouts of the fire, and to see if they could be of any use. Lady Selene saw her son moving off with some young men. "Henry," she called anxiously, "surely you are not thinking of going? You

are too young to be of any use, and a crowd only does harm in such cases."

"Only to be with Ned, mother, and as my father is going. You won't really mind, will you?"

She did mind very much. But, faithful to her principle of never repressing him if possible, after a moment's hesitation and a look at his eager face, she said, "Only promise me to go nowhere that your father does not permit, and I will not keep you back;" for she knew that his word once given he would not be led away by his wishes. She had returned from seeing the party set off, when Cynthia suddenly remembered that the Colonel had not been asked to send them word of what he found, and darted off to call after him. Her brother was too far off to hear her, but one of the moving figures caught the sound of her voice, and ran rapidly back to ask her wish.

"Mr Vernon," asked Cynthia, "will you ask Charles to let us know as soon as possible what is going on? We are so anxious about Mr Grant and his sister, and little Margaret may be frightened about them at any moment."

"You shall know at the first moment possible, trust me," he replied, and pursued his companions with the calm swiftness of a strong, active man.

As Cynthia joined the rest of the ladies, she was met in a doorway by Margaret, who asked her, "When do you think Uncle and Aunt Bessie will come, Lady

Cynthia? It's a long time since you said you expected them every minute."

Cynthia and her sister looked at each other, and then Cynthia said, "Perhaps the crowd of people has stopped them a little while, dear. Or perhaps your kind Uncle has found something he can do to help about the fire. I hope we shall see them soon. Come along with me into the other room. Good old Mrs Diana came up to spend New Year's Day with us, as she always does, and we can show her some of the funny dresses which the children are going to put on."

Cynthia had seldom passed a more anxious time than the next half-hour. She was thankful that Margaret was too young to have an idea of the dread which was haunting herself; but she was in perpetual fear lest some one should betray it by an incautious remark. Both sisters tried to make some diversion from the subject among their guests, especially the children, some of whom they did wile away to a room whence the fire could not be seen, and set them to play some games. But the sight of the fire was, of course, a fascination to which every one was drawn again and again, while a perpetual buzz of conjecture and wonderment went on. The suspense seemed quite endless to Cynthia before she heard the bell for which, amidst all the hum and noise, her ears were keenly on the watch, and hastened to meet the messenger herself.

"All's well," came from Mr Vernon's own lips before

she could see to whom she had opened the door. "Every one is all right; not a creature hurt in any way, thank God."

"Where—what is it?"

"A quantity of Denham's rotten old buildings must have been smouldering for hours in great heat, and set fire to the next farm buildings belonging to the farmer Knight. He was absent, and only his wife, children, and maids were about the place, who were all indoors, and no one perceived anything till the fire had got great hold, and even the engines could not check it. But they were all got out unhurt, and Mr Grant has taken the mother and children in for the night. We found him and his sister hard at work to make them comfortable, and they both sent an urgent message that none of you were to trouble about them, as, of course, they could not come here now."

Mr Vernon did not get through his account without several interruptions from listeners, but none came from the two sisters, who only watched him with their eyes.

"I came myself," he added, specially to Cynthia, "for I could be of no use there, and I felt no messenger could he trusted to relieve your minds as quickly and surely as myself."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" exclaimed Cynthia. But her voice broke into a sort of gurgling sound from a rising sob which she tried to suppress.

"Why, Cynthia!" said a lady standing next her, a

person quick of observation, but not wise of perception. "Why, Cynthia, what *is* the matter? I thought you despised the idea of hysterics."

"Don't be ashamed of me," said Cynthia to Mr Vernon, "it's the relief after the suspense we have been in."

"No one need be ashamed of you," he replied, quietly, in a tone which went a long way to make her quite calm and happy again in a few moments.

They found Margaret still in happy unconsciousness, listening to a story from old Mrs Knox about a wonderful journey her father once took through the snow.

"Margaret," said Cynthia, with joyous face and voice, "I was quite right about your uncle. He did not come because he was busy helping some neighbours who had to leave their house. Mrs Knight and her children could not sleep at home because it was rather too near the fire; so kind Uncle Edward and Aunt Bessie were giving them all beds for to-night in his house."

"I wonder if Delia has got my bed," said Margaret, "Was Delia there, do you know?"

"I think I caught the sound of that name," said Mr Vernon. "I saw your uncle carrying a very white-faced little girl with very yellow hair, and I heard him tell her she should have some warm bread and milk before going to sleep in her new room."

"That must be Delia. And please, is Uncle Edward coming to-night after all?"

"No, my dear. He was much too busy to leave home with such an unexpected houseful. But your cousin will be able to tell you more about him or Delia than I can, for I came away so soon."

"And here come the boys," said Cynthia.

"And where are the rest, Henry? Are all come back?"

"All, and every one," replied the Colonel himself as he came in. "We found that there was nothing for us to do, so we came home in a body."

The return of all the adventurers brought a general inroad of all the guests, and a storm of questions from all quarters, to which, however, there was little to answer beyond what Mr Vernon had already told.

When the first burst of enquiry was abated, Lady Selene wished to produce a diversion from the one ceaseless subject, as she thought how the future nights of many a child might be haunted by dreams of all that they heard repeated and suggested now.

She gradually drew some of the elders into the larger room again; and her husband presently came up to Cynthia to say, 'I don't think it is too late for some of the performances we meant to have, and I don't want the children to be cheated of all their fun. You are the manager general, and Selene has struck up a dance tune already."

Cynthia's heart was singing with thankful rejoicing, and her spirits rose every moment with the reaction from

suspense and dread. She gaily collected and marshalled the children; while the elder people began to desert the windows for fire, or seat, or dance, now that curiosity and excitement were abated.

Cynthia herself hardly danced, she had too many small couples to look after for that, she merrily said. But her every movement was grace and music, as she followed the small children, or led them into their right places; and there was no other face in the room like hers for brightness. So, at least, thought Mr Vernon, as he watched the moving throng, standing apart himself in a dim, unseen corner. Perhaps he was in a fanciful mood, which it was cool and pleasant and restful to indulge in, after the glare of the burning buildings, and his rapid exercise through the sharp night air. Anyhow he pleased himself with finding analogies for those whom he was watching.

There was that fair little child with the sweet, soft face set in flowing flaxen hair—she was like what Cynthia had called her—a little new moon,

"A little strip of silver light,"

a young, tender thing, with her growing course of life before her.

Then there was his Cynthia herself, like the Queen of Night, in her loveliest crescent shape, ever growing daily more lovely and loveable—growing in depth, in strength, even in tenderness of character.

Her sister Selene—of the same type and nature, but fuller, more matured, wearing her prime of wifehood and motherhood with the calm, lustrous dignity of a noble, refined woman—like the golden moon in the full glory of her perfect sphere.

He glanced upwards, and his eye fell on old Diana o' the 'Phesians, as she sat among a group of old servants, looking down upon the dancers below. Yes—she too, with her gentle, aged, wrinkled face, was like the moon in her last phase, giving forth but a wan, feeble light, which must decrease surely and absolutely, till it become altogether invisible. Yes! invisible to human eyes, but not extinguished, not the less existent; reflecting somewhere the light of the same glorious sun, and perhaps visible to thousands of

"Other, larger eyes than ours."

If he were fanciful, there was a method in his fancy.

Presently he saw that the old woman was left all alone, and went up to speak to her. He had often talked with her, and liked to draw her out. "Well, Dame Knox," he asked, "do you like looking on at this kind of sight?"

"Yes, Sir, I like to see all the children so merry, little dears. But most I like to watch my Lady Cynthia as she goes among 'em. She looks quite a pictur', don't she, Sir?"

"Better than a picture," he answered with an amused smile, "for she is always moving, you see, and the ex-

pression of her face is always changing. The great want of a picture is that it never gives the changes of a face."

"To be sure, Sir. But to sit here and look down at her makes me think of my years and all that's gone by."

"You have always spent this day here, haven't you?"

"Never missed but three years, Sir, since before Lady Selene was born. It was her mother first asked me up, and that were forty years ago pretty nigh. I had some young children of my own then, and now they have got their own grandchildren, some o' them. I was looking at Master Henry just now, and he had such a look of his grandfather. I thought how the old Earl and my lady would have liked to see him here."

"Do my fore-elders know of me?"

thought Mr Vernon. "How old, or how young rather, was Lady Cynthia when you first remember her?" he asked aloud.

"Why, Sir, I remember the very day she was born, how Lady Selene come down and told me how pleased she were to have a sister at last. She was fifteen years old then, and she had never had brother nor sister before till this one. I can see her as plain standing at my door as I see you, Sir. And now her own boy is nearly as old as she was then—but she didn't know how soon she'd have to be mother to Lady Cynthia as well as to her own baby."

"He certainly is a big nephew for so young an aunt.

But when was it that you nursed her in some illness?"

"That was when she and Lady Selene were both down with the measles, Sir. Master Henry could run alone then, he was a fine boy two years old, and he was kept away in the nursery, with the nurse, while Lady Selene's maid and me, we nursed the two ladies."

"I have often heard Lady Cynthia say how fond of each other you and she became at that time, and how she remembered the stories you used to tell her."

"Nobody could be off loving her, Sir, she was such a little dear. Amongst us all we used to say she was quite a sock. But she was never over indulged. That was the first time she heard of my name, and she never forgot it, but always liked to call me 'Diana o' the 'Phesians.'"

"And how long have you lived in that little house with the vines?"

"Ever since I was married, Sir, and my eldest he's sixty. I was that fond of the place, I couldn't bear to leave it when my husband died, and my children they clubbed together, and pay my rent, so I'm well off."

"And have you never been hindered from coming here at this time of year by bad weather?"

"Yes, Sir, there was two years when it snowed so thick and lay so heavy that we could hardly get anywhere. I've seen a deal of snow on that road in my time. There's that great hill between us and Hatcham, I've known that

shut up with drifts of snow for weeks together, and men digging it out twenty feet deep."

"Even Lady Cynthia can remember the snow-drifts through which the road was dug open between this and Brooksley being higher than the carriage once as she went to church when a child."

"Yes, sir, we've never had nothing like that since that very same winter she remembers. We don't seem to have the snow in these parts, not as we used to have. And even when it was most heavy here, it were nothing to what we used to have where I lived when I was a child. For, you see, sir, this being a high road and near a town, they used to dig it out as soon as possible. But in my old home up over the hill, we was far away from any place, and the lanes might be left all drifted up for weeks, so that we were quite hid away, and cut off from everybody almost."

"And now here comes your friend the housekeeper," said Mr Vernon, "so I will make room for her. You are not going home through the snow to-night, are you?"

"No, sir, the ladies wouldn't let me go home, but were kind enough to say I were to sleep here."

"What are you smiling at?" asked Cynthia, as she and Mr Vernon met on the stairs. "You look very much amused at something."

But he did not tell her how, as he moved away from Dame Knox, he had heard the housekeeper's audible whisper, "Don't Lady Cynthia look lovely now? She

dressed in white and silver, and Lady Selene in white and gold. I feel proud of my ladies."

"At last the party broke up, the neighbours departed, and only the house guests remained. As they were separating towards their divers quarters, Margaret grasped Lady Cynthia's hand.

"What a long, long day it seems," she said, "I never was up so late before. Oh, look, look!" she cried in delight, as they came to the great lobby window.

It was indeed a beautiful sight which drew the child to gaze silently out. As far as eye could see lay a field of pure untrodden snow, sparkling in the brightness

> "Of the long glories of the winter moon."

Others came up also, and each stood still, drawn by the same spell—the calm, crystal sphere shedding her soft, still light upon the unsullied whiteness below.

"What an intense contrast," said Cynthia to Mr Vernon, "between this and the fierce glare we watched on the other side a few hours ago! That seemed to make one's very eyes burn, while this beautiful moon is most refreshing."

Her nephew touched her arm, and said mischievously,

> "But, Cynthia, should to thee the palm be given,
> Queen both for beauty and for majesty."

"She is too large for me, Henry. She is just at the full, and has become Selene, not Cynthia."

"The stars are nearly put out," said Edward. "I

have been looking out of doors, and could hardly see the Great Bear."

