BARBARA LADD

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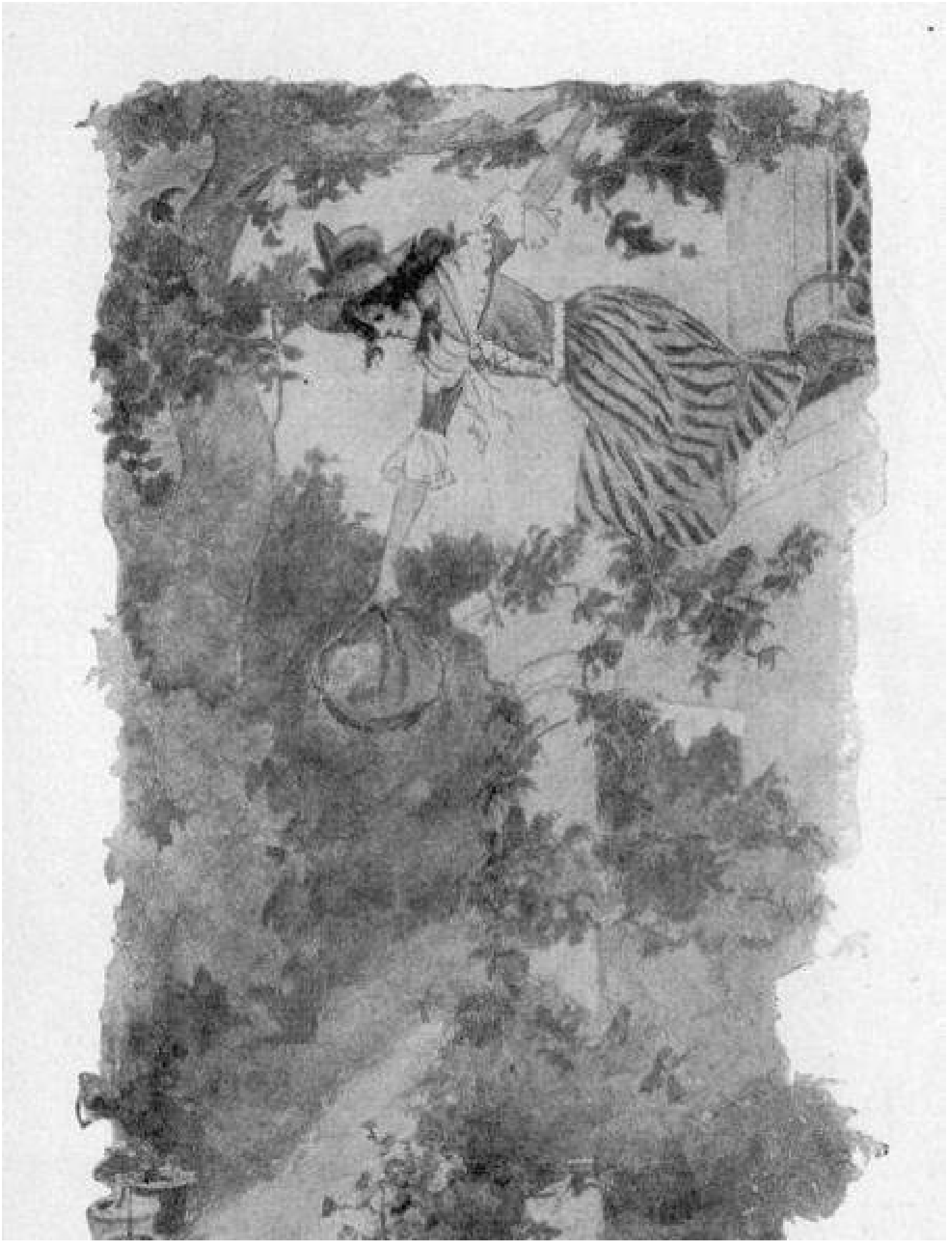

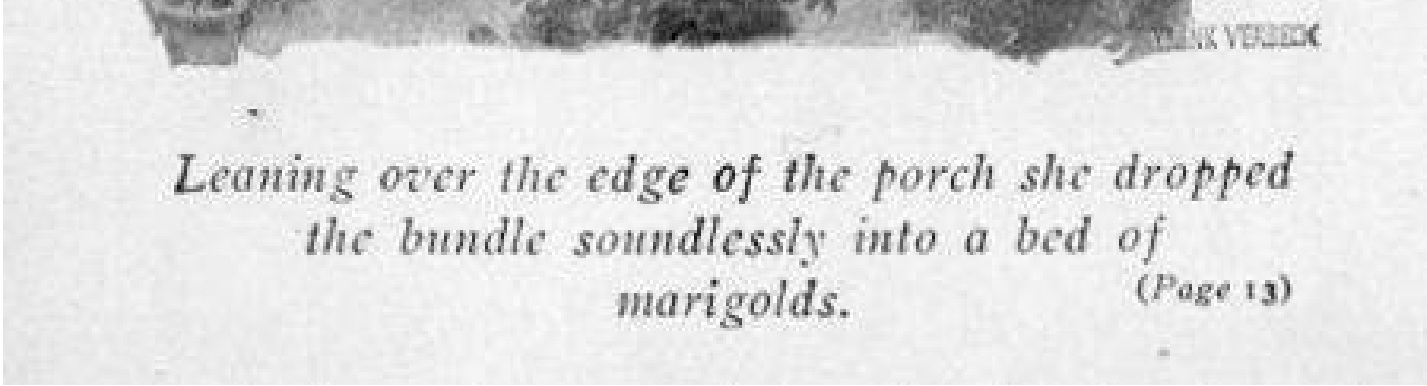

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BARBARA LADD

BY

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

AUTHOR OF

THE KINDRED OF THE WILD, THE HEART OF THE ANCIENT WOOD, A SISTER TO EVANGELINE, POEMS, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

BARBARA LADD

CHAPTER I.

She knew very well that she should have started earlier; but if there was one thing that could daunt her wayward and daring little spirit, it was the dark. Now, as she stood, wide-eyed and breathless with suspense, beside her open window, the face of the dark began to change. A gray pallor came over it, and on a sudden she was aware of a black horizon line, ghostly, lonely beyond words, far to the eastward over the yet invisible tree-tops. With this pallor came a chill which Barbara felt on her little, trembling hands, on her eyes, and in her heart: as if the night, in going, had laid aside its benignity and touched the world in farewell with a cold hand of warning and menace. Then, here and there a leaf stood out, palely distinct, upon the thick frondage of the apple-tree whose nearest branches crowded the roof of the porch below her window. There was a faint chirping from the heart of the syringa thicket; and Barbara's ears were so attentive that she caught the drowsy, awakening flutter of small wings down below in the dewy gloom. With the sound came a cool and delicate pungency from the wet currant bushes, puffed upward to her as if the garden world beneath the leaves had drawn a long breath in getting ready to awake. This tonic scent, which nostrils less keen than Barbara's would scarcely have discerned, came to the child as a signal for action. Peculiarly sensitive to the message and influence of odours, she felt this sudden fragrance in her nerves as a summons, a promise, and a challenge, all in one. Noiselessly she pushed the two diamond-paned leaves of her window open to their widest. How the

grayness was spreading! A pang of apprehension seized her, lest she had delayed too long. She turned impulsively, and stepped into the darkness of her room.

In a moment her slim little figure reappeared at the window, this time heavily encumbered. In one hand was a round, soft bundle, in the other a square wicker basket with a white cloth tied over the top. The white cloth glimmered conspicuously, but the light was not yet strong enough to reveal the colour of the bundle. Setting both the burdens out upon the roof of the porch, she turned, glanced in at the window, and said, softly:

"Good-bye, little room! I haven't been happy with you. But I hope you won't be lonely when I'm gone!"

Leaning over the edge of the porch, she dropped the bundle soundlessly into a bed of marigolds. The basket, on the other hand, she took up with care. Thrusting her left arm through the handle, she swung herself nimbly into the apple-tree, and thence to the ground; while the basket tipped and slewed as if it were alive.