"Which is the Great Bear," asked Margaret.

"The same as Charles's Wain, which you were reading about the other day, when Harry Sandford found his way out of the bog on the moor."

"Does any one know," asked Cynthia, "who the Charles was who gave his name to that constellation? The waggon is plain enough, but who or what was Charles?"

"Carl the Great is the only person who suggests himself to me," said Mr Vernon.

"If Lady Selene is the moon, Charles's Wain ought to be Colonel Richmond," said Margaret, in a low voice only meant for her cousin, but the Colonel caught the remark, and turned upon her with pretended wrath.

"What, little girl! Do you call me the Great Bear? What can you expect me to do with you?"

"You once were a Major," said Cynthia. "Why not Ursa Major?"

"What are those white things that stand out like statues to the right there?" asked Mr Vernon.

"Those ruined, little old pillars," said Henry. "They always remind me of the rhyme my nurse used to tell me when I was a child—

"Three Ghosties
Sat upon three Posties,
Eating bread and Toasties."

"What a peculiarly harmless and comfortable occupation for ghosts. Are they of purely Kentish origin?"

"I don't know. I only know of them through my nurse, and she was a Kentish woman, or a woman of Kent."

"Does history enter into no further details of their fame?"

"None at all. The only variation I ever heard was a curious sort of feminine plural given to all three—

> "Three Ghostesses
> Sat upon three Postesses,
> Eating bread and Toastesses."

"Well," said his father, "we have no bread and toasties, so I don't see why we should stay here as if we were bound to the posties. And I am sure it is time that Ursa Minor should disappear from view. Come, little Bear, let the Great Bear help you down from your high perch. Your nice warm den is all ready for you."

"Well jumped, Margaret," said Edward.

"Well shone, moon," said Henry.

"Henry!" said his aunt, "what a parody on this splendid moon."

"Shakespeare's parody then, not mine."

"Shakespeare parodies Quince & Co., not the real moon."

"One must come in with a bush of thorns and a

lantern, and say, he comes to disfigure the person of moonshine," said Henry.

"Proceed, moon," urged Edward.

"All that I have to say is, to tell you, that the lantern is the moon; this thornbush my thornbush, and this dog my dog."

"I had rather be a dog and bay the moon," said the other boy.

> "Sweet moon, I thank thee for thy sunny beams;
> I thank thee, moon, for shining now so bright;
> For by thy gracious, golden, glittering streams,
> I trust to taste of truest Thisbe's sight."

"Before such a hailstorm of quotations I shall beat a retreat," said Cynthia. "Good-night, you two—lunatics, who think snow a sign of a midsummer night. Good-night, Mr Vernon."

"Good-night, Cynthia—

> 'How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank.'"

"You gone over to the enemy!" said Cynthia. "Et tu, Brute!"

"Exit Moonshine," called out her nephew, as she vanished within a doorway.

> "Then the moon in all her pride
> Like a spirit glorified,
> Filled and over-flowed the night
> With revelations of her light."
>
> *Longfellow.*

CHAPTER VIII.

SNOW.

"Out of the bosom of the air,
Out of the cloud-folds of her garments shaken,
Over the woodlands brown and bare,
Over the harvest fields forsaken,
Silent, and soft, and slow
Descends the snow."

—*Longfellow.*

IT was a small but merry party which assembled for luncheon at Elmhurst the next day, when almost all the guests had left. Of course the boys had been down to look at the place where the fire had been, and were full of what they had seen and heard. It had been settled that Margaret should stay a little longer at Elmhurst, and Mr Grant was still too busy to come up to see her.

"It seems so funny," said Margaret to Edward, "that Delia should be in Uncle Edward's house, and I should be in Colonel Richmond's, and neither of us at home."

"Like a game of general post," replied her cousin.

"Was there not a general post throughout the town to look at the burnt down buildings?" asked Cynthia.

"Heaps of people," answered her nephew, "from

newspaper reporters down to ragamuffin boys. Won't the newspapers rejoice in such a 'ragic subject?'"

"It will be a 'drearful ragedy' for days to come," added Edward.

"What words are these, and what their meaning?" asked Mr Vernon.

"I am afraid the words are my concoction," said Cynthia, gaily; "and they took the fancy of these boys so much that they are always using them."

"But what does ragedy mean?"

"I once said that the muse which inspired the flashy, gushing emotion painting of inferior newspapers was only worthy to be called a 'ragic' muse. So now the boys are always producing specimens of 'drearful ragedy.'"

"It's just Tragedy, without the T," said Henry.

"No tea, but a quantity of insipid boiling water," added Edward.

"I saw several to-day whom I strongly suspect to be boilers elect," said Henry. "S. S. S.'s—or Superfluous—Superlative—Suppliers."

"M. M. M.'s—or Maudlin—Melo-drama—Mongers."

"V. V. V.'s—or Vapid—Verbiage—Vendors," continued Henry. "Now, Aunt Cynthia, I can see you shaking. What are you laughing at?"

"You! It may sound very rude, but it is strictly true, and I can't help it."

"That sounds like the man who, being asked by a friend what plant a donkey reminded him of, instead of

the 'thistle' he was expected to say, answered 'Yew' (you)!"

"The other," said Edward, "should have turned upon him like Bottom upon Snout, with 'What do you see? You see an ass's head of your own, do you?'"

"I hope, Henry," said Mr Vernon, "that you and Edward are not practising to graduate as future members of the fraternity of rampant ragedy ranters? You seem dangerously fluent in the correct style of language."

"It would be too outrageous of them if they were," said Cynthia.

"Did either of you raging boys notice the new fallen snow round the blackened buildings?" asked Colonel Richmond. "It had a most curious effect, looking like the effort of kind Nature to hide the fierce ravages of one element with the soft veil of another."

"Snow an element?" asked his son.

"A form or condition of water, that perfidious element. Don't you think it admissible to call snow an element, Vernon?"

"I never looked upon it before as one of the four elements, but I suppose the proper definition would be 'a condensed form of aqueous vapour;' and so practically a phase of the element water. I was struck by the very effective study in black and white which the black rafters and ruins made against the untrodden snow."

"Our whole landscape is nothing but black and white now," said Cynthia.

"The trees have not the intense contrast of blackness which the ruins brought out so strongly."

"Why is good ice always so black?" asked Edward.

"By the bye, father," exclaimed Henry," is our splendid black ice all spoilt by last night's fall of snow?"

"No. I looked round this morning and it was all swept clear; and I advise all who think of skating to start at once, for the sky looks like more snow at any time."

"How soft and pleasant that nice, thick snow looks," said Margaret, when all the gentlemen were dispersed; "may I go out in it?"

"You shall go with me, my dear," said Lady Selene. "I am going to walk on the swept paths, which are more fit for your little boots than the 'nice, thick snow' through which the others can walk."

The swept paths sounded very tame to one who desired to plunge into a trackless, fathomless, snowy waste. But Margaret found plenty of untouched snow, of which snowballs could be made, and Lady Selene was ready to help her now and then in snow sculpture of a rough kind.

"If this weather continues," she said, "the boys ought to make you a snow house, Margaret, or a fine snow man with a pipe in his mouth. Did you ever read a fairy story about a snow image of a little girl which two children made and called their little sister? She was supposed to have a sort of life, and to like to be with them out in the cold air, flying about with them among the snow drifts. But their father would look upon her

as a real child, who would be frozen; so he dragged her in before the hot stove, though the children entreated him to leave her alone, and there she melted away, and the children cried over their little snow sister."

"I can't leave off looking at the snow," said Margaret; "it does look so pretty, and it sparkles so in the sun, it quite dazzles my eyes. I never saw any like this before."

"Ah, but then where have you been? In York, haven't you? Snow, the whitest of all things in the country, becomes the blackest of all things in the town."

"Those soft, smooth folds look so beautiful, it seems a pity to spoil it by sweeping."

"So it does. I like to see it all untouched, just as it fell from the sky."

And Lady Selene stood still to watch the wreathed white masses, which no touch of man or beast had ever yet soiled, in the celestial purity which they had brought with them from above, fresh from the hand of their Maker.

"Ice and snow fulfilling His word," says the psalm. Was not one part of the fulfilment the being such a type of exquisite purity, to which none could blind themselves, however slow to see? Somehow the little drifting flake of virgin snow which fell softly and silently on her hand suggested the idea of a little innocent baby,—

> "O little souls! as pure and white
> And crystalline as rays of light
> Direct from heaven, their source divine."

That was the thought which came to her for both the flake and the unknown, little white-souled infant.

"Why does the snow look white as it is? Rain isn't white, it's clear like glass. Why isn't snow the same?" asked Margaret, after examining the snow very closely.

"Snow is not frozen rain, dear. Raindrops are clear like glass when they freeze. They make clear icicles like those you see hanging from that laurel. But snow freezes far above the earth, and forms what we call crystals, like sugar, so that the light cannot shine straight through, but is reflected from the many sides of the crystals as if they were diamonds, and so the snow looks thick and white. There is nothing in the world so white as snow."

"I suppose that is why it says in the psalm, 'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' Is there anything like snow, do you think, except a snowdrop?"

"Another psalm tells us what the Jews thought most like snow, 'He giveth snow like wool, and scattereth the hoar frost like ashes.' Soft, white wool is about the nearest thing one can think of to snow."

"But why does the verse say that frost is like ashes? My poem says of the frost—

> 'He lit on the trees, and their boughs he dressed
> In diamond beads.'

Ashes sound grimy and black, not like the bright, frosty drops."

"You are thinking of coal fires, dear, with their cinders and grey ashes. But if you saw fires made of wood, and leaves, and vegetable things, you would see

that they leave a quantity of soft, white, dust-like ashes. These are what the Jews would have. Though Palestine is very hot, it has a great deal of snow. Sometimes at Jerusalem the snow lies a foot deep, and up in the mountains the frosts are very keen. I can fancy how a Jew who had made a fire, perhaps at the mouth of a cave where he slept during the cold night, would see the white ashes lying when he went out in the early morning, and then, looking at the hoar frost glittering in the rising sunlight, would think to himself that he knew nothing so like the frost as the ashes of his fire."

"Did the Jews have to live in caves in the mountains?"

"We know that David did when he was forced to hide himself, or Saul would have killed him. And in all times of war and trouble people would take refuge in the mountain caves. But wherever a Jew was, his fire would show him the same white ashes."

"But snow and frost shine so, and wool doesn't shine, or ashes either. The snow shines like sugar or salt. I wonder they didn't say it was like salt. They must have known salt, didn't they?"

"Certainly they did. Palestine is singularly full of salt. And though I never thought of it before, I do wonder that they did not compare it to salt."

"Is there anything else you can think of like snow? We have found four things; wool, and ashes, and sugar, and salt."

"I think what most reminds me of snow is the blossom

of our cherry orchards. I dare say you saw no great cherry orchards in Yorkshire, but here you will see what a pretty sight they are in the spring, the trees all laden with great masses of pure, white bloom, which always look snowy."

"How thick those great, soft folds of snow look, as if there was something hidden under them. Did any one ever get snowed up here?"

"Not to my knowledge, dear. Bur I dare say in former times people were now and then caught in some great snow storm. But I should think it was less frequent in Kent than in the bleak parts of Yorkshire. I remember hearing a story of a poor woman being snowed up somewhere for several days, and though she could hear the church bells ring, she could not make herself heard by the people who walked over her head, whose very voices reached her. And through the hole which her breath made in the snow she could see the stars at night, but no one could see her."

"But did she come out alive?"

"Yes, she did, for she told this herself after her release. The snow was melting, and at last, when she was almost exhausted, some one heard her faint cry for help. People are much oftener snowed up in wilder and more mountainous counties. The other day I was reading a very interesting, true story of a set of little children who were snowed up in their cottage all by themselves for four days. They would most likely have died but for the

courage and sense of the eldest, a little girl herself only nine years old."

"Only a year older than I am. What did she do? And where did she live? And what was her name?"

"Her name was Agnes Green, and she lived in Cumberland. Her parents had both left home, and were lost in the mountains in the great storm which blocked up the cottage where the children were. Poor little Agnes was in great grief and fear when her parents never returned by midnight. But she put all her five little brothers and sisters to bed, and sat up herself to watch. Then in the morning when she found that they were cut off from all their neighbours, she set herself to providing everything—peat for the fire, meal and milk for their own food, and fodder for the cow. She even carefully divided the food into small portions, lest they should eat it up too fast. And she kept all the younger ones as warm and well as she could, every night and morning making them kneel down with her to pray for their father and mother. Till at last she found that she could cross a bridge which led to the houses of neighbours, and she found her first kind friend in the sister of the poet Wordsworth."

"What a wonderful little girl. I should like to have seen her. What a good thing that she was so brave and thoughtful. I wonder what I should have done snowed up like that."

"Now, Margaret," said Lady Selene, presently break-

ing into the child's meditations on this point, "look down into that quarry. Do you see a dark hole in the cliff? That is a cave, which I first found out when I was about as old as you, and I thought I was the first person to discover it."

"And were you?"

"O, no. I daresay several people knew it well, only they didn't think it anything wonderful as I did. I used to make my way down there by myself, to look into 'my cave,' and wonder if any one had ever been hidden there from his enemies. Then I invented all sorts of stories for my cave, of princes taking refuge from their pursuers, and being secretly fed by myself at the risk of my life, or of our being driven out of our home by invaders, and some one hiding there to be a spy upon the enemy—all kinds of absurd things, but they were a great amusement to me."

"It would have been very nice to help some poor faithful friend in danger by hiding him there. Why should not some one have been there in the time of the Civil Wars? Do you think anybody ever was hidden there?"

"O, no. The cave is very small, and too low for any one to stay there except lying flat. Besides, to tell you the truth, I am afraid the quarry was only dug out about a hundred years ago, so that no one could have used this particular little cave in the Civil Wars."

"That was a great pity. It would have been nice to

think that some one might have been safe in it while his enemies were trying to kill him. Did you ever see a real cave of refuge anywhere?"

"No, I never saw one, but there must be many to be seen, if we only knew them, even in England. When you are older you will read in Sir Walter Scott's stories of some most exciting adventures in caves."

"I remember the wonderful cave in 'Feats on the Fiord,' which was under the island, so that it could only be reached by diving into the water, but when you got there it was quite dry, so that Rolf could light a fire and sleep comfortably, and he could see all the ships and the coast for an immense way, but no one could see him."

"There have been several stories, both true and invented, of people being saved from apparently certain drowning by finding one of these caves, below water except at very low tide. In the island of Capri, in the Mediterranean, there is a most wonderful, large cave of this kind. Its name is the 'Blue Grotto,' because all the light that reaches it has to come through the water, which gives a most wild and beautiful hue of blue over everything. The air is blue, the water is blue, the rocks and pillars are blue, and yet they sparkle and glimmer so as to look like azure silver. It is the most fairy-like and marvellous place, and it has not been known for fifty years. Two Germans found it out by accident as they were swimming, but now numbers of people go to see it from curiosity."

"How beautiful and strange it must be. Just like a mermaid's cave beneath the waves. Should you not like to be able to live in the sea, Lady Selene? It would be so delightful to swim down among the beautiful shells and corals and sea-weeds, and not mind how long you were in the water."

"I would rather be like a bird, I think, able to fly high in the air."

"But there's nothing new to see in the air. I should so like to see all the wonderful things at the bottom of the sea, and to go floating about among the waves like the pictures of the mermaids. They always look so happy in the clear water."

"You would like to be Undine. You don't know who Undine was. She was a lovely, good water maiden in a delightful German fairy story, which I won't tell you in English, because you ought to read it some time when you are older in its own beautiful German. But I don't know if Undine liked snow, and at present you look more like a snow maiden than a water spirit, for you are powdered white from head to foot. Shake it off before it melts, and then come to the drawing-room like a respectable earth maiden."

"But the earth is all black and white now, so I'm right for an earth maiden. O, here's Lady Cynthia coming in too."

"Cynthia!" said her sister in surprise. "What brings you home so early? Have you been on the ice? You

have not had a fall, I hope, have you?" she rather anxiously asked, struck with an unusual look on Cynthia's face.

"No,

'He that is down need fear no fall,'

you know. And I think that, on the contrary, I feel curiously lifted up."

"What is the matter then, that you are not with the others? Have you been on the ice?"

"No, I have not been on the ice at all. Charles went forward with the two boys, and we were walking behind, and then—afterwards—I felt inclined not to go on with the others, but to come home and tell you, my mother-sister, all about it."

This was said in a low voice, as they reached the drawing-room, and she pressed Selene's hand, as the two sisters looked at each other. Then Lady Selene spoke to Margaret, whom Cynthia had scarcely perceived.

"Run upstairs to Nurse, my dear. If you bring those cakes of snow near the fire, you will melt like the Snow Image."

Then when they were alone, she took Cynthia's two hands in hers, and spoke, "Now, my darling, tell me!"

Margaret went upstairs in rather a wondering state of mind. Some expression in Cynthia's face had startled her, and she would be so sorry if anything had happened to make her beautiful Fairy Princess unhappy. She

turned the subject about in her mind during her dressing in such complete and absorbed silence that she quite jumped when Nurse said, "What makes you look so straight, Miss Margaret, my dear?"

Then she answered slowly and gravely, "Nurse, I am afraid something has happened to my Lady Cynthia. She looked so different, and she said something, and they sent me away."

"Never you mind, Miss Margaret. Little girls should never want to find out what their elders don't tell them. If it was proper for you to know, you *would* know."

"I only wanted to know if she was unhappy."

"Don't you think about it, my dear. Lady Cynthia may have a cart-load of things to talk about with her sister that don't concern you, and you should never be curious; that's not like a little lady."

Margaret could not help wondering what ladies ought to feel if they wanted very much to know if some one they loved was in trouble. Was it always wrong to feel curiosity? Her perplexity was not lessened by going down to the drawing-room, for certainly every one seemed a little strange; and when she saw Cynthia, she hardly heard her speak a word. Margaret wished for Uncle Edward very much.

But though Cynthia had so great and wonderful a new subject to fill her thoughts and check her words that evening, she did not forget before dinner to visit as usual her little pet in her bed. So softly she came into

the darkened room that Margaret called out, "I'm quite awake," for fear lest Lady Cynthia should think she was asleep.

Then she sat down on the child's bed, and kissed her fondly, more fondly than usual even, without ever a word. Margaret sat up and looked at her. Her own face was in shadow, but the fire-light cast a soft glow over Cynthia's face and figure. *She* was not a snow image, though this evening she was dressed all in snow-white, without one touch of colour. No snow image could have that light in her dark eyes, or that lovely rose blush on her cheeks, or that strange, tremulous motion about her mouth. Was she going to cry, or to smile, or to speak? It did not look exactly like any of these things. Margaret could not help putting her arms round her kind, beautiful friend's neck, and then her question was uttered in a half whisper—

"Is it always curious to want to know something? If you are afraid some one is unhappy, is it always wrong to want to know?"

"No, dear," replied Cynthia, half laughing, but very gently. "It is curious and wrong to want to find out things just because you don't know about them. But it is only kind to wish to know if some one is happy or unhappy."

"But I don't know when it's right or when it's wrong. Nurse says it's curious to notice people's faces, and want to know what they are thinking of. But I can't help

noticing sometimes. I couldn't help seeing people look different unless I shut my eyes."

"But tell me what particular thing is puzzling you now, dear."

"I'm afraid whether it would be curious to ask you anything."

"If I think it wrong, I will tell you so at once, darling. But don't be afraid to ask me what you want."

"I couldn't help seeing—I was afraid—I thought something had happened to make you unhappy, and it made me so sorry," said Margaret, with hesitation and a wistful look. "Only I don't think you look unhappy now."

Cynthia hid her eyes, not at all unhappily, for a few moments from the child's earnest gaze; then she kissed her again and said brightly, "Something had happened to me, Margie, but nothing to make me unhappy, only something to make me think a great deal. You may be glad for me, dear, not sorry for me. Some day I will tell you about it, but not to-night."

"But was it wrong to ask, was it curious to see?"

"It was not wrong or curious, because you couldn't help seeing something. It would be curious if you were always watching my face, or any one's. It was not wrong to be anxious about me, because you love me, and would be sorry if I were in trouble. It would be wrong and dishonest if, when I have not told you what happened, you were to try to find it out some other way.

But I think Uncle Edward's little Margaret would never do that."

And Uncle Edward's little Margaret was soon peacefully sleeping, while the hours rang Cynthia through a wonderful, blissful evening, such as her life had never known before.

" The road she had come by then was soon
The one of my paths that best I knew,
By glittering gossamer and dew,
Evening by evening, moon by moon.

" Sweet were the hopes I found to cheer
My heart as I thought on time to come,
With one that would bless my happy home,
Moon upon moon, and year by year."

Barnes.

CHAPTER IX.

ECLIPSES.

The moon shall be an island in the sun.
—*Charles Tennyson Turner.*

A FORTNIGHT later found the two cousins still at Elmhurst, instead of at The Limes, whither they would naturally have returned. Mrs Knight, Delia's mother, had fallen so ill from the alarm of the fire that it had been impossible to move her from Mr Grant's house. It was not at all desirable therefore that any more should be added to the number of persons there, and as both the colonel and his wife had urgently pressed Mr Grant to let Edward and Margaret stay on "in a large house where they give no trouble, but a great deal of pleasure," he gladly consented.

Mrs William Grant was busy nursing the sick farmer's wife, and Mr Grant was called from home upon business, so that during this fortnight Margaret had scarcely ever seen either of them.

There had been no break in the weather, and one keen, breezy morning brought to Margaret a new enjoyment in watching the two schoolboys at a new occupation.

They found excellent amusement, combined with hard labour and healthful exercise, in making a large snow-house, such as they vowed should put to shame all the Eskimo huts in the Arctic regions. It was certainly a feat of architecture, and the number of times during its construction that Margaret went inside the door, and peeped through the windows, is beyond the pale of computation by vulgar arithmetic. The doors and windows gained a universal vote of admiration, inasmuch as they were—not holes, but blocks of ice. Carts laden with ice were passing to and fro near the snow-house, and upon these the boys had made regular raids, and levied a black mail of fine, square, clear blocks of ice, which changed their house from a common snow-hut into a crystal palace, they said, fit for the abode of the snow queen, as they called their little lady companion. She looked very Arctic in the white fur jacket in which Lady Selene had equipped her, if ever brown Eskimo woman could have had face so snow-white and rose-red.

The boys were now building for themselves icebergs, whose toppling crags she was perpetually called upon to come out and admire, till impelled again to take refuge within her snow-castle.

As she was coiling herself up in the large railway rug which had been spread inside for her, she felt some soft and living thing touch her, and turning quickly round, there was—no Polar bear—but a small, grey, fluffy creature, nuzzling up to her in silent delight.

"Luna! why, Luna, is it you?" And Margaret scrambled to her feet and out of the hut in a desperate hurry. Luna would never have came here without—there he is—and with one spring she was in Uncle Edward's arms.

"O, uncle," when she found breath to speak, "I thought I never should see you again. It seems such a long time since I came here, and I didn't know when you were going to come for me." And she hugged him, and clung to him, with her face all aglow with delight and frosty bloom, and her whole frame astir with pleasure and fun. The boys leapt down from their bergs with a shout, Luna shuffled with her feet, and whisked round and round in the snow with short yaps of joy, and the colonel popped his head out of his dressing-room window to know what all the commotion was about.

"Only an old man and a dog entering upon the scene. What a fly on the wheel I am," said Mr Grant.

"Come and look at the beautiful house Edward and Henry have made for me, Uncle."

"Take care, Mr Grant, that's our ice floe, and you had better not walk on it; you might slip."

"Look out, Uncle! That iceberg is just going to turn over. She's top-heavy, and may bring you and your little craft to grief."

"I would take refuge in the snow house, but I fear some spider web spread to entrap me there, as everywhere outside seems beset with danger."

"O no, Uncle, really there is not a spider."

"But the house is so small that you can't get inside her. It wasn't built for man, only for maiden," said Henry. It's entitled the

'MAJESTIC MELLIFLUOUS MANSION
OF
MILD MISTRESS MEG.'"

"No," said Edward," the

'PEERLESS PELLUCID PALACE
OF
PROUD PRINCESS PEG.'"