"Be still, my babies!" she whispered; and then, picking up the bundle from the crushed marigolds, and never turning her head to look up at the stately old house which she was leaving, she fled down the walk between the currant and gooseberry bushes, the thyme, the sage, and summer savoury beds,—through a narrow wicket gate half-hidden in larkspur and honeysuckle,—along the foot-path through the rank and dripping burdocks back of the barn, where she felt a little qualm of homesickness at the sound of her dear horses breathing deeply and contentedly in the stalls,—and thence, letting down one of the bars and crawling through with her burdens, out into the graying, hillocky open of the cow-pasture.

By this time a cool and luminous wave of pink, changing to pale saffron at its

northeastern edges, had crept up over the far-off hilltops. Faint tinges of colour, of a strange and unusual transparency, began to reveal themselves all over the expanse of pasture. As the miracle of dawn thus overtook her, a sense of unreality came upon Barbara's soul. She felt as if this were not she, this little girl so adventurously running away—but rather some impossible child in a story-book, who had so engaged her sympathies for the moment that she could not be sure which was make-believe and which herself. With a chill of lonesome dread she slipped a hand under the cloth and into the basket. The touch of warm, live, cuddling fur reassured her, and brought her back to her own identity. But stranger and stranger grew the mystical transparency, only made the more startling by a fleece of vapour here and there curling up from between the hillocks. Stumps, weed-tops, patches of juniper, tufts of blueberry bush, wisps of coarse grass left uncropped, seemed to detach themselves, lift, and float in the solvent clarity of that new-born air, that new-born light. Surely, this was not her old, familiar world! Barbara stood still, her great eyes dilating, her lips parted in a kind of ecstasy, as sense and spirit alike drank in the marvel of the dawn. It seemed to her as if she discovered, in that moment, that the world was made anew with every morning,—and with the discovery she became aware, dimly but securely, that she was herself a part of the imperishable, ever-renewing life.

She was brought back to more instant considerations by the sudden appearance of a red-and-white cow, which got up with a great, windy, grunting breath, and came toward her out of a misty hollow. With all the cows of the herd Barbara was in high favour, but just now the sight alarmed her.

"Gracious!" she exclaimed to herself, "Abby will be out to milk in another minute!"—and she broke into a run at the best speed that her burdens would permit, making for the maple woods which lay to the north of the pasture. The cow looked and mooed after her wistfully, wondering at her flight, and aching for the relief of the milker's hand. But Barbara paid no heed to her, nor to the others of the herd, who now came into view from corners of the pasture as the

enchanted light grew and spread. She darted on, vanishing in the hollows, flitting over the hillocks, fleetly threading the crooked and slender path,—a wisp-like, dark little figure. Her bundle, now seen to be tied up in a silk shawl of flamelike scarlet, and the snow-white covering of her basket, flickered across the mystical transparency of the landscape like bubbles of intense light blown far in advance of the morning.

Not till she came to the other side of the pasture and plunged into the obscurity of the woods did Barbara check her speed. Here the dawn was but beginning to penetrate, thrusting thin shafts of pink-amber light here and there through the leafage, and touching the eastward sides of trunk and branch with elusive glories. Breathing quickly, Barbara set down the bundle and the precious basket; but she snatched them up again as she caught a sound of panting and running behind her. On the instant, however, the alarm faded from her face.

"Down, Keep!" she commanded, sharply, as the gaunt gray form of a mastiff leaped upon her, almost carrying her off her feet. Fawning, and giving little yelps of joy, the huge animal crouched before her, pounding the sward with ecstatic tail, and implored to lick her hands. She threw both arms about the dog's head, murmuring to him, poignantly impetuous, her voice tearful with self-reproach:

"Was his best friend going away, without ever saying good-bye to him? Well, she was bad, she was very, very bad!" And she wiped away several large, surreptitious tears upon the furry folds of his neck. Then she sprang up and renewed her journey resolutely; while the mastiff, bounding in front of her, showed his plain conviction that some fine, audacious adventure was afoot, and that it would be his great luck to have a part in it.

For more than a mile Barbara followed the wood-path, the fresh, wet gloom lightening about her as she went. Where the maples thinned away, and the slenderer ash and birch took their place, she got glimpses of a pale sky

overhead, dappled with streamers of a fiery violet. Here and there a dripping leaf had caught the colours from above and flashed elusive jewels upon her vision. Here and there the dewy thickets of witch-hazel and viburnum crowded so close about the path that her skirts and shoulders were drenched with their scented largess. Here and there in her path rose suddenly a cluster of night-born toadstools—squat, yellow, and fat-fleshed, or tall, shadowy-hooded, and whitely venomous—over which she stepped with wary aversion. And once, eager as was her haste, she stopped to pick a great, lucent, yellow orchid, which seemed to beam like a sacred lamp in its dark green shrine beneath the alders.

At length the path dipped sharply between rocks overgrown with poison ivy. Then the trees thinned away before her, and the day grew at once full of light; and the mirror-surface of a little lake, shining with palest crocus-tint and violet and silvery rose, obscured with patches of dissolving mist, flashed upon her eyes. She ran down to the very edge, where the water seemed to breathe among its fringing pebbles, and there set down the bundle and the basket; while the dog, yelping joyously, bounded and splashed in the shallows.

When, however, Barbara stepped up the bank to a thicket of Indian willow, and proceeded, by dint of carefully calculated lifting and pulling, to drag forth from its hiding-place a ruddy canoe of birch-bark, the dog's spirits and his flaunting tail fell together. If Barbara's venture was to be in the canoe, he knew he should have no part in it; and his big, doggish heart was dejected. With his tongue hanging from his jaws, he sat up on his brindled haunches and looked on, while slowly and laboriously Barbara worked the frail craft down to the water. When it was afloat, and the resined prow pulled up into a tuft of weeds to keep it from drifting away, Barbara fetched two paddles from the same hiding-place. In the bow of the canoe she stowed her bundle and her basket. In the stern she arranged a pile of ferns as a cushion for her knees. Once more she flung her arms around Keep's massive neck, kissed his silky ears, wept violently for the smallest fraction of a minute; and then, stepping into the canoe with the

light precision of one skilled with the birch-bark, she pushed off, and with quick, vigorous strokes headed straight across the lake. The dog ran uneasily up and down the water's edge, whining and fretting after her. When she was a little way out he made a sudden resolution, plunged into the water, and swam eagerly after the fugitive. But Barbara heard the splash, and understood. She realised that he would surely upset the canoe in trying to get into it, and this was the time when she must seem hard, however her heart was melting. She looked back over her shoulder.

"Go home, Keep! Go home!" she commanded.

The dog turned obediently and made for shore. And Barbara, her lips set and the big tears rolling down her cheeks, continued her journey out across the lake.

CHAPTER II.

It was now clear day. The ample spaces of blue between the thin clouds overhead grew pure, as if new bathed. The sun was not yet visible over the woods, but sent level shafts of radiance through the sparser leafage. Barbara's face was westward, and her prow, as the nervous cunning of her paddle urged it forward, threw off the water on either side in long, polished, fluted furrows, dazzlingly bright at the top of the curve and steel-dark in the depression. Child as she was, and of a fairy slightness, Barbara's wrists were strong and she was master of her paddle. Her tears presently dried themselves as she noted with exultation, by the growing depth and abruptness of these furrows from her prow, that she was making a speed that did credit to her canoe-craft. In a few

minutes her parting pangs were all forgotten, and she was absorbed in racing, as it were, against herself. She knelt low, working her shoulders freely like a squaw, and bent every energy to making the passage of the open before a wind out of the morning should awake to hinder her progress.

A low, green point, deep-plumed with sedge, thrust out from the nearing shore to meet her. At its tip, motionless, and eloquent of ancient mystery, poised the dream-like shape of a blue heron. Nearer and nearer slipped the canoe, till Barbara could discern the round, unwinking jewel of the great bird's eye, watching her inscrutably. Then, with leisurely spread of spacious wings, it rose and flapped away, to renew its not wholly disinterested contemplations in a further reed-bed.

Behind the point of sedges Barbara swept the canoe on a fine curve, and into the channel of a little river, the quiet outlet of the lake. Alders, osiers, and thick-starred draperies of clematis came down over either bank. The stream was not twenty paces wide, and its deep current was so gentle that the long weeds on the bottom were hardly under compulsion to show which way it flowed.