Whereupon Margaret began to pelt him vehemently with snowballs, aided by her champion Henry.

"Pelt him, punish him well, Margie," said her uncle, joining in the attack; while Edward, defending his head with both hands, persisted in his pertinacious profusion of provocative protests.

"Pelted! pommelled! polygonally persecuted! by a pragmatical paragon of a pigmy—a perfidious, paradoxical, paralogical parasite, and a peripatetic, parenthetical, paraphrastical pilgrim. Poor Peter Peebles, plaintiff!"

"What is all this polylogical persiflage?" asked Colonel Richmond, who had come in time to hear the last preposterous peroration. "Why, Ned, you will be nothing but a pea-shooter."

"He is as full of p's as a perennial polypod," said Henry.

"A parlous boy, a very parlous boy!" observed Mr Grant, as he shook his hands free from snow.

"Too full of p's to mind his ques," added Henry.

"Well, Pax, to your peas now, boys. And you—perpend, Signor, my words. There is my wife, now, beckoning from the window; she is so anxious to secure you to stay till after luncheon."

"I shall be very glad to do so, if I may take my little woman home in the early afternoon."

"Is Margaret to go home? No one wants to get rid of her here, though she does look upon me as the Great Bear. But I daresay Uncle wants his own Ursa Minor; eh, Margaret? You are a regular little white Polar Bear to-day in your Arctic house. Think it over, Mr Grant, will you? and let us hear what you decide afterwards. I will go back to Selene if you want a further walk."

Margaret skipped along by her uncle's side with renewed pleasure, and poured out numerous questions about home, the fire, Aunt Bessie, and especially Delia.

"Was Delia still at The Limes? And her mother, and brothers, and sisters? How full the house must be!"

"Their father has taken all the others away. But as Delia is weak and easily made ill, she is to stay longer, lest she should get any harm, this very cold weather, in travelling. She is very comfortable with Deborah, and

Aunt Bessie is very good to her. But I think she will be happier when you and nurse come back.

And have you been very happy here, Margaret?"

"O, very happy indeed, Uncle. I love Lady Selene and my Lady Cynthia so much! But I should like to come home best, if I may. I want you sometimes very much."

"I think it is the right time for you to come home now, my dear. And I want my childie quite as much as she wants me."

"Do you, Uncle? But you can't—O, what is that?" she exclaimed, standing still in astonishment. "What has happened to the sun?"

She might well wonder, for the sun, which had just broken through some driving clouds, came forth with an unmistakeable piece of the moon's disk blackening a part of his circle.

"I had forgotten it for the time, but it is an eclipse of the sun—a partial eclipse. It was cloudy as I came along, so I did not think of it."

"But how strange and wild it looks."

And then they stood, fascinated, to watch the sight, which grew indeed wilder and stranger every moment. Fierce gusts of wind suddenly blew past, and then as suddenly dropped. Clouds scudded overhead, now entirely concealing sun and moon; then parting, and revealing the two orbs as it were engaged in a deadly struggle. A light that seemed not the shining of the

sun—a gloom that seemed not the darkness of storm—but a mingled, lurid, unearthly strife between light and darkness; rendered all the more weird and almost awful by the snowbound earth below, whose whiteness became tinged with the pallid, dusky hue of the sky above.

The boys had left their work, the Colonel and his wife had come out of the house, all drew together, and watched, half spell-bound, this wondrous sight—single as it would probably be in the lifetime of all. Few words were spoken, till the wildest of the glamour cast over the whole visible world was past; all seemed to wish to drink in so solemn a spectacle in silence.

Mr Grant murmured half-aloud,—

> "Hustling along, a strange compounded form,
> Half glitter and half gloom—the sun aggrieved,
> And the black moon confederate with the storm
> Against mankind."

"I never wonder," said Lady Selene, as they moved towards the house, "that heathen and ignorant nations looked upon eclipses as portents of dire and awful events. If you were not an enlightened Christian, how such a sight as this would seem to foretell some strange occurrence!"

"Do you remember," said her son, "the eclipse in Thalaba?

> 'When the sun shall be darkened at noon,
> Son of Hodeirah, depart.'

"Then when the eclipse really comes—

'It spreads, and spreads, and now
Hath darkened half the sun,
Whose crescent pointed horns
Now momently decrease.

'The day grows dark, the birds retire to rest;
Forth from his shadowy haunt
Flies the large-headed screamer of the night.
Far off the affrighted African,
Deeming his god deceased,
Falls on his knees in prayer,
And trembles as he sees
The fierce Hyena's eyes
Glare in the darkness of that dreadful noon.'"

"But what I complain of," said Edward, "is the want of darkness and all the imagined disturbance among animals. You always read of the cocks crowing, the birds roosting, the cows going home. But one sees nothing of this sort. Either people exaggerated tremendously, or eclipses are not what they used to be. Why, even this darkness is nothing like some thunderstorms, though there is a more uncommon look about it; while one reads of the stars rushing out amidst an awful blackness."

"But, Edward," said his uncle, "those descriptions apply to a total eclipse, which is so rare that hardly any one can compare one with another. Why, the last total eclipse visible in England was in 1715. Though I allow that I have felt some of your disappointment in the want of darkness."

"Don't you suppose, too," said Lady Selené, "that in the tropics the effect would be far more awful and fearful than with us from the intense contrast between the glare of the sun and the blackness of shadow? In the yellow, tawny deserts, how weird it must be!"

"Hardly more so than in snow, I think," said Mr Grant. "One never hears of eclipses in the Arctic regions, but I should think they would be even wilder and grander in the ice-world than in the desert, tropical world."

"Uncle," asked Margaret, "do you think animals see what we see about skies, and colours, and such things?"

"They would be more likely to notice a gathering storm or darkness than anything. They certainly often know by instinct when a storm is brewing."

"But a beautiful sunset, Uncle, or anything very beautiful? I was watching Luna the other day, when the sun was all red like fire, and the sky all gold and red; and she never seemed to see or care a bit. Yet she can see some things much better than I can."

"The sight of animals is much more acute about small, near things, but it is quite impossible to know how they see these great distant sights such as sunsets. They certainly never seem to take the slightest pleasure in a glorious view or sky, whether they see the colours or not."

"And they don't seem to care to smell sweet flowers either."

"No. Their senses must be in some ways totally

different from ours, for their smell is far more acute, of course, only it seems unfitted to receive the scent of flowers."

"But though dogs don't admire the beautiful moon or sky, they howl at the moon. Why is that, Uncle?"

"I do not think any one has ever really made out the reason. Our power of fathoming the minds of animals is singularly small. We often think we know a great deal about them, and all the time how soon we come to the impassable barrier."

"Mr Grant," said Lady Selene, when they had left the dining-room, and Margaret had gone up to her nurse, "you must, please, wait for Cynthia to come home from skating. She took luncheon with her, and meant to be back about three. She would never forgive us if Margaret were carried off while she was out; and she also wants to see you very specially."

In fact, Cynthia and Mr Vernon returned before the time prefixed, and both started forth to walk to The Limes with Margaret and her uncle. Cynthia walked forward with Mr Grant, while Mr Vernon good naturedly set himself to talk pleasantly with his small companion.

"And so you saw the great eclipse," he said. "Do you know that you at—eight o'clock is it, that the clock of your age marks?"

"Nearly half-past eight."

"That you, at nearly half-past eight, have seen such an eclipse as I never saw, though I am more than four

times eight o'clock? And hardly any one in England has seen so grand a one, however old they may be. Do you think you shall remember this day when you have reached my great age?"

"I am sure I shall. Why, you are only half as old as Uncle, for he is more than eight times my age."

"Eight times eight o'clock! I am afraid the poor clock would be quite tired out if it had to strike all those times. And what did you think of the eclipse?"

"I thought it very wonderful," said Margaret, with some hesitation.

"What else?"

"But I couldn't think it beautiful. I had rather not see it often."

"No. An eclipse of the sun is more wild and strange than beautiful. Now an eclipse of the moon may be extremely beautiful."

"I want to see that very much indeed."

"You may have your wish then, probably, next summer. I wonder where you and I shall both be then. Not building snow houses or skating on the ice, anyhow."

"Were you skating this morning when the dark spot began to creep over the sun?"

"Yes, I was. And I went on skating while I watched the dark spot growing bigger and bigger."

"And what was my Lady Cynthia doing?"

"She was resting her feet in a little sheltered shed,

till I called her out to look at the eclipse. Why do you call her *your* Lady Cynthia?"

"Only because I love her so much," said Margaret, blushing. "I always say, 'my moon,' because I love it, and I like to call any one 'mine' whom I am fond of."

Mr Vernon looked amused, and replied, presently, "But I don't quite know how we are going to arrange matters, if you think she belongs to you. For do you know, I can tell you a little secret about her ——"

"Don't tell me, don't tell me, please," cried Margaret, speaking quite vehemently in her eagerness to stop him. "She said it would be dishonest to find out some other way what she didn't tell me. She said she would tell me some day, and I don't want to find out. Please don't tell me anything."

"I won't tell you a word. I see you wish to be a faithful and honourable child. We will talk of something else."

And he told her a long amusing adventure which he and his brothers had on the ice once as boys, which lasted till they reached The Limes. Then out came Aunt Bessie to meet them, and every one went indoors, and Lady Cynthia went with Margaret to see Delia. Margaret had her little cross-over ready, and had been longing to give it; but now she turned shy, when the moment came. Farther on, she ran to look at her own nursery again, and here Cynthia followed her, and sat down in Nurse's own chair, where there was room for

the two to sit squeezed close together. And there Lady Cynthia whispered her secret into Margaret's ear, and heard how Margaret could not help guessing a little, but would not let herself be told. Mr Grant knew what Cynthia was going to tell Margaret, so that he was not surprised to be asked that evening,—

"Uncle, do you like Mr Vernon very much?"

"Yes, dear, I do. I have known him for about a dozen years, and I like him more every year."

"I am very glad. I should not like Lady Cynthia to be married to somebody unless you liked him very much. Doesn't it seem very odd, Uncle?"

"Not to me, dear," he replied, smiling.

"I can't think of her as 'Lady Cynthia Vernon.' It sounds so strange. Will it be soon, Uncle?"

"Not till the summer. Lady Selene does not want to lose her sister yet."

"Lose her, Uncle? But won't she be here just the same?"

"Why no, childie. Mr Vernon does not live here, and wives go with their husbands all over the world. Not that Lady Cynthia will have to do that. Her home will not be very far off, only in London, or a little way on the other side of London."

"I never thought of her going away," said Margaret, mournfully, for a cloud of unexpected separation seemed to threaten her. She felt as if the glamour of the last three weeks had been somewhat rudely broken, if her

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"MARGARET THE MOONBEAM."

beautiful princess was going away to live in a kingdom elsewhere.

"Shall I ever be able to see her, Uncle?"

"O yes, I hope so, my dear. You may be sure she will often come here to her sister. Besides, only just now she was telling me how she hoped that I should next autumn come to stay with her in her new home, and take you with me. Is not that a delightful thing to look for?"

It certainly was, and Margaret went to bed quite free from the shadow which had for a few moments threatened an eclipse to her otherwise most happy day.

"What a charming little girl is that Margaret of yours," said Mr Vernon to Cynthia. "I am glad that good old Mr Grant has such a child in his home for his elder years."

"You did not see the prettiest sight though, which was the meeting of the two children over Margaret's gift. She had been quite excited over the idea of giving the little woollen shawl made by herself, and went rushing upstairs to see Delia with it all ready. But then she turned as shy as possible, and grew as red as a rose, not knowing how to present it, while Delia sat watching her in some surprise, with her little pale cheeks and large eyes. At last Margaret almost thrust the shawl upon Delia, saying hastily, 'I hope you will like it; I made it.' Then the other child blushed a little with pleasure, and stroked the soft wool, and said, 'For me? How nice.'"

"I like the child's sense of honour about not letting me tell her your secret. I feel inclined to say with your song—

'My love is only *eight* years old,
And I am thirty-three.'"

"I wonder if you remember half as well as I do the first time we met, that second of January when I was only ten years old and you were twenty-three. What *is* the matter? What have I said to make you look like that?"

"Well, I do think it hard when an unromantic being, 'a plain, blunt man,' has for once in his life tried to effect a little bit of romance, that his efforts should be ignored by the person most concerned. Has it never occurred to you that I chose *this* second of January just because it was the day when I saw you first ten years ago?"

"How should I know that?

'Ye suld ha telled me that before, laddie.'

It might be a great event to me at ten years old to see a gentleman of whose fame I had heard a great deal, but what should a mere child be to the 'famous man?'" replied Cynthia, laughing slightly as if to hide how deeply she was blushing.

"To tell the truth, the man of fame at first remembered the day far the most by its being his first sight of your sister. You were such a picture together—you, and she, and the boy. I remember when Charles brought me into the drawing-room, straight upon you all three sitting near

the fire, with the ruddy glow flickering over your faces. Henry was sitting on his mother's knee holding up his hands to make some kind of sign to you, and you on the low ottoman were answering him on your fingers, both of you laughing at the time, while Selene was silently watching you with an amused but tender smile on her face. I have that scene engraved on my memory. Afterwards, Selene's character, as well as her face, showed me what her sister might grow to be."

"I wish she might! Do you think I shall be like her when I am thirty-five?"

"I am content to leave that problem. Don't alarm me by suggesting what an old fellow I shall be then."

"What a grand sun sinking behind the hill! What a contrast to this morning. If one did not know it, how little one could imagine that innocent, white moon seeming as if trying to blot out the mighty sun."

"She has two sides to her character, you see, as well as two sides to her sphere. How I like that little loving touch of Browning's to his wife about the moon's unseen face—

> 'What, there's nothing in the moon noteworthy?
> Nay—for if that moon could love a mortal,
> Use, to charm him (so to fit a fancy)
> All her magic ('tis the old sweet mythos),
> She would turn a new side to her mortal,
> Side unseen of herdsman, huntsman, steersman,
> Blind to Zoroaster on his terrace,
> Blind to Galileo on his turret.
>
> . . . . .

What were seen? None knows; none ever shall know.
Only this is sure—the side were other,
Not the moon's same side, born late in Florence,
Dying now impoverished in London.
God be thanked, the meanest of His creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her.'

What a world of manifold thoughts that eclipse this morning may have roused among all the thousands of human beings who gazed at it."

"Mr Grant spoke one of his thoughts upon it as we walked together, so like him the idea was. 'It is like the black, thick darkness of human misery, which seems as if it would blot out all light from our heaven as well as earth. But the glorious source of the light is really all untouched, and one day that blackness may all vanish as utterly from us as those few dark moments amidst the whole existence of the sun in the universe.' His words seemed meant for me, for I sometimes feel a sort of sudden panic, and this morning I couldn't help fearing, as I watched the eclipse—"

"A foreboding of trouble?"

"No, *no*. I am not silly and superstitious like that. It was a fear lest I might ever be an eclipse to your sun, lest you might ever regret having chosen me."

There was a silence before he replied, "Dearest, do you think I have never felt a fear like that? Long before I asked you to trust yourself to me, how often have I heard a voice say to me, 'Art thou sure that thou art

worthy to ask her to be thine, fit to be entrusted with her happiness?' Perhaps a humble self-distrust is the surest promise of mutual security of trust."

"But I am so young, so untried. I cannot tell, nor can you, how I should bear any great troubles of life, for you have only seen me in a life of happiness and peace."

"The God-given happiness of a joyous youth need not make you fear to fail, so long as you cherish a brave and humble spirit. Let us face life together, my darling. And if dark times do come to us, let us remember that behind every eclipse, the glorious sun is ever the same."

"The sun may in glory go by,
Though by cloudiness hidden from sight,
And the moon may be bright in the sky,
Though an air-mist may smother its light."—*Barnes.*

CHAPTER X.

EASTER HOLIDAYS.

"Queen of the stars! so gentle, so benign,
That ancient Fable did to thee assign,
When darkness creeping o'er thy silver brow,
Warned thee these upper regions to forego,
Alternate empire in the shades below."

Wordsworth.

"I LEFT my moon-maiden, Margaret, in a world of snow, and I find her in a world of flowers."

All pleasant things are fleeting in this world; and to nothing does the trite observation more strongly apply than to that delightful time—the holidays of a schoolboy. Happily however, for some few years he has, like the orbit of a well-regulated comet, periods of regular recurrence. Such a period in his yearly revolution brought Edward Grant back again to his uncle's home for the Easter holidays, rather more than three months after he had left it.

The day was the very type of a perfect spring day, and Margaret had spent most of it in a wood which held within its not wide limits all the chief pleasures and treasures of a lovely spring time. The tender glimmer-

ing of April leaves, the wealth of flowers bedecking the ground in countless hosts, the bright sunlit sky, the fresh and balmy air, the happy birds that from tree and bush gave forth their "blithe good-morrow," all these delights together enriched the woods belonging to Elmhurst. Here she roamed among the dells more than a foot deep in lush, green growths, or climbed the little steep hills crowned with circlets of flower-jewels of every colour, or sat upon the mossy stumps of the underwood which had been felled a year or two before. Now she filled her hands with blossoms; now she twined wreaths for herself and her companions, Nurse and Delia; now she half-buried in leaves and grasses the much enduring Luna, who had become her devoted playmate; now she tried to follow the notes of the nightingales warbling around her; now she softly sang to herself a dreamy song. But whether aloud in her voice, or silent in her thought, the one burden of her song was the same continually—

"Edward is coming!
Edward is coming!
Edward is coming home to-day!
Home to-day,
Home to-day,
Edward is coming home to-day!"

"Do you know that, Luna, you dear, wise, old doggie? Do you know that your young master is coming to see your old master? And won't you be glad to see him?

And haven't I dressed you up with flowers in his honour? Yes, shake your head and look wise about it; I am quite sure you know what is going to happen."

Yet presently, while she was humming to herself a few yards away, she did not notice how Luna all of a sudden pricked up the pretty drooping ears, shook off her encumbering, flowery necklaces, and pelted down the road to greet the figure she had perceived from afar. So that while Margaret was yet unaware of the approach of any one, she found herself raised from the ground by Edward himself, with his first words of greeting—

"Here she is. I left my moon-maiden Margaret in a world of snow, and I find her in a world of flowers."

What a happy afternoon it was! No wonder that it dwells in Margaret's memory as one of her most delightful early recollections. She had so many things to show Edward, especially when, after wandering homewards, they went all round the garden and orchard, and every part of the homestead at The Limes. Spring had brought to Margaret so many pleasures hitherto never known.

"O, Edward, there are twenty dear little chickens and nine baby ducklings, and they are so soft and pretty, and I feed them every day. And the little tiny ones live in a basket before Mrs Betts's fire to keep them warm, and when she feeds them there in her kitchen the robins hop in at the doorway and pick up the food too, and they come quite near me, and don't mind me a bit. And now

I have got such a secret just here. Do shut your eyes and not look till I tell you. Now! Is not that a nice little nest in the box hedge, full of pretty eggs? I watch the mother robin fly away, and then I peep in, but I never touch them lest she might not like it. And there is another who does not even fly away, but sits looking at me out of her pretty, bright eyes. You didn't know of all these nice things, did you, Edward?"

"No, I didn't. But I wish you had written a letter and told me all about them, Margie. Do you know, the fellow who shares my room at school used to get such nice letters from his little sister that I and Henry often wished we had each got a sister at home. And though you are not really my sister, and not at what is quite my home, still Uncle's house is very nearly my home, and you are all I can have for a little sister. I wish you would write to me next half."

"I would have written a letter to you before if I had known you would like it, but you never asked me, and I didn't think about it. I should like it very much."

"Well, then, let us make a solemn league and covenant to write to each other next half."

"And will you put a nice large seal outside? And then I won't break it, but cut it right out. And let it be bright red sealing-wax, please."

"The brightest vermillion stick I can find shall it be. So there is our compact firmly made," said Edward, as

he finally jumped his little cousin to the top of the steps at the end of the sloping lawn.

"You will find there's a way where'er there's a will, so write to me often, my dear Metelille."

"What new name is that?" asked Mr Grant.

"A form of Margaret in Danish ballads which I came upon the other day, and thought I would try on for a change."

"You are always making changes in my name."

"Well, if you *are* the moon, you ought to be always changing."

"There won't be any moon at all to-night to greet you," said Margaret, plaintively.

"Then we shall have a fine starlit night, which I like much better."

"Better than the moon, Edward? Like the stars better than the moon?"

"To be sure I do. Incomparably better."

Margaret looked at her uncle quite appealingly. "Only think, Uncle! Edward likes the little stars better than my beautiful moon. But I am sure you don't, do you?"

"Little stars!" exclaimed Edward. "That is how people talk of all those magnificent suns, as if they were insignificant specks, instead of being, perhaps, infinitely grander and brighter than our own sun. It used to make me quite angry to read that poem—you know it, Uncle—made for Elizabeth of Bohemia,—

'You meaner beauties of the night,
That poorly satisfy our eyes,
More by your number than your light,
You common people of the skies,
What are you when the moon doth rise?'

The idea of saying 'meaner beauties' to the glorious stars. And then people talk of them as attendants on the moon, when she is only a little dark attendant on the earth, and cannot shine at all except by borrowed light.'

"You must make a little allowance for poetic fancies—"

"I don't like poetic fancies if they think themselves finer than poetic truths."

"And for apparent size, which does make our moon give us much more light than all the stars, and appear to sail among them like a queen."

"Of course she is beautiful enough, but I think nothing in the world is so grand as the brilliant midnight sky of countless stars. Look at the Milky Way! It gives one a sense of vast, enduring majesty, to which the moon can never approach."

"I quite think and feel with you in that."

"O Uncle, surely you like my moon best!"

"My dear little girl, there is no need to choose between them at all. The beautiful things which God has made are all so beautiful that we need never compare them. Moonlight and starlight never interfere with each other, and we can enjoy both."

"What has the name 'Margaret' to do with the

moon?" asked Edward. "I heard some one say that there was some connection, but I don't know what."

"The Persian form of the name given to the pearl is said to mean 'child of light,' and the legend seems to be that the oyster rises to adore the moon, when drops of dew from the moonbeams fall into its mouth, and become pearls. Dante gives the moon the title of 'l'eterna margherita,' but whether he took it at all from this old Persian myth, or entirely from his own idea of the pearl-like softness of moonlight, I do not know."

"L'eterna margherita is a very beautiful title," said Edward. 'The everlasting pearl' is what it means, Margie."

"Then you see the moon really is called by my name, and I *never* knew that before!"

"Quite a triumph for you, Moonbeam. Uncle, I wonder how long we could keep up between us capping verses about the moon. It would be rather fun to try."

"O do," pleaded Margaret.

"Even I could do that, as Miss Bates said," remarked his mother.

"How can you liken yourself to Miss Bates, mother? You ought to be made to begin."

"I am quite ready to begin,—

> 'If thou would'st view fair Melrose aright,
> Go visit it by the pale moonlight.
> When the broken arches are black in night,
> And each shafted oriel glimmers white;

When the cold light's uncertain shower
Streams on the ruined central tower;
When buttress and buttress alternately
Seem framed of ebon and ivory;
When silver edges the imagery,
And the scrolls that teach thee to live and die.'"

"'The Lay of the Last Minstrel,' I know that, mother."

"Now, Margie, I can see you are ready."

Margaret stood up as if saying a lesson, and repeated slowly and calmly her favourite passage:—

"Now came still Evening on, and Twilight grey
Had in her sober livery all things clad:
Silence accompanied, for beast and bird,
They to their grassy couch, these to their nests
Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale;
She all night long her amorous descant sung.
Silence was pleased; now glowed the firmament
With living sapphires, Hesperus that led
The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon,
Rising in clouded majesty, at length
Apparent queen unveiled her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw."

"Very well said, Margaret," was her Uncle's remark. "I have not heard a piece of Milton repeated for a very long time. Leave me to the last, Edward, and give out your own."