The ancient wood at this place gave back several hundred yards from the lake, save for scattered outposts and thickets. Rounding the first curve of the stream,—which, indeed, seemed all curves in its reluctance to forsake the parent water,—the canoe ran into a flock of gray-and-white geese dabbling along the weedy margin. The birds were not alarmed, but they lifted their heads and clamoured a sonorous warning; and straightway from behind the screen of leafage came a quacking of ducks, a cackling of hens, and the excited barking of a puppy. Then a cock crowed shrilly. The stream rounded to a wider stretch, and its western bank, flooded with sunshine, showed a grassy clearing of perhaps two acres in extent, at the back of which, close against the primeval trees, huddled a low, gray cabin, with wide eaves and a red door. A hop-vine covered one end of the cabin and sprawled over the roof. Along the base ran a

"banking" about two feet high, of rough boards with the bark on, supported by stakes and filled in with earth—a protection to the cellar against winter frosts. Leaned up to the sun, along the banking, stood wooden tubs and an iron pot; and on a bench beside the door another tub. In front of the door was a space of chips, littered with axe, buck-saw, feed-troughs, parts of a broken hand-sled, a large wicker basket with the bottom gone, and indeterminate waifs and strays of human use. From this space of débris a foot-path ran down through short grass to the waterside, where a clumsy punt was hauled up. The place was alive with ducks and chickens; and as Barbara came in view a stately turkey-cock swelled, strutted, and gobbled defiance to her intrusion.

Sitting on the door-step in the sun was a sturdy old woman in greenish homespun petticoat and bodice, with a dull red kerchief crossed upon her shoulders and a cap of greenish-yellow linen on her head,—the soft dye of the "yaller-weed" juice. She was busy cutting coloured rags into strips for mat-hooking. At her side sat a small yellow puppy, with head cocked and one ear alertly lifted, curious but doubtful as to the visitor.

Barbara turned her birchen prow to the landing-place, and ran it gently ashore in the soft mud beside the punt. At the same moment Mrs. Deborah Blue—known to Barbara and to all the village of Second Westings as 'old Debby'—dropped her knitting on the stoop, snatched up a stout stick that leaned against the door-post, and hobbled with a heavy briskness down the path to meet the visitor. The yellow pup frisked interestedly at her heels.

Barbara had indeed run her prow ashore, but that was for the sake of stability merely. She was in haste, and had no idea of stopping now to indulge her inclination for a gossip with old Debby. She rested in silence, one brown hand on the gunwale of the punt, her full, young, wilful lips very scarlet, her gray-green eyes asparkle with mystery and excitement, as the old woman hobbled down to greet her.

"Ain't ye comin' in to set awhile, an' eat a cooky, Miss Barby?" inquired Mrs. Blue, wondering at the child's inscrutable look. The old dame's face was red and harsh and strongly lined. Her chin was square and thrust forward aggressively, with a gray-bristled wart at one side of its obtrusive vigour. A lean and iron-gray wisp of hair, escaped from under her hat, straggled down upon her red neck. But her shrewd, hard, pale-blue, dauntless old eyes beamed upon the child with unfeigned welcome. She spoke a little wheezingly, being out of breath from haste; and Barbara was the only soul in all the township of Second Westings for whom old Debby would condescend to hasten.

"No, Debby dear, I can't stop one minute. I'm not coming ashore. I'm running away from Aunt Hitty, and I'm going down the river to Uncle Bob. I just stopped to say good-bye to you, you old dear, and to ask you to take this letter for me to Aunt Hitty. I didn't dare to leave it in my room, for fear she'd find it and know where I'd gone, and send after me before I'd got a good start. I don't like Aunt Hitty, you know, Debby, but she's been good to me in her way, and I don't want her to be worrying!" She held out a folded paper for the old dame to take; but she held it tentatively, as if she did not want to surrender it at once.

Knowing Barbara as no one else in the township of Second Westings knew her, old Debby betrayed neither surprise nor disapproval. She nodded several times, as if running away were the most reasonable, and indeed the most ordinary, thing in the world for a little girl of fourteen years to do when she found aunts and environments uncongenial. Old Debby's smile, at this moment, had just the right degree of sympathy. Had ever so little of amusement glimmered through its weather-beaten creases, she knew that the sensitive and wilful girl before her would have been off in a second with her venture all unexplained.

"I'd take it fer ye, my sweeting, ef I'd got to crawl on my knees all the way 'round the lake," the old dame answered promptly; but at the same time,

scheming to prolong the interview, and knowing that if once Barbara started off again there would be no such thing as luring her back, she kept both hands clasped on top of her stick and made no move to accept the missive.

"Ain't ye goin' to read it to me?" she went on, coaxingly. "I'd give a sight to hear what ye're sayin' to yer Aunt Hitty."

Now this was just what Barbara wanted, in spite of her haste. She wanted to hear how her letter would sound. She wanted to try it on old Debby, in whom she felt sure of a eulogistic critic. Without a word she untied the yellow ribbon, opened the packet, and began to read, with a weighty impressiveness in her childish voice:

"MY DEAR AUNT HITTY:—This is to say farewell for ever, for I have run away. I do not think it would be good for me to live with you any longer, so I am going to Uncle Bob. He loves me, and does not think I am bad. And I think he needs me, too, because I understand him. I know I have often been bad, and have made you unhappy very often, Aunt Hitty. But I don't think you ever understand me—and I don't understand you—and so we cannot be happy together. But don't be worried about me, for I will be all right. And I thank you for all the trouble you have taken about me. I don't want any of my old clothes except what I have brought with me, so please give them to Mercy Chapman, because she is poor and just about my size, and always kind to animals, and I like her. I have taken your nice basket you got from the squaw last Saturday, to carry my kittens in; but I know you won't mind, because you offered to give it to me when I did not know I was going to need it. I have taken the canoe, too, but I want to pay for it, of course, Aunt Hitty. Please keep enough to get a new one, and paddles, out of the money you are taking care of for me, and send the rest right away to Uncle Bob, because I'll need some new frocks when I get to the city, and I don't know whether Uncle Bob has any money or not. Good-

bye, Aunt Hitty, and I am so sorry that we could not understand each other.

"Your niece,
"BARBARA LADD."

She looked up, proud, but a little anxious, and eager for commendation. Old Debby rose to the circumstances.

"Law, how you kin write, Miss Barby," she said, with a nod and chuckle. "The parson nor Doctor Jim couldn't 'a' done no better. I reckon Aunt Hitty'll understand ye now, a sight better'n she's given to understand folks as don't jest think as she do. Give me the letter!"

Barbara's face flashed radiantly. With a sudden impulse she sprang up, skipped ashore, thrust the letter into the old woman's hand, and cried in a high key:

"Oh, I'm so hungry, Debby! I can't stop a minute, but do give me some breakfast, there's a dear. I was too excited to eat before I left. And do give my kittens a drop of milk. I've got nothing but cold meat for them to eat on the journey, poor babies!"

Without waiting for a reply, she skipped back to the canoe, grabbed up the covered basket, and flew up the path to the cottage; while the old woman limped after her with astonishing speed, chuckling and wheezing out a disjointed invitation. She followed Barbara into the cabin, shutting the door to keep out the puppy, who whined in an injured voice upon the stoop. Then, thinking of the kittens first,—and thereby showing her deep knowledge of the kittens' mistress,—she set down a bowl of milk in the middle of the floor; and Barbara, uncovering the basket, lovingly lifted out three plump, moon-faced little cats, a yellow-and-white, a black-and-white, and a gray-and-white. While the three,

with happy tails erect, lapped at the milk, Barbara made haste to devour thick slices of brown bread and butter, spread to a luscious depth with moist, sweet-scented maple sugar. She had no time to talk. She sat on the edge of the big four-post bed, swinging her slim legs, and kicking her heels against the dingy, gay patchwork quilt whose ample folds hung to the floor. The hidden space under the bed was a place of piquant mystery to Barbara, containing, as it did, boxes on boxes of many-coloured rags, out of which, earlier in the season, old Debby would bring forth precious goose-eggs, duck-eggs, turkey-eggs, and the specially prized eggs of certain pet and prolific hens, gathered against the time of setting. While Barbara broke her fast, old Debby refrained from questions, having shrewdly grasped the whole situation. She knew that Mr. Robert Glenowen, Barbara's uncle, had lately come north on an errand which nobody seemed to understand, and had taken a house at Stratford. Of a nomadic spirit in her younger days, Debby had moved much here and there throughout her native Connecticut, and over the bordering counties of New York and Massachusetts; and she had not only a rough idea of the distance from Second Westings to Stratford, but a very vivid realisation of the perils of the journey which Barbara, in her innocence, had so confidently undertaken. Till she saw that the appetites of Barbara and the kittens were nearing satisfaction, she talked with a sort of casual enthusiasm of her luck with the chickens, the goslings, the young turkeys, and depicted the prowess of an old speckled hen which had engaged and defeated a marauding hawk. Then, when at last Barbara sprang up, bundled the satiated kittens into the basket, and turned to her for a fond and final good-bye, the crafty old dame broke into passionate farewells. She kissed the child, and even wept over her, till Barbara's self-centred exaltation was very near collapse.

"*You* love me, don't you, Debby dear?" she exclaimed, with a wistfulness in her voice, searching the old woman's face with her great, eager, strangely alien eyes. Barbara was one of those who colour the moods of others by their own, and who are therefore apt to be at fault in their interpretation of another's motives. This gave her, even in childhood, a strangeness, an aloneness of

personality, which she, as well as those who loved her, could seldom break down. It was with a kind of heart-break that she now and again, for an instant, became dimly aware of this alien fibre in her temperament. It made her both misunderstanding and misunderstood.

"I can trust you, can't I?" she went on, leaning childishly for a moment upon the old woman's comfortable breast.

"Trust old Debby, my sweeting!" cried the old dame, in tones which carried conviction. "Ye hain't got no lovinger nor faithfuller friend alive than me. Don't ye never forgit that, Miss Barby."

For answer Barbara clutched her fiercely around the neck, sobbed and clung to her for a moment, cried extravagantly, "Yes, you are the best friend I've got in all the world!" then gathered up her basket of kittens and fled wildly down the path to the canoe. Impetuously she pushed off, the world a golden blur before her eyes; and without once looking back, she disappeared around the next winding of the stream. Old Debby stood for some minutes gazing after this meteor-like—and very Barbara-like—exit. There was amusement now, unhindered, on her hard old face, but a kind of fierce devotion withal. When the stern of the canoe had vanished behind the leafage, she muttered to herself: "Well! Well! Well! was ever sech a child! When ye set yer finger onto her, she ain't there! I reckon that mincing-mouthed Aunt Kitty's hed her bad times, too. But the sooner I git 'round to see Doctor Jim the better it's goin' to be fer the little wild witch. Land's sakes alive! But 'twon't be 'Debby dear' to me agin fer awhile. How them eyes'll blaze! I'll not go nigh her till she's hed time to git over it an' to know who's really her friends. No, Pippin, ye can't come with me! Go 'way!"

Turning into the long lean-to of a shed which stretched behind the cabin, she brought out two stumpy oars. These under her left arm, her stalwart stick in her right hand, she limped with massive alertness down to the waterside, shoved off

the punt, climbed into it with a nicety of balance remarkable in one of her weight, clicked the oars into the rowlocks, and pulled up-stream toward the lake whence Barbara had come.

CHAPTER III.

The child who set forth so fearlessly, on so audacious and ill-regulated a venture, that midsummer morning of the year 1769,—in a time when audacity on the part of small girls was apt to meet the discouragement of a peculiarly strenuous discipline,—was an accident in her period, an irreconcilable alien to her environment. In her intense individuality, and in the confident freedom with which she claimed the right to express that individuality, she belonged to an earlier or a later day, but not to a New England of the eighteenth century. Two years before, at the age of twelve, an age when other children's personalities were colourless to the eyes of their elders, she had been projected into the tranquil routine of the little world of Second Westings. It was an established, crystallised, unchanging life there in the back country of Connecticut, where hours, seasons, actions, habits, revolved in so orderly a fashion as to have worn themselves grooves out of which they could hardly even look, still less achieve to deviate. Into this rigid placidity the dark child came like a grain of ferment; and presently, no one could tell just how, the mass began to work. Barbara was everywhere discussed. She was rather unanimously disapproved of. And, nevertheless, as it were in the teeth of all probability, she won to herself here and there a friend.

At the time of Barbara's transplanting from the cordial soil of Maryland to the austere uplands of Connecticut, her father, the Reverend Winthrop Hopkins

Ladd, clergyman of the Established Church, had been dead over two years, and the child's hurt, as such things will, had outwardly healed; though the hidden wounds would agonise in her heart at unexpected times, set vibrating to some poignant touch of scent or sound or colour. The child had adored her father with a tempestuous and jealous devotion, which, however, had not prevented her waywardness from diversifying his repose with many a wakeful night. Her mother, who had died when Barbara was scarce out of arms, had been a bewildering birth from the kiss of North Wales on the warm south of Spanish passion. The son of an old Welsh family, adventuring to the New World to capture himself a fortune, had captured himself also a wife to beggar envy. Where or how he got the fortune, no man knew and few presumed to wonder; but where and how he got the wife was matter of noonday knowledge. He saw her at church in New Orleans. There were looks that burn and live. Through that emotional spring Glenowen sniffed the incense of more masses than he had thought to attend in a lifetime. Once there was a stolen word behind a pillar, eyes warily averted. Twice notes passed from hand to hand. Then a girl, the daughter of one of the haughtiest houses of Colonial Spain, was audaciously carried off by night from a convent school in the safe heart of the city. When next seen of the world, she was Glenowen's wife, most radiantly and graciously dispensing an accepted hospitality in Baltimore.

The result that in particular pertains to this history was a small, flame-like, imperious girl, one Mistress Mercedes Glenowen, who, from the night of ceremony when she first made her bow to the governor and joyously turned her disastrous eyes upon the society of Baltimore, for the space of some three years dispersed vain heartache throughout the colony. Into the remotest plantations went the name of her and the fame of her—and too often, also, the sickness of a hopeless desire of her. There were duels, too, discreetly laid to other cause; and old friendships changed to hate; and wild oaths made perjury. But the heart of Mistress Mercedes went free. A quiet young clergyman, a kinsman to the governor, came to Baltimore from Boston, on his way to a country parish on the Pawtuxet, to which he had just been appointed. Dining at

Government House, he met Mistress Mercedes, but his eyes, being at that moment immersed in dreams, looked not upon but through and beyond her. Mercedes could not rest an instant until those far-wandering, Northern eyes were ensnared, imprisoned, and denied a range beyond the boundaries of her heart. But the capture was not a quick one, and in the interest of it she had the accident to become herself entangled, to such a degree that she had no longer any use for freedom. And so it came about, to the wrathful amaze of her retinue, but the unspeakable content of the Reverend Winthrop Ladd, that the dark rose of Maryland was on a sudden removed from Baltimore to bloom on a churchly plantation by the pale waters of the Pawtuxet.

Mr. Ladd, though a dreamer so far as consisted with outdoor life and sanity of brain and muscle, was a strong man, one of those who have the force to rule when they must, and the gentleness to yield when they may. In the passionate completeness of her love, Mercedes sloughed the caprices that would have pained and puzzled him, forgot the very echoes of the acclamations of her court, and lived in the sanctuary of her husband's devotion. For nearly three years the strangely assorted lovers dwelt in their dream, while the world passed by them like a pageant viewed through a glory of coloured glass. Then a sudden sickness tore them apart; and when the dazed man came slowly back to the realisation that he had been left to live, all his love, with all the illusion of it, centred itself fixedly upon the little one, Barbara, whom Mercedes had left to him.