"That orbèd maiden, with white fire laden,
Whom mortals call the moon,
Glides glimmering o'er my fleece-like floor,
By the midnight breezes strewn;

And wherever the beat of her unseen feet,
Which only the angels hear,
May have broken the woof of my tent's thin roof,
The stars peep behind her and peer;
And I laugh to see them whirl and flee,
Like a swarm of golden bees,
When I widen the rent in my wind-built tent,
Till the calm rivers, lakes, and seas,
Like strips of the sky fallen through me on high
Are each paved with the moon and these."

Margaret followed the musical rhythm with great pleasure, but she could not understand the lines at all well till it had been explained to her that the speaker was a cloud.

"My quotation is nothing so wildly beautiful," said their Uncle. "But you, Edward, ought to know their writer's poems, and Margaret will follow them more easily."

"Ye mighty forests, deep and old,
With knotty stems and towering shade,
That, where the lordly streams are rolled,
A dense and matted gloom have made.

Ye stand like shrouds before the clouds,
That hold the sunset of mid June—
And darker still when o'er the hill
Creeps the pale dawning of the moon.

O then the soft suffusion clear
Peers over your enormous screen,
The skies are white with silver light,
How grand the shade! how sweet the sheen!"

—*Charles Tennyson Turner.*

"I like those very much," said Edward, "but I do not know whose they are."

"I shall give you the volume from which they come, in hopes that you will certainly like some of the beautiful verses and thoughts you will find in it."

"I could quite understand those, Uncle," said Margaret, "and they make me think of one night at Elmhurst in the winter, when I saw the moon rise from behind the belt of elms."

"Yes, dear. One thing which makes fine poetry so interesting is that it reminds us of the beautiful things that we see, but which we could only describe more commonly."

"Now for your turn again, mother."

"The moon is bright, the sea is calm,
The little boat rides rapidly
Across the ocean waves.
The line of moonlight on the deep
Still follows as they voyage on;
The winds are motionless;
The gentle waters gently part
In murmurs round the prow.
He looks above, he looks around,
The boundless heavens, the boundless sea,
The crescent moon, the little boat,
Naught else above, below."

"Thalaba! Thalaba! I know that," said Edward.

"I think I know why Aunt Bessie chose that pretty bit," said Margaret.

"Why, my dear?"

"Because you live by the sea, Auntie."

Mrs William Grant smiled her silent assent, before Edward started off afresh—

"Keen as are the arrows
Of that silver sphere,
Whose intense lamp narrows
In the white dawn clear,
Until we hardly see, we feel that it is there.

All the earth and air
With thy voice is loud,
As, when night is bare,
From one lonely cloud
The moon rains out her beams, and heaven is overflowed."

"I would ask for the whole poem, Edward, if there was time," said his uncle. "But we have missed Margaret's turn."

"This is not such a long one," said Margaret—

"To behold the wandering moon
Riding near her highest noon,
Like one that hath been led astray
Through the heaven's wide pathless way,
And oft, as if her head she bowed,
Stooping through a fleecy cloud."

"Why, that is Milton again, Margie. Is he your favourite poet?"

"Yes. Uncle says Shakespeare was a much greater poet, but I know so little of his poetry, except about Hubert and Arthur. And I like Milton so much."

"Mother, who is your favourite poet?"

"Shakespeare."

"Trust mother for a prompt, *undoubtable* answer in the fewest possible words. Whom should you say, Uncle?"

"Too tremendous a question for me, Edward. I suppose I should come to the same, but I could not say so as positively as your mother."

"You know so many more poets," replied his sister-in-law.

"But your moon verse, Uncle," urged Margaret.

He looked at her, and repeated the following triplets–

"So fair, so sweet, withal so sensitive,
Would that the little Flowers were born to live
Conscious of half the pleasure that they give.

That to this mountain daisy's self were known
The beauty of its star-shaped shadow thrown
On the smooth surface of this naked stone!

And what if hence a bold desire should mount
High as the Sun, that he could take account
Of all that issues from his glorious fount!

And were the Sister-power that shines by night
So privileged, what a countenance of delight
Would through the clouds break forth on human sight."

"O Uncle, how very, very pretty!" cried Margaret, with a most vivid 'countenance of delight.'

"I am glad you like it, dear. Now, I think you should follow the moon's present example, and become invisible."

"One round more let us have," asked Edward. "All good things come in threes."

"That means that you have a third good one ready," said his mother. "You must put up with a very small one from me—your uncle's piece from Wordsworth recalled it to me—

> 'Who would "go parading"
> In London, "and masquerading,"
> On such a night of June,
> With that beautiful soft half-moon,
> And all these innocent blisses,
> On such a night as this is?'"

"What a dear little bit," said Margaret; "I like that 'beautiful soft half-moon' so much. I really don't think I know a third, Edward."

"O yes, you must find one more."

Margaret thought for a few moments, and then a bright look flashed across her face—

> "Soon as the evening shades prevail
> The moon takes up the wondrous tale,
> And nightly to the listening earth
> Repeats the story of her birth."

"That is right, Margaret. You have done your part very well," said their uncle. "Now, Edward, let us hear your third, which you can hardly contain."

Edward began without any preamble—

"O Moon! the oldest shades 'mong oldest trees
Feel palpitations when thou lookest in.
O Moon! old boughs lisp forth a holier din
The while they feel thine airy fellowship.
Thou dost bless everywhere, with silver lip
Kissing dead things to life. The sleeping kine,
Couched in thy brightness, dream of fields divine.
Innumerable mountains rise, and rise
Ambitious for the hallowing of thine eyes.
And yet thy benediction passeth not
One obscure hiding-place, one little spot
Where pleasure may be sent; the nested wren
Has thy fair face within its tranquil ken,
And from beneath a sheltering ivy leaf
Takes glimpses of thee; thou art a relief
To the poor patient oyster, where it sleeps
Within its pearly house. The mighty deeps,
The monstrous sea is thine—the myriad sea!
O Moon! far spooming Ocean bows to thee."

"Where did you find that, Edward?" asked his mother.

"I found it quoted, mother, with no reference, as usual. I was weeks trying to make out where it was, for it took my fancy very much, and was just going to write and ask Uncle Edward, when I by chance discovered that it comes out of Keats's 'Endymion.'"

"Now uncle must give us the last of all," said Margaret, looking up in his face.

"I shall give you a quotation which is not verse, but to make amends for that it is more than a thousand

years older than anything we have had, and nobody will know where it comes from.

'He spoke to the moon, Be thou renewed, and be the beautiful diadem of man, who shall one day be quickened again like the moon.'"

"It sounds not unlike some of the Apocrypha," said Edward, after a few moments.

"It is not from the Apocrypha, but your guess is a very near one, Edward. It comes from a synagogue service believed to be, at least, as old as the third century A.D."

"What a number of different poets we have had," said Margaret; "but they all agree in one thing."

"What one thing?"

"In liking and loving my beautiful moon."

When Mr Grant and Margaret were alone for their little evening reading, she asked, "Uncle, don't you think 'child of light' is a very pretty meaning for my name?"

"Very pretty, my dear."

"And it sounds like—like a good name, as if anybody who had it ought to be very good. It reminds me of something in the Bible, Uncle, only I don't know exactly what."

"I know what you mean, dear. St Paul in his Epistles writes, 'Ye are all the children of the light,' and 'Walk as children of light.' And our Lord Himself said, 'While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may

be the children of light.' I hope my own Margaret will always be more and more a 'child of light.'"

"Ere the night we rose
And sauntered home beneath a moon, that just
In crescent dimly rained about the leaf
Twilights of airy silver."

—*Tennyson.*

CHAPTER XI.

SEASIDE.

"The moon was bright, and o'er the tranquil flood,
She sped the silver ripples to the shore."

Charles Tennyson Turner.

"I WISH the holidays would never end," was Margaret's remark on Edward's next departure for school.

"Only then they would never begin," said her uncle, "though I have just the same feeling when first we lose Edward."

"Will he come here in the summer, uncle?"

"No, my dear; he will be at his mother's home."

"O, what a pity! Then we shall not see him at all."

"I hope we shall, for Aunt Bessie has asked me to take you to stay with her during the summer holidays. And I mean to do so, if nothing prevents it."

"Then I hope nothing will prevent it."

Nothing did prevent it. The day before Edward left school again, he received the following letter:—

"MY DEAR EDWARD,—Uncle and I came to Aunt Bessie a week ago. I think Clearwell Bay is delightful,

and I have been to Furze Hill and Fern Dale, and found heaps of flowers. I can remember seeing the sea before, but it is much more beautiful than I knew, and Clearwell Bay is the nicest place I ever was at by the sea. I shall be very glad when you come.—Your loving cousin, MARGARET ESDAILE."

Margaret received no written answer to this letter, for Edward himself was the answer the next day. Even before his train stopped, he was aware of a little beaming face shining out upon him from one of the light basket carriages with which sturdy ponies trotted up and down the steep hills of the inland country near Clearwell Bay. Mother and uncle were also there, and when bag and baggage were stowed away inside, they started off at a round pace, followed by the never absent Luna, and her brother, 'Pollo, Edward's own particular dog.

"Six precious souls and all agog," remarked Edward. "How jolly it is to see both uncle and Margie here, mother."

They met on the downs the fresh evening sea breeze, most grateful to the dusty, be-travelled boy, after a long, blazing, summer day's journey. And when, after stopping at Aunt Bessie's cottage to discharge luggage, and to have tea under the trees, they hastened down to the valley, through which the little stream of clear water rippled down between high hills whose lower slopes were clothed with trees and bushes, and reached the

open sea shore itself, they were still in time to see

"The blaze upon the waters to the west"

a good hour before sunset.

How beautiful it was, with the still, gleaming sea full before them, and the gentle purling sound of the water, as—

"The little waves rolled the rocks to greet,
And polished their bare and rugged feet."

All was still, and soft, and bright. If you looked to landward, the noble cliffs rose high with stately walls, or rolling downs lay in soft, rounded folds above the shore, or graceful, wooded valleys streamed downwards from the distant uplands. If you looked to seawards, there was the vast, silent expanse, quivering in broken sheets of light, while little dark boats floated near, or white-sailed ships were seen afar flocking round the great point to the west.

The tide was low, the pleasant sands were firm and dry, the long, distant reefs of rocks tempted them on from reach to reach till near sundown. Then came the climb homewards, when they reached a turfy hill just in time to catch the last edge of the sun's disk, as he dipped below the waters still glowing with his light.

Margaret's day, like that of the sun, had lengthened out very much in the summer months. The evenings by the sea were so fresh, and beautiful, and inviting for walking, while all the rest of the day could be spent quietly under the deep, cool shade of the large trees

round the cottage. So that to her delight she was allowed to sit up later than she ever did otherwise; whereby she saw more of the beauty of evening and early night, than summer had ever before shewn her. Her late tea with Nurse was soon over, and when the others came from their supper, they found her still lingering in the drawing-room, from whence was the fullest view of sea and western sky.

Edward came up to the window also, and took her on his knee.

"The moon is quite high to-night, Edward," she said, "but last week I saw her set just over where the sun had set before, and she did, O, she did look such a beautiful, little, tiny silver boat."

"And next week she will be full," said Aunt Bessie, "and she will, O, she will look such a beautiful, large silver ball."

"How well you must know how everything looks from these windows, Aunt Bessie."

"Yes indeed, my dear."

"Before you came up I was singing that pretty song Lady Cynthia sings—

'Sweet and low, sweet and low,
Wind of the western sea,
Low, low, breathe and blow,
Wind of the western sea.
Father will come to his babe in the nest,
Silver sails all out of the west
Under the silver moon.'

It sounds as if it might have been made for this place, doesn't it, Aunt Bessie?"

"Yes indeed, my dear," replied her aunt again. But such a rush of ever living memories came over her at these words by that window, that she rather quickly left the room, not before the child had seen an unusual look pass over her countenance. Edward ran after his mother, and when in a few moments he returned, Margaret's bright face was troubled.

"Did I say anything wrong?" she asked, blushing with affectionate regret lest she had hurt Mrs Grant's feelings.

"No, darling," replied Edward very kindly. "It was only that mother used to sing that song to me at this window, when it was the real truth that my father would 'come to his babe in the nest' from

'Silver sails all out of the west.'

And the words made her suddenly think of those old days."

"I am so sorry I said them, but I didn't know."

"No, darling, how should you? Mother is not hurt at all, and doesn't want you to think she minds. She will come back directly."