As Barbara grew more and more like her mother, her ascendency over her father grew more and more complete. Tenderly but firmly he ruled his parish and his plantation. But he gradually forgot to rule Barbara. Too nearly did she represent to him all that he had lost in his worshipped Mercedes; and he could not bring himself to see anything but freshness of character and vigour of personality in the child's very faults. Hence he evolved, to suit her particular case, a theory very much out of harmony with his time, to the effect that a child —or rather, perhaps, such a child as this of Mercedes—should not be

governed or disciplined, but guided merely, and fostered in the finding of her own untrammelled individuality. This plan worked, for the time, to Barbara's unqualified approval, but she was destined to pay for it, in later years, a heavy price in tears, and misunderstandings, and repentance. With the growth of her intense and confident personality there grew no balancing strength of self-control. Unacquainted with discipline, she was without the safeguard of self-discipline. Before she was eight years old she held sway over every one on the plantation but herself,—and her rule, though pretty and bewitching, was not invariably gentle. As for her father, though ostensively her comrade and mentor, he was by this time in reality her slave. He rode with her; he read with her; he taught her,—but such studies only as ensnared her wayward inclination, and with such regularity only as fell in with her variable mood. The hour for a lesson on the spinet would go by unheeded, if Barbara chanced to be interested in the more absorbing occupation of climbing a tree; and the time for reciting Latin syntax was lightly forgotten if berries were a-ripening in the pasture. Under such auspices, however, Barbara did assuredly grow straight-limbed and active, slight and small indeed, by heritage from her mother, but strong and of marvellous endurance, with the clear blood red under her dark skin, her great gray-green eyes luminous with health. Her father devoted to her every hour of the day that he could spare from the claims of his parish. In a sunny and sandy cove near the house he taught her to swim. Rowing and canoeing on the Pawtuxet were mysteries of outdoor craft into which he initiated her as soon as her little hands could pull an oar or swing a paddle. A certain strain of wildness in her temperament attuned her to a peculiar sympathy with the canoe, and won her a swift mastery of its furtive spirit. In the woods, and in the seclusion of remote creeks and backwaters, her waywardness would vanish till she became silent and elusive as the wild things whose confidence she was for ever striving to gain. Her advances being suspiciously repelled by the squirrels, the 'coons, and the chipmunks, her passion was fain to expend itself upon the domestic animals of the plantation. The horses, cattle, dogs, and cats, all loved her, and she understood them as she never understood the nearest and best-beloved of her own kind. With the animals her patience was untiring, her gentleness

unfailing, while her thoughtless selfishness melted into a devotion for which no sacrifice seemed too great.

The negroes of the plantation, who seemed to Barbara akin to the animals, came next to these in her regard, and indeed were treated with an indulgence which made them almost literally lay their black necks in the dust for her little feet to step on. But with people of her own class she was apt to be hasty and ungracious. *Their* feelings were of small account in her eyes—certainly not to be weighed for a moment against those of a colt or a kitten. There was one sweet-eyed and lumbering half-grown puppy which Barbara's father—not for an instant, indeed, believing anything of the sort—used to declare was more precious to her than himself. But her old black "Mammy" 'Lize used to vow there was more truth than he guessed in "Marse Ladd's foolin'."

However, when a fever snatched the gentle priest away from the scene of his love and kindly ministrations, the child's true self emerged through its crust of whim and extravagance. Stricken beyond a child's usual capacity to feel or realise such a blow, she was herself seized with a serious illness, after which she fell into a dejection which lasted for the better part of a year. In her desolation she turned to her animals rather than to her human companions, and found the more of healing in their wordless sympathy.

At last, youth and health asserted themselves, and once more Barbara rode, paddled, swam, tyrannised, and ran wild over the plantation, while relatives from Maine to Maryland wrangled over her future.

There was one young uncle, her mother's only brother, whom Barbara decided to adopt as her sole guardian. But other guardians came to another decision. Uncle Bob Glenowen was an uncle after Barbara's own heart, but a little more disciplined and reasonable than herself. The two would have got on delightfully together—together careering over the country on high-mettled horses, together swimming and canoeing at the most irregular hours, together

lauding and loving their four-foot kindred and laughing to scorn the general stupidity of mankind. But Uncle Glenowen had little of gold or gear, and his local habitation was mutable. He loved Barbara too well not to recognise that she should grow up under the guidance of steadier hands than his. It was finally settled—Barbara's fiery indignation being quite disregarded—that she should go to her father's younger sister, Mistress Mehitable Ladd, in Second Westings.

Mistress Ladd was a self-possessed, fair-faced, aristocratic little lady, with large blue eyes and a very firm, small mouth. She was conscientious to a point that was wont to bring her kindness, at times, into painful conflict with her sense of duty. The Puritan fibre ran in unimpaired vitality through the texture of her being, with the result that whenever her heart was so rash as to join issue with her conscience, then prompt and disastrous overthrow was the least her heart could expect for such presumption. In the matter of Barbara's future, however, Distress Mehitable felt that duty and inclination ran together. She had loved her brother Winthrop with unselfish and admiring devotion, and had grieved in secret for years over his defection from the austere fold of the Congregationalists to what she regarded as the perilously carnal form and ceremony of the Church of England. Her hampered spirit, her uncompleted womanhood, yearned toward Barbara, and she shuddered at the idea of Winthrop's child growing up untaught, unmothered, uncontrolled. She made up her mind that Barbara should come to Second Westings, become a daughter to her, and be reared in the purity of unsullied Congregationalism. With a sigh of concordant relief it was recognised by the other relatives that Mehitable was right. They washed their hands of the child, and forgot her, and were thankful—all but Uncle Bob. And so Barbara went to Second Westings.

CHAPTER IV.

Little enough, indeed, would Second Westings ever have seen of the heartsore and rebellious child, but for this Uncle Bob. Searching his own spirit, he understood hers; and maintaining a discreet silence as to the chief points of his discovery, he set himself the duty of accompanying Barbara on the long, complicated journey to Connecticut. Not content with delivering his charge into the hands of Mistress Mehitable,—whom he liked despite her uneasy half-disapproval of himself,—he stayed long summer weeks at Second Westings, thus bridging over for Barbara the terrible chasm between the old life and the new, and by his tactful conciliation on every side making the new life look a little less hatefully alien to her. He took her riding all over the township; he took her canoeing on the lake, and down the outlet to its junction with the river; and so not only won her a freedom of movement hitherto unheard-of among the maidens of Second Westings, but also showed her that the solace of wild woods and sweet waters was to be found no less in Connecticut than in her longed-for Maryland. Moreover, Uncle Bob had "a presence." Second Westings scrutinised him severely, all ready to condemn the stranger folk to whom Winthrop Ladd had turned in his marrying. But Second Westings felt constrained to acknowledge at once that Winthrop Ladd had married within his class. To high and low alike—and the line between high and low was sharply drawn at Second Westings—it was obvious that the sister of Mr. Robert Glenowen must have been gently born. Those who would not let themselves be warmed by Uncle Bob's bright heartsomeness were unable to withhold acknowledgment of his good breeding. Mistress Mehitable, though antagonised by vague gossip as to his "wildness," nevertheless recognised with serious relief that no common blood had been suffered to obscure the clear blue stream whose purity the Ladds held precious. "Light, I fear—if not, in other surroundings, ungodly; but beyond all cavil a gentleman!" pronounced the Reverend Jonathan Sawyer, flicking snuff from his sleeve with white, scholarly fingers. He was not so innocent as to attach too much importance to Uncle

Bob's devout attitude through those interminable services which made a weekly nightmare of the Connecticut Sabbath; but he had found a reserved satisfaction in the young man's company over a seemly glass and a pipe of bright Virginia. He had a feeling that the visitor's charm was more or less subversive of discipline, and that it would be, on the whole, for the spiritual welfare of Second Westings if the visit should be brief; but meanwhile he took what he could of Uncle Bob's society. Class against creed, and a fair field, and it's long odds on class.

But in the minds of Doctor John and Doctor Jim Pigeon—physicians, brothers, comrades, fierce professional rivals, justices of the peace, and divinely self-appointed guardians of the sanctity of caste for all the neighbourhood—there were no misgivings. Their instincts accepted Bob Glenowen at first glance. Their great, rugged faces and mighty shoulders towering over him,—and Uncle Bob himself was nowise scant of stature,—they looked at him and then into each other's eyes; and agreed, as they did on most subjects outside the theory and practice of medicine.

"You are right welcome to Second Westings, Mr. Glenowen!" exclaimed Doctor Jim, in a big, impetuous voice, grasping his hand heartily.

"And we trust that you may be slow to leave us, Mr. Glenowen!" added Doctor John, in a voice which any competent jury, blindfolded, would have pronounced identical.

Recognising the true fibre and the fineness of these two big, gentle autocrats, Uncle Bob made a special point of commending Barbara to their hearts—in which commending he so well sped, and indeed was so well seconded by Barbara herself, who loved them from the moment when her eyes first fell upon them, that they presently constituted themselves special guardians to the little maid, and indulgent mitigators of Mistress Mehitable's conscience. The manner in which they fulfilled the sometimes conflicting duties of these offices will

appear pretty persistently in the sequel.

It was to Uncle Bob, also, that Barbara owed the somewhat disreputable friendship of old Debby. The very first day that he and Barbara went canoeing on the lake, they explored the outlet, discovered old Debby's cabin, paid an uninvited call, and captivated the old dame's crusty heart. Glenowen knew human nature. He had the knack of going straight to the quintessential core of it, and pinning his faith to that in spite of all unpromising externals. He decided at once that Debby would be a good diversion for Barbara after he was gone; and when, later in the day, he learned that the old woman was universally but vaguely reprobated by the prim folk of Second Westings, he was more than ever assured that she would be a comfort to Barbara through many a dark hour of strangerhood and virtuous misunderstanding.

But Uncle Bob's visit had to end. He went away with misgivings, leaving Barbara to pit her careless candour, her thoughtless self-absorption, her scorn of all opinions that differed from her own, her caprices, her passionate enthusiasms, her fierce intolerance of criticism or control, against the granitic conventions of an old New England village. The half guilty, half amused support of Doctor John and Doctor Jim gave importance to her revolt, and so lightened the rod of Aunt Kitty's discipline as to save Barbara from the more ignominious of the penalties which her impetuous wilfulness would otherwise have incurred. The complete, though forbidden, sympathy of old Debby, affording the one safe outlet to her tumultuous resentments and passionate despairs, saved the child from brain-sickness; and once, indeed, on a particularly black day of humiliation, from suicide. Barbara had shaken the very foundations of law, order, and religion, by riding at a wild gallop, one Sunday afternoon, down the wide main street of Second Westings just as the good folk were coming out of meeting. Her rebellious waves of dark hair streamed out behind her little head. Her white teeth flashed wickedly between her parted scarlet lips, her big eyes flamed with the intoxication of liberty and protest—to these good folk it seemed an unholy light. Barbara ought to have been at meeting, but had been left at

home, reluctantly, by Aunt Hitty, because she had seemed too sick to get out of bed. In very truth she had been sick beyond all feigning. Then one of those violent reactions of recovery which sometimes cause the nervous temperament to be miserably misunderstood had seized her at an inauspicious moment. As the tide of young vitality surged back to brain and vein and nerve, she had felt that she must let herself loose in wild action, or die. All unrealising the enormity of the offence, she had flung down her mad defiance to the sanctified and iron-bound repose of the New England Sabbath.

Such a sacrilege could not be overlooked or condoned. The congregation was appalled. Long upper lips were drawn down ominously, as austere eyes followed the vision of the fleeing child on the great black horse. Could it be that she was possessed of a devil? Pitying eyes were turned upon Aunt Hitty; and triumphant eyes of gratified grudge, moreover, for Aunt Hitty was proud, and had virtuous ill-wishers in the village. But Mistress Mehitable Ladd was equal to the occasion. With a level stare of her blue eyes, a cold tranquillity upon her small, fine mouth, she froze comment and forestalled suggestion. The feeling went abroad, in a subtle way, that the case would be dealt with and the piety of Second Westings vindicated in the eyes of Heaven. Doctor John and Doctor Jim looked grave, and said not a word. This was a time when Mistress Mehitable, they well knew, would brook no interference.

Of course there could be no question of such correction as would have fallen to the lot of any ordinary offender. There could be no such thing as putting a *Ladd* in the stocks. The regular machinery of village law rested quiescent. Equally of course, Mistress Mehitable would do nothing in anger. She was humiliated before the whole village, in a manner that could never be forgotten or wiped out. But her first feeling and her last feeling were alike of sorrow only. She would do her duty because Winthrop's child must be saved. But she had no proud consciousness of virtue in doing it. First, she attempted to explain to Barbara the depth, quality, and significance of her sin, its possible influence upon the ethics of Second Westings if allowed to go unpunished, the

special variety of inherited evil which it revealed in her nature, and her stupendous need of having this evil eradicated by devotedly merciless correction. After the first few words of this exhortation, Barbara heard no more. She was at all times fiercely impatient of criticism, and now, being determined not to fly into a fury and further complicate her predicament, she shut her eyes, inwardly closed her ears, and concentrated her imagination on memories of the longed-for plantation by the Pawtuxet. This concentration gave her vivid little face an air of quietude, subjection, and voiceless sorrow, which Aunt Hitty was glad to construe as repentance. But it earned no mitigation of punishment. For one whole week Barbara was a prisoner in her room, eating her heart out in hatred of the stupidity and injustice of life. Then came around, at last, another Sabbath. Barbara was taken to church. There her proud soul was affronted by a public rebuke from the pastor, who exhorted her from the pulpit, contented the congregation by a rehearsal of her punishment, and held her up as an example to the other children of the village. Barbara listened with shut eyes and white lips, her heart bursting with rage. She ached to kill him, to kill her aunt, to annihilate Second Westings—saving only the animals, old Debby, Mercy Chapman, Doctor John and Doctor Jim. But when the good divine went on to say that her discipline would be concluded with a wholesome chastisement on the morrow, in the privacy of the house to which her sinful conduct had brought grief,—then, indeed, her heart stood still. She felt a great calmness come over her. She made up her mind to escape by her window that very evening and drown herself in the lake. If life contained such horrors she would have done with it.

She did not go that night, however, because she feared the dark. It was gray dawn when she climbed from her window. Blind, resolved, swift-footed, she fled through the woods. Old Debby, resting in her punt by the lake's edge, not far from the Ladd landing-place, was pulling some sweet-rooted water-plants of a virtue known only to herself, when she was startled by a heavy splash and a little gasping cry which came from the other side of a steep point some four or five rods distant. Her vigorous old arms drove the punt through the water in

mad haste—for there was something in the cry that wrenched at her heart. Rounding the point, she stood close in to the foot of a rock which jutted out into five or six feet of water. Peering down over the side of the punt, she saw lying on the bottom a slim, small body. A groan burst from her lips, for Barbara's face was half visible; and the old woman understood at once. She had heard the village gossip, and she had feared a tragedy. She knew that Barbara could swim,—but there was her long scarf of red silk twisted about the little arms lest resolution should falter in the face of the last great demand.

For a second old Debby was at fault. She could not swim. Then her brain worked. Reaching down with one of the oars, she twisted the blade tightly into the skirt of the child's gown, pulled her up, and snatched her into the boat. Experienced and ready in emergency, the old woman thrust ashore, laid the moveless little figure down upon a mossy hillock, and in a very few minutes succeeded in bringing it back to conscious life. She asked no questions, while Barbara clung to her, sobbing spasmodically at long intervals. She murmured pet names to her, caressed and soothed her, told her she was safe and no one should abuse her, and finally, lifting her into the punt and laying her gently on an armful of sweet bracken in the stern, rowed over the lake to her cabin. Throughout the journey Barbara lay with closed eyes, while the young life, slowly but obstinately reasserting itself, brought back the colour to cheeks and lips. Only once did she speak. Lifting her lids, she gazed fixedly at the hard-lined old face that bent over the swaying oars.

"Oh, why did you do it, Debby dear?" she asked, weakly. "If you knew how I hate to live!"

"Tut! tut! honey!" answered the old woman, with a cheerful positiveness that made her despair suddenly seem to Barbara unreasonable and unreal. "Ye don't want to die yet awhile. An' whatever ye want, ye cain't die yet awhile, fer I've seen it in yer blessed little hands that ye've got a long life afore ye. Moresoever, I read it that life's got a heap of happiness in store fer ye. So you

be brave, Miss Barby, an' think how Uncle Bob would 'a' broke his poor heart if ye'd got yer own way an' drownded yerself."

"Yes," murmured Barbara, drowsily, sinking away into peace after her long pain, "Uncle Bob would have been sorry!" Then, after a pause, she added softly under her breath: "I'll run away and go to Uncle Bob some day!"

Old Debby heard the words, but made no comment. She stored them in her memory, and afterward kept crafty watch whenever she saw, by Barbara's mood, that a crisis was on at Aunt Kitty's. For the time, however, she felt no great anxiety, it being very plain to her that this present crisis was past, and that Barbara was no longer strung up to the pitch of violent action or any course that would require initiative. Nerve and will alike relaxed, the child was submissive through exhaustion. At the cabin Debby first made her eat some breakfast, and then got her interested in a brood of chickens just one day out of the shell. The mother hen ruffled her feathers, scolded in shrill protest, and pecked angrily, but Barbara reached under the brooding wings and drew out a bead-eyed, golden-yellow, downy ball. Her face lightened tenderly as she felt the tiny bill and fragile baby claws snuggling against her enclosing palms.