And, indeed, Aunt Bessie came back with her usual cheerful, gentle face quite unruffled. And meeting Margaret's timid look, and gentle kiss to her hand as if asking pardon for an unconscious injury, she set herself to

talk brightly, and started a brisk conversation, which lasted till the long delayed bed-time really had to come to pass.

The following week was one of perfect summer weather, and perfect enjoyment of all pleasures of sea and country combined. One afternoon would be spent among the broad grassy glades and lofty trees of an inland place, half park, half forest. Another would be given to a boating expedition, skimming over the smooth, glistening water near the grand, tall cliffs, sometimes stopping to picnic in some little shady bay, where the only sign of man was a little solitary coastguard cottage.

"I don't know whether you are most of a country maiden or a sea maiden, Margie," would Edward say.

"O, I am most of a sea maiden here," would Margaret reply, "for you see I can have the flowers and trees at home, but not the beautiful sea."

And truly what she loved best was only to patter about the sands with spade, and bucket, and basket, gathering shells from out of the clear pools; clambering over rocks rough and rugged, or slippery with rich, glossy, brown sea-weed, and watching Edward as he pushed his net for crabs, or climbed steep paths up the cliffs, or made his way, half leaping, half paddling, to the far seaward end of some long reef of rocks, far beyond Margaret's power of even approaching.

Every day of that week was overflowing with sea joys and sea sights. And yet how fast the days seemed to fly

past. Like the sea-gulls who dipped and gleamed among the waves, and then were lost to sight, so did those days fly past and vanish, yet the gleam of their wings would live ever after to those who had spent them together.

"The last day!" said Margaret, with a sigh, when she awoke the day before she and Uncle Edward were to return home. And "the last day!" she again sighed out that evening as they all looked out of the large bow-window together. "What a pity ever to leave such a sea, Uncle! And I think it looks beautifuller than ever for our last evening. But I wish last evenings wouldn't come."

"Remember what is coming though, Margie, for the last sight of our last evening—the eclipse of the moon which you have been longing to see."

There was no need to tell her to watch for this. Patiently did she stand watching long before the time, and breathlessly did she gaze on the grand, almost eerie vision of the dark shadow gradually stealing over the sphere, which had looked like an orb of purest molten gold. And joyfully did she hail the slender sickle when it glimpsed out again from beneath the black foe. And slowly, slowly, but surely, the well-known form grew and grew, and rounded and brightened, till there she hung once more in the blue dome of night, "apparent queen," clothed in her peerless light. Beneath her streamed her glistering path of beams across the sleeping sea, a Milky Way upon the world of waters. Margaret was roused

at last by hearing her uncle repeat aloud to Aunt Bessie one of the sonnets from his favourite little volume—

" When the moon's edge grows dim, then blurred and rough,
And darkness quarries in her lessening orb,
She yields an image, true and stern enough,
Of all those crimes and sorrows which absorb
Our hope and life ! The thievish shadow sits
On her smooth rim at first, like Adam's sin,
But soon the encroaching gloom its way doth win,
And with a stealth that never intermits,
Eats out her glory ; but the moon expands
Once more, and brightens to a perfect sphere,
A blessèd restoration, full and clear ;
So Christ refills our waning world, and stands
For her lost light : O, Saviour, ever dear !
Soon shall Thy name be known throughout all lands."

When Margaret thought that her voice would not interrupt the remarks of her elders, she asked—

" Uncle, don't you think we are all poetry people ? "

" If you mean people who are fond of poetry, dear, I think we certainly are."

" But nurse says it is because I am such a poetry child that I go mooning about and losing my things. Yesterday, when I let my bucket swim away with the tide, she said : 'You are such a poetry child, you'll forget and leave your head behind some day.' "

" Well, we have ne'er a one of us come to that catastrophe yet," remarked Edward, as he left the room.

"But what does she mean, Uncle? Why should poetry people forget things? And I wasn't thinking of any poetry at all when the bucket swam away. I was counting my bright yellow shells."

"I am very glad that you are such a poetry child, dear. Sometimes people who are very fond of poetry are apt to be absent, and not to observe what is just before them, and that is what nurse meant. But there is no need that you should forget common things because you are fond of poetry. The most poetical friend I have never goes 'mooning about,' but is always awake to everything."

Margaret's next remark shewed that her mind had started upon a new track of thought. "Uncle, do you think that any people who have died may be living in the moon?"

"That has often been a fancy of many persons, my dear."

"But what do you think, Uncle? Do you think any one you love may be living in the moon?"

"My own feelings are entirely against it, my dear."

"O, why? She looks so bright and pretty."

"She looks very pretty and bright to us; and as long as people knew nothing more about her, I can fancy their being pleased with the idea that their friends might be there. But do you know that from all that telescopes show, it appears that if we were in the moon, everything there would look very unpleasing to our eyes as they are now. It seems to be a barren land of huge mountains

and chasms, with no green grass and no trees or flowers; but with a black sky, with a fierce blazing sun for one fortnight, and icy-cold darkness for another. Do you think that sounds pleasant?"

"No; but then—"

"We cannot judge what it might be to beings with quite different powers from our human senses. We know nothing. Still it seems to me extremely unlikely that a world which sounds to us so barren and dreary should be inhabited by the spirits of human beings like ourselves. I will try to explain what I mean, dear," he continued, seeing the child look mystified, but extremely interested. "All that we are told in the Bible about those who go to God gives us the feeling of their going to a beautiful place. Then our Lord himself calls the place, where He said the penitent thief should be with Him, by the name of Paradise. Now, do you know what the word Paradise meant? It meant a beautiful garden or park, full of trees, and streams, and soft, green valleys and lawns. Our Lord would not have used the word if He had not meant to make us think of a delightful, refreshing place full of—

"All things bright and beautiful."

So when we are told of a fresh, pleasant place, and find that the moon appears to us a dreary, barren world, it would seem contradictory to think of her as the Paradise for those whom we love."

"Then, where do you like to think of them, Uncle?"

"I prefer not to think of any place, dear child, like moon or star, though, of course, those thousands of worlds in the sky may be full of happy beings. But my own feeling is only to think of them in a happy Paradise belonging to God, no matter where. A writer of beautiful old English hymns says—

'They are all gone into a world of light!

. . . .

I see them walking in an air of glory.'

I like that thought better than fancies about any place in particular."

"I like that 'world of light,'" said Margaret, and then added very softly, "I ought to be a real child of light to go there too, Uncle."

Mr Grant kissed her brow very tenderly. He knew well what anniversary it was this day which had naturally brought this subject very vividly before the child, especially when connected with the wonder and solemnity of the eclipse.

Margaret's heart was indeed very full. And she had grown much in mind, since nearly a year ago she had asked whether Uncle Edward's moon was the same as her own. She lingered once more to say, "Don't you think, Uncle, that the sky is the wonderfullest and beautifullest of all the things we see? The sea is very wonderful, and so the mountains and other things must be; but the sky seems the best and greatest of all, because it is every-

where. We can't lose sight of it as we do of the sea."

"I think every one feels the same about that, dear. All the old nations in ages past who watched the stars, like the Egyptians and Chaldeans, must have felt it so. And none more strongly than the Hebrews, who were always writing of the glory and majesty of the heavens. Next Sunday we will look for some of the verses about this in the Bible. Good night now, my child; good night."

"And as the moon from some dark gate of cloud
Throws o'er the sea a floating bridge of light,
Across whose trembling planks our fancies crowd
Into the realm of mystery and night.

So from the world of spirits there descends
A bridge of light connecting it with this,
O'er whose unsteady floor, that sways and bends,
Wander our thoughts above the dark abyss."

—*Longfellow.*

CHAPTER XII.

THINGS NEW AND OLD.

" How beautiful is night !
A dewy freshness fills the silent air,
No mist obscures, nor cloud, nor speck, nor stain,
Breaks the serene of heaven.
In full-orbed glory yonder moon divine
Rolls through the dark blue depths.
Beneath her steady ray
The desert circle spreads,
Like the round ocean, girdled with the sky ;
How beautiful is night ! "

—*Southey.*

"GOOD-BYE, dear beautiful sea ; good-bye." Such had been Margaret's last words of farewell, as she gazed fondly from the carriage at the last, the very last sight of the sea, which a dip in the downs gave her before the winding road turned steadily inland on the way to the railway station.

Even the pleasure of all the old and new delights of home did not quiet her regretful longing for the voice and face of the sea that evening, till something wholly unexpected came to occupy her thoughts with pleasant wonder. A note was brought to Mr Grant, after reading which, he

took from inside the same cover an enclosed, much-tinier note, carefully sealed, and fully directed to—

"MISS MARGARET ESDAILE,
THE LIMES,
ADIMSTONE."

With glowing cheeks and eager fingers did the owner open her note and read—

"MY DEAR MARGARET,—As I know you should be at home to-day, I have asked Uncle Edward to let you come up to me to-morrow as early as possible. For I have Something to show you, Something to tell you, and Something to ask you. Be sure you come ready to see, and ready to hear, and ready to speak.—Your loving friend,

CYNTHIA MORNINGTON."

"Do you know what the three Somethings are, Uncle."

"Perhaps I do, perhaps I do not. I am not going to betray Lady Cynthia's secrets."

Here was a delighful bewilderment and mystery to go to sleep upon! And an excellent sleep upon it did Margaret have. And exceedingly bright and fresh did she look the next morning, when her little active figure and blithe face appeared at the door of Lady Cynthia's own sitting-room.

"You look as if you came fresh from a dip in the sea," said Cynthia, after the first greetings were over, and she could take a good look at her little friend. "I shall like to hear all your adventures at Clearwell Bay sometime. But now ——"

"But now you will show me the Something, won't you?" asked Margaret, entreatingly, as she fondled Lady Cynthia's hand.

"It would be too bad to keep you in a puzzle any longer, wouldn't it, after rousing all your curiosity last night? Come along with me, and you shall see."

She led Margaret upstairs to the very room which the child had inhabited in the winter.

"Now wait for a few moments," she said, "and shut your eyes till I say 'Look.'"

She passed into an inner room, and Margaret waited with a growing wonder, which made it very difficult to keep her eyes shut till the signal came. Open they flew —Lady Cynthia stood before her, holding in her arms a little long-clothed baby.

A long "O—o" of surprise, pure and simple, was all that came at first from Margaret's lips. Then she found breath for words.

"What a little darling tiny baby! Is it a boy or a girl?"

"My own little niece, and Henry's own little sister."

"How pleased Henry must be!"

"So he is really, though he calls her a 'squanny little atom.'"

"How old is she? And what name is she going to have?"

"She is just two days old, and she is to be a little Cynthia Richmond."

"How nice!" exclaimed Margaret. "May I have her on my knee? What dear little hands she has! Look, her pretty little nails are just like the tiny pink shells I used to find on the sands. Do let me have her, please. I can make her such a comfortable place in my lap."

And so presently when the baby's father came to the nursery door, what did he see but a lady and a child sitting on the floor, while upon the knee of the child was his own new little daughter, who was receiving soft touches and caresses from both, as a merry conversation went on over her head. A sound made Margaret look up, when Colonel Richmond threw up his hands in pretended horror.

"What!!! *my* little daughter in the clutches of Ursa Minor! Cynthia, I could not have expected such cruelty from you. I must rescue my unfortunate infant at my own risk."

"But the Little Bear can't be as bad as the Great Bear," was Margaret's defence, as the Colonel changed his pretended attack into a kind stroke of her cheek.

"And I think," said Cynthia, "that the baby will have to be Ursa Minor now, since her father is Ursa Major. Now I am afraid you must yield her up, Margaret, as I see the nurse is waiting for her, and you and I will go downstairs.

And now for my other Somethings, Margie. The Something I had to show you is worth something, is not

she? The Something I have to tell you is that as soon as Lady Selene has her own little Cynthia, we hope that I shall have a new surname, and not be Cynthia Mornington any longer. Do you understand?"

Margaret nodded gently. "And I am so glad of one thing," she said.

"What is that?"

"That you will still be Lady Cynthia. I couldn't bear you to be Mrs Anything."