"She's all right now!" said old Debby to herself, nodding her head in satisfaction. Aloud she said,—as she got a clean white sunbonnet out of the chest, adjusted it on her sparse locks, and tied its strings beneath her grim chin, —"I'm goin' to leave ye a bit, honey, to mind the chickens fer me an' look after the place while I go in to Second Westings to hev a bit o' talk with Doctor Jim. Promise me not to quit the place while I'm gone?"

"I'll take good care of everything till you get back, Debby," answered Barbara, abstractedly, without turning her head. She had relinquished the downy chicken, and was busy conciliating the ruffled hen with crumbs.

CHAPTER V.

It was without misgiving that old Debby left the child to the healing of the solitude and the sun, the little wholesome responsibility, the unexacting companionship of the cat and the fowls. (This was before the day of the yellow pup, which did not come upon the scene until the following summer.) She had already learned that Barbara's promise was a thing to depend upon; and she felt that Barbara's heart would now be medicined more sweetly by silence than by words.

The problem to whose solution the dauntless old woman had set herself was that of getting Barbara back to her aunt's house on terms that should ward off any further discipline. With this end in view she turned, as a matter of course, to Doctor Jim Pigeon. Debby's position in Second Westings was theoretically that of an outlaw. She had a mysterious past. She was obstinately refractory about going to meeting. Without actually defying the authorities, she would quietly and unobtrusively go her own way in regard to many matters which Second Westings accounted momentous. Moreover, she was lamentably lacking in that subservience to her betters which the aristocracy of Second Westings held becoming. And she had knowledge that savoured of witchcraft. She would certainly have felt the heavy hand of correction more than once, and probably have been driven to seek a more humane environment, but for the staunch befriending of Doctor Jim. Something in the old woman's fearless independence appealed to both the big, loud-voiced, soft-hearted brothers—but to Doctor Jim in particular. He in particular came to perceive her clear common sense, to appreciate the loyal and humane heart that lurked within her acrid personality. He openly showed his favour, and stood between her and persecution, till Second Westings taught itself to regard her offences as privileged. So, though

an outlaw, she became a useful and tolerated one. She served surpassingly to point a moral in family admonitions. She was much in favour as a bogy to frighten crying children into silence. And furthermore, when deadly sickness chanced to fall upon a household, and skilled help was lacking, and self-righteous prejudice melted away in the crucible of anguish, then old Debby was wont to appear unsummoned and work marvels by the magic of her nursing. Doctor Jim had been known to declare defiantly that Debby Blue's nursing had saved patients whom all his medicines could not cure,—whereto Doctor John had retorted, with brotherly sarcasm, "In spite of your medicines, Jim—in spite of them! Debby is the shield and buckler of your medical reputation."

So it was of course that the old woman turned to Doctor Jim in her difficulty. She knew that both brothers loved Barbara, and that both, individually and collectively, had more influence with Mistress Mehitable Ladd than any other living mortal could boast. She would talk to Doctor Jim. Doctor Jim would talk to Doctor John. Doctor John and Doctor Jim would together talk to Mistress Mehitable. And Barbara would be taken back without penalty of further exhortation or discipline. If not—well, old Debby's mind was made up as to what she would do in such a distressing contingency. She would herself run away with Barbara that same night, in cunning disguise and by devious ways, and travel to find Uncle Bob.

But there was to be no need of such audacious adventuring. When Doctor Jim heard what Barbara had done, he was sorely wrought up. He glared fiercely and wonderingly; his shaggy eyebrows knitted and knotted as he listened; he dashed his hands through his hair till the well dressed locks were sadly disarranged. When Debby ceased speaking he sprang up with an inarticulate roar, knocking over two chairs and one of the andirons.

"They have gone too far with the child," he cried out at last, mastering his ebullient emotions. "She is too high-strung for our rude handling. I swear she shall not be persecuted any longer—not if I have to take her away myself. No

—not a word, not a word, Debby! Not another word! I'll just step across the yard and speak to Doctor John. Be good enough to wait here till I return."

Without hat or stick he ramped tempestuously across to his brother's office, in the opposite wing of the big, white-porticoed, red-doored house which they occupied together. He left old Debby well content with the first step in her undertaking. She had but a little to wait ere he returned, noisy, hurried, and decisive.

"Now, my good Debby," he shouted, "I'm ready to accompany you. I will fetch Barbara myself. Doctor John is going over to lay our views before Mistress Ladd, and I'll warrant that wise and gentle lady will see the matter clearly, just as we do. Yes, yes, my good Debby, we have all been forgetting that the little wild rose of Maryland cannot be at once inured to the rigours of our New England air. Eh, what?"

When Doctor Jim and the old woman reached the cabin they found Barbara sound asleep, curled up in the sun beside the stoop, one arm around the gray-and-white cat, which lay, fast asleep also, against her breast. There was a darkness about her eyes, a hurt droop at the corners of her full red mouth, but the colour came wholesomely under the transparent tan of her cheeks. The picture stirred a great ache in Doctor Jim's childless heart, and with a tender growl he strode forward to snatch her up from her hard couch.

"S't! Don't ye frighten the poor baby!" said old Debby. Whereupon Doctor Jim went softly, mincing his big steps, and knelt down, and gathered the little figure in his arms. Waking slowly, Barbara slipped her arms around his neck, thrust her face under his chin, drew a long sigh of satisfaction; and so, the revolt and cruel indignation for the time all quenched in her wild spirit, she was carried down to the punt. Everything seemed settled without explanation or argument or promise. The trouble was all shifted to Doctor Jim's broad shoulders.

"Good-bye, Debby dear!" she murmured to the old woman, reaching down

a caressing hand; "I'll come to see you in a few days, as soon as Aunt Hitty will let me!"

During the journey homeward Barbara threw off her languor, and became animated as the punt surged ahead under Doctor Jim's huge strokes. The conversation grew brisk, touching briefly such diverse topics as the new bay mare which the doctor had just purchased from Squire Hopgood of Westings Centre, and the latest point of exasperation between the merchants of Boston and the officers of the king's customs at that unruly port. This latter subject was one on which Doctor Jim and Barbara had already learned to disagree with a kind of affectionate ferocity. The child was a rebel in every fibre, while Doctor Jim had a vigorous Tory prejudice which kept his power of polemic well occupied in Second Westings. The two were presently so absorbed in controversy that the rocky point of the morning's attempted tragedy was passed without the tribute of a shudder or even a recognition. At last, with a mighty, half wrathful surge upon the oars, Doctor Jim beached the punt at the landing-place. As the distracted wave of his violence seethed hissing up the gravel and set the neighbour sedges a-swinging, he leaned forward and fixed the eager girl with a glare from under the penthouse of his eyebrows. Open-mouthed and intent, Barbara waited for his pronouncement.

"Child!" said he, waving a large, but white and fine forefinger for emphasis, "Don't you let that amiable and disreputable old vagabond, Debby Blue, or that pestilent rebel, Doctor John Pigeon, stuff your little head with notions. It's *your* place to stand by the *Crown*, right or wrong. Remember your blood. You know right well which side your father would have stood upon! Eh, what?"

The disputatious confidence died out of Barbara's face. For a moment her head drooped, for she knew in her heart how thoroughly that worshipped father would have identified himself with the king's party as soon as occasion arose. Then she looked up, and a mocking light danced in her gray eyes, while her mouth drew itself into lines of solemnity.

"I promise," she exclaimed, leaning forward and laying a thin little gipsy hand on Doctor Jim's knee, as if registering a vow, "that I won't harm your dear King George!"

"Baggage!" shouted Doctor Jim, snatching her from her seat and stalking up the beach with her.

Arriving at the Ladd place from the rear, by way of the pasture and the barnyard, they found Doctor John awaiting them. He was leaning over the little wicket gate at the back of the garden, eating a handful of plump gooseberries. With affected sternness he eyed their approach, not uttering a word till Barbara violently pushed the gate open and rushed at him. Then, straightening himself to his full height,—he had a half-head to the good of even the towering Doctor Jim,—he extended his hand to her, and said, civilly:

"Do have a gooseberry!"