Cynthia laughed, and laughed again. "Nor would I be Mrs *Anybody*," she said. "We do not know quite yet which day will be fixed for our wedding; but we hope it will be the last day of August. Well, Mr Vernon has two grown-up sisters, and one middle sister, and one little niece, who are going to be my bridesmaids. They will walk two and two, and I have a cousin to walk with the middle one, but none to go with the youngest. And the Something I want to ask my Margaret is whether she would like to be bridesmaid along with Rose Vernon, who is about the same age. Your uncle says you may, dear, so what do you say?"

Margaret thought it sounded like a very great honour, but had a vague, mystical idea of very onerous duties; and the solemnity of her enquiry, "What shall I have to do?" made Cynthia laugh again. She soon explained that the weighty duties of the untried and unknown position were extremely few and simple. "Only I have set my heart on having Uncle Edward's Margaret for my

youngest bridesmaid, and in my last letter from Mr Vernon, he says, 'I hope you will get your Daisy to walk with my Rose.'"

And then in a few simple but earnest words, she explained to the child a little what was meant by the solemn marriage service at which she was to be present, and told her how her own great desire was to be a good and helpful wife to the good man who was going to be her husband. Margaret never forgot those few but impressive words, which gave her her first ideal of what was meant by marriage as the—

"Perfect music unto noble words."

The next few weeks went by, but they brought a new and almost unknown pleasure into Margaret's life. She could not see much of Lady Cynthia, who was full of work both in tending her sister and in preparing for her marriage. But the nursery with its new little inmate was always open to her, and many a happy hour did she spend, watching the little creature with the absorbing interest of a true lover of babyhood. She was so quiet and unobtrusive that Lady Selene, who was very fond of her, used often to invite her into her room, and sometimes ask her to read aloud to her, while the baby was sleeping beside them. Never was child more joyfully received—a gift so long desired and scarcely hoped for by both parents, and now to be so fondly cherished by them, her brother, her aunt, and by others as well. Lady

Selene, as she watched Margaret's ever growing delight in the little one, would tell her she was like a loving elder sister to wee Cynthia, whereat Margaret's eyes and cheeks would glow with a feeling to which she could give no speech. Once Lady Selene repeated to her some lines upon a baby, which fascinated the child to such a degree that she would ask for them over and over again; not because she did not know them well by heart, but because they touched the key-note of the womanhood which lay hidden underneath the budding flower of her childhood.

"Where did you come from, baby dear?
Out of the everywhere into here.
Where did you get your eyes so blue?
Out of the sky as I came through.
What makes the light in them sparkle and spin?
Some of the starry spikes left in.
Where did you get that little tear?
I found it waiting when I got here.
What makes your forehead so smooth and high?
A soft hand stroked it as I went by.
What makes your cheek like a warm, white rose?
I saw something better than any one knows.
Whence that three-cornered smile of bliss?
Three angels gave me at once a kiss.
Where did you get this pearly ear?
God spoke, and it came out to hear.
Where did you get those arms and hands?
Love made itself into hooks and bands.
Feet, whence did you come, you darling things?
From the same box as the cherubs' wings.

How did they all just come to be you?
God thought about me and so I grew.
But how did you come to us, you dear?
God thought about you, and so I am here."

It was a marked day for Margaret when she was present at the baby's christening, for she had never before seen the baptism of an infant of whom she had any personal knowledge. And she was delighted to find that on almost the same day, nine years before, she herself had been christened. With awe and deepest interest did she watch the godmother, Cynthia, hold the baby forth and lay her in the arms of the clergyman, and she tried to imagine herself so held to have the name of "Margaret" spoken over her with those holy words.

Ten days later came the wedding day, and Margaret was not the only one whose eyes eagerly turned skywards on awaking, and were rejoiced by the sight of a most serene and lovely summer morning. She was to be up at Elmhurst very early, and was at once taken to Cynthia, to whom, with shy delight, she gave her own little present, bought with carefully kept savings from the monthly allowance which her uncle had given her ever since she had at Christmas wished to give away something of her "very own." It was a little silver brooch, made in the shape of a crescent moon, with some delicate tracery work over it. Cynthia said, with perfect truth, that it was one of the wedding gifts which gave her most pleasure, and she seemed as free to attend to the child as if

it was but any common morning, and not the day of such single and vast moment to herself. She wished to see her little bridesmaid arrayed in her pretty lily-white frock, just relieved by forget-me-not blue, and then she hung round Margaret's neck a little locket wherein her own hair was enclosed behind a daisy formed of pearls on a deep blue ground, and gave her the last smile and kiss from Cynthia Mornington.

Margaret did not see her again till she came softly up the church on Colonel Richmond's arm, her sweet face lightened, not shaded, by the tender grace of deep and holy feeling. It was a quiet wedding, only a few nearest friends and relations having been invited, but the village church was filled with many of humble degree, not a few of whom had strong, affectionate recollections of the father and mother of the bride.

Mr Grant was in the church early, and watched with interest the known and unknown faces as they came in. He gave a smile to his own little Moonbeam as he saw her among her fellow bride-maidens awaiting the bride, her fair, glossy hair streaming like a cloud from under her little wreath of daisies and forget-me-nots round her face, with its soft, bright look of gentle eagerness. He could not help a sense of amusement at the galaxy of moons whom he saw assembled in the church. He sat close to Lady Selene, who looked this day singularly like her sister—the sister who had been almost like an eldest daughter to her as well as a baby-sister. There was old

Diana Phœbe herself, her little, aged, wrinkled face alight with the pleasure of seeing her "own young lady" married.

Close by her was the youngest representative of the galaxy, the tiny monthling Cynthia, her little baby, smooth face composed to the most serene indifference to all around her, as she slept in the arms of her nurse, beside whom also stood Mrs Martin, whose first interest was the sight of her own nursling in the procession.

Then came the bride herself, whose growth he had watched for twenty years, her sweet, pure, noble face of strength, mingled with tenderness, bearing upon it the impress of the character he so dearly loved.

And yet another moon did he see, for at the doorway, one of the children strewing flowers before Cynthia Vernon's feet, stood the frail little Delia Knight.

Returning from the wedding, Mr Grant was accompanied by the two important young groomsmen, Edward and Henry, the latter of whom soon communicated to him the question which was working in his mind. "I don't know how in the world to begin calling Mr Vernon 'Uncle Henry.' It seems absurd that we should have the same name, and I shall feel like an ass when I say it, but I know Aunt Cynthia wishes it."

"You would look more like an ass if you didn't do it," said Edward.

"I would begin at once," said Mr Grant, "and then the ass's head will disappear more quickly than Bottom's did."

Edward put up his hands, not to his own, but to Henry's ears. "Methought I was—and methought I had—"

"Where are thy fair large ears, my gentle *boy?*"

When did these three ever meet without a quotation?

After the breakfast, Mr Grant had a few quiet words with Cynthia, for even on her wedding-day there was no hurry or haste about her. She spent a few moments with each old friend, and then gave the last of her time to her sister, till she came down prepared to leave, dressed in soft, summer-like silver-blue, wherein none could specially point her out as a bride. There was no scramble even to reach a train, for Cynthia wished that no part of this one day in her life should be snatched up by Pluto into his chariot, and desecrated by black tunnels and smoke. So, though the husband and wife were to spend September in Scotland, they only drove this day to a nice old-fashioned country inn some twelve miles away. There they alighted at about six o'clock in the evening, and took their first married walk together, wandering through wooded lane and fields of corn sheaves, till they reached a breezy hill-top from whence to see the sun go down upon their wedding-day.

At that same hour Mr Grant and his Margaret were having an evening walk together at The Limes, before he went to dine at Elmhurst with others of the wedding guests. Edward had been obliged to leave by an afternoon train, as he must be at school the next day, and his uncle and cousin had driven with him to the station.

While they were waiting for the train to start, Edward pulled a little piece of paper from his pocket, and said,

"There, Margie, read that, and see if you think I can be called a 'poetry boy.' Not now, keep it till you are quietly at home."

Margaret looked up at him with her pleased face, and Edward was looking at her, and feeling in what he would have called a rather sentimental mood, when this was abruptly put to flight by her asking, "Uncle, what did old Mrs Moore mean by saying to you that Lady Cynthia's was a very 'crackeristic' wedding?"

This innocent question entirely upset Edward's gravity, and he rolled upon the carriage seat in such fits of laughter that his uncle gravely bade him take care lest he were pulled in two, and exploded like a Twelfth Night cracker. This set him off afresh, and he only recovered himself in time to call out, "You have got a hard nut to crack, Uncle," before the train swept him off out of hearing of Mr Grant's explanation to Margaret of the meaning of "characteristic."

Margaret read her verses during her tea-time, and then took them out to Uncle Edward, who was sitting under the finest lime tree on the lawn reading the paper, which he readily laid aside when he heard the modest request.

"Uncle will you read the pretty verses which Edward gave me?"

He took them from her hand and read aloud—

"Twelve fair moons have lightened thy home,
Since thou to gladden our hearts art come,
Sweet maid Margaret, joyous and mild;
Dearly we love thee, moonbeam child.

Pearl of the ocean, and pearl of the sky,
Grow ever, nor wane, as the moon doth on high.
Gentle and bright, our hearts delight,
Dearly we love thee, child of light."

"Don't you think them very pretty, Uncle? And is it not kind of Edward to write them for me?"

"They show how much Edward loves my little Margaret, which pleases me very much; and I hope she will always grow in goodness, as he says. And now little moonbeam," he added, making room for her beside him, "how have you liked this wedding day?"

"O, very much, Uncle, only it seems such a strange, long day, because I never was at a wedding before, you see."

"I wonder if you remember what happened this day last year, Margaret?"

"O yes, I do indeed, Uncle. It was the very day I came here, and I saw it all for the first time. And now it seems so strange to think of never having seen your home, I can hardly fancy it."

"It would seem very strange to me now not to have you in my home, childie."

"Would it, Uncle?"

"Yes, very strange, and very sad. My little Margaret is the chief happiness of my home."

"O Uncle!" said Margaret, and wondered why something seemed nearly to bring tears into her eyes, when she was feeling so happy. "Will you let me always stay in your home, Uncle?" she presently asked, with a wistful look and tone.

"What could make you think of asking such a question, my dear?"

"One of the ladies asked me whether you were not going to send me to school, and I said you never said anything about it. Then she asked if I shouldn't like to go to school, and I said I couldn't bear it; and then she laughed, and said I knew nothing about it. And then she said to another lady (as if I shouldn't hear), 'School is the best place for a child with no natural home.' But you won't send me to school, will you, Uncle?"

"Never, my child. Even if I thought you would be happier with some other children, I would never send you away from me. This is your natural home now."

"Then will you always let me be in your home, Uncle darling?"

"Always, as long as I am with you, my child; unless when you are grown up to be a woman you should leave me for a happier home, as Lady Cynthia has left us to-day. Till that time comes, you are my own Margaret."

"And you are my own Uncle Edward," softly answered the child, as she wound her arms round his neck, and gave him a loving, good-night kiss.

But her great-uncle saw her once more that night, after

he had walked home from Elmhurst through the soft moonlight. As he looked at the sleeping child, who lay wrapped in unruffled, peaceful rest, he thought of the night, just a year ago, when he had found the little orphan in such a burst of grief; and he felt thankful that he had been enabled to make this year a ring of pure gold of true child-happiness to her.

"Yes, my Margaret, my pearl," said Uncle Edward to himself, "loth would I be, indeed, to part with thee, my little Moonbeam child. Fain would I shelter thee from every storm of life. Sent for me to rear and cherish with tender care, sent as a ray of heavenly light to my waning years. God bless thee for ever, Child of Light!"

"How peacefully the broad and golden moon
Comes up to gaze upon the reaper's toil!
That they who own the land for many a mile
May bless her beams, and they who take the boon
Of scattered ears; O beautiful! how soon
The dusk is turned to silver without soil,
Which makes the fair sheaves fairer than at noon,
And guides the gleaner to his slender spoil;
So, to our souls, the Lord of love and might
Sends harvest hours, when daylight disappears;
When age and sorrow, like a coming night,
Darken our field of work with doubts and fears,
He times the presence of His heavenly light,
To rise up softly o'er our silver hairs."

—*Charles Tennyson Turner.*

THE END.

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