At this Barbara shrieked with laughter. Doctor John always seemed to her the very funniest thing in the world, and his humour, in season and out of season, quite irresistible. At the same time she pounded him impatiently with her fists, and tried to pull him down to her.

"I don't want a gooseberry," she cried. "I want you to kiss me. I haven't seen you for more than a week, and you go and act just as if I had seen you every day!"

Doctor John stooped, but held her at arm's length, and gazed at her with preternatural gravity.

"Tell me one thing," he said.

"What?" whispered Barbara, impressed.

"Have you been taking any of Jim Pigeon's physic since I saw you?"

"No!" shrieked Barbara, with another wild peal of laughter. "Doctor Jim's a Tory. He might poison me!"

"Then you shall have one kiss—no, two!" said Doctor John, picking her up.

"Ten—twenty—a hundred!" insisted the child, hugging him violently.

"There! there! Enough is as good as a feast!" interrupted Doctor John, presently, untwining her arms and setting her down. Then, Doctor Jim holding one of her hands and Doctor John the other, she skipped gaily up the path toward the house, like a wisp of light dancing between their giant bulks.

At this moment the figure of Mistress Mehitable appeared on the porch; and Barbara felt suddenly abashed. A realisation of all that had occurred, all she had done, all she had suffered, rushed over her. Her little fingers shut like steel upon the great, comforting hands that held them, and the colour for a moment faded out of her cheeks. Doctor John and Doctor Jim both felt the pang of emotion that darted through her. She felt, rather than saw, that their big faces leaned above her tenderly. But she did not want them to speak. She was afraid they might not say the right thing. She felt that *she* must say something at once, to divert their attention from her plight. She looked around desperately and caught sight, in the barnyard behind her, of the hired man milking the vicious red 'mooley' cow that would not let Abby milk her.

"Why!" she exclaimed, with a vast show of interest and surprise, "there's Amos milking Mooley!"

On the instant she recognised the bald irrelevancy of the remark, and wished she had not spoken. But Doctor John turned his head, eyed Amos with critical consideration, and said:

"Goodness gracious! why, so it is! Now, do you know, *I* should have expected to see the parson, or Squire Gillig, milking Mooley. Dear me, dear me!"

At this, though the deeper half of her heart was sick with apprehensive emotion, the other half was irresistibly titillated, and she laughed hysterically; while Doctor Jim emitted a vast, appreciative guffaw. Before anything more could be said, the voice of Mistress Mehitable came from the porch, kindly sweet, familiar, and cadenced as if no cataclysms whatever had lately shaken the world.

"Supper is waiting," she said, and smiled upon them gently as they approached.

"We come, fair mistress!" responded Doctor Jim, modulating his voice to a deferential softness.

"We come—and here we are," broke out Doctor John, snatching up Barbara, dashing forward, and thrusting her into her aunt's not unwilling arms.

It was a wise device to surmount the difficulty of the meeting.

"I am truly most glad to see you, my dear child," said Mistress Mehitable, earnestly, pressing Barbara to her heart and kissing her on the forehead. Barbara looked up, searched her aunt's face piercingly for a second, saw that the gentle blue eyes were something red and swollen with weeping, and impulsively lifted her lips to be kissed.

"I am sorry I grieved you, Aunt Hitty," she whispered, "I'll try hard not to."

Mistress Mehitable kissed her again, almost impetuously, gave her a squeeze of understanding, and with her arm over the child's shoulder led the way in to supper.

CHAPTER VI.

After this upheaval there was better understanding for a time between Barbara and Mistress Mehitable. The lady made an honest effort to allow for some of the differences in the point of view of a child brought up on a Maryland plantation, under another creed, and spoiled from the cradle. She tried, also, to allow for the volcanic and alien strain which mingled in Barbara's veins with the well-ordered blood of the Ladds. But this alien strain was something she instinctively resented and instinctively longed to subdue. Moreover, she lacked imagination; and therefore, with the most sincere good purpose on both sides, the peace between herself and Barbara was but superficial, demanding the price of ceaseless vigilance. Barbara, on her part, strove to be more diligent with her tasks, and greatly conciliated Mistress Mehitable by her swift progress in plain sewing, penmanship, and playing on the harpsichord; and she quickly learned to read aloud with a charm and a justness of emphasis which her aunt never wearied of commending. But with the elaborate Dresden embroidery and intricate lace-making, and the flummery art of "papyrotamia"—a cutting of paper flowers—which then occupied the leisure of young maids of gentle breeding, Barbara had no patience at all. She scorned and hated them—and she purchased her release from them by electing rather the rigid and exacting pursuit of Latin grammar, which only masculine intellects were considered competent to acquire. In this she had had some grounding from her father; and now, under the sympathetic tuition of Doctor John, she found its strenuous intricacies a satisfaction to her restless brain, and made such progress as to compel the reluctant commendation of the Reverend Jonathan Sawyer himself.

Meanwhile, seeing the restraint under which the child was holding herself, Mistress Mehitable tried to moderate to some degree her disapproval of Barbara's vagaries and impetuosities, so that sometimes her wild rides, her canoeings at unseemly hours, her consortings with old Debby, her incorrigible

absences from the noonday board, were suffered to go almost unrebuked. But it was a perennial vexation to Mistress Mehitable to observe Barbara's haughty indifference to the other young girls of her own class in the township, who were her fitting associates and might have redeemed her from her wildness; while, on the other hand, she insisted on making an intimate of Mercy Chapman, the daughter of Doctor John's hired man. Barbara found all the girls whom her aunt approved hopelessly uninteresting—prim, docile, pious, uninformed, addicted to tatting, excited over feather-work. But Mercy Chapman was fearless, adventurous within her limits, protectingly acquainted with all the birds' nests in the neighbourhood, and passionately fond of animals, especially horses and cats. Mercy Chapman, therefore, was admitted very cordially to certain outer chambers of Barbara's heart; while the daughters of Squire Grannis and Lawyer Perley were treated to a blank indifference which amounted to incivility, and excited the excoriating comment of their mammas.

Another severe trial to Mistress Mehitable's patience was Barbara's unhousewifely aversion to the kitchen. She vowed she could not abide the smell of cooking in her hair, averring that all cooks carried the savour of the frying-pan. When her aunt pointed out how humiliated she would be when she came to have a house of her own, she declared there would be time enough to learn when that day threatened; and she stoutly asseverated, moreover, that she could cook without learning. Upon this rash claim Mistress Mehitable pinned her to a test, being minded to abase her for her soul's good; but she emerged from the trial with vast accession of prestige, doing up sundry tasty desserts with a readiness born of past interest in the arcana of her father's kitchen by the Pawtuxet. But for all her aunt's exhortations she would explore no further in the domain of bake-pan and skillet. There was antagonism, moreover, between Barbara and Abby, to the point that if Mistress Mehitable had prevailed with her niece in this matter, she would have found herself obliged to change her cook.

There was one department of the household economy, however, in which

Barbara was ever ready to meet her aunt half-way. It furnished a common ground, whereon many a threatened rupture was averted, or at least postponed. This was the still-room.

Barbara adored cleanliness and sweet smells. The clean, fragrant place, wherein bundles of herbs whose odours spoke to her of the South, and of strange lands, and of longed-for, half-forgotten dreams, and of desires which she could not understand, was to her a temple of enchanting mysteries.

Now Mistress Mehitable was a cunning distiller of the waters of bergamot, rosemary, mint, thyme, and egrimony; but Barbara developed a subtlety in the combining of herbs and simples which resulted in perfumes hitherto unknown. One essence, indeed, which she compounded, proved so penetrating, lasting, and exquisite, that her aunt, in a burst of staid enthusiasm, suggested that she should name it and write down the formula for security. This was done, to Barbara's great pride; and thereafter the "Water of Maryland Memories" became the proper thing to use in Second Westings. Nothing, perhaps, did more to make Barbara a personage in the township than this highly approved "Water of Maryland Memories."

In this way the days passed, so that at times Mistress Mehitable had hopes that the child was going to assimilate herself, and cease to pine for her plantation in the South. In reality, the rebellion in Barbara's soul but grew the stronger as her nature deepened and matured. Throughout her second spring at Second Westings,—when the mounting sap set her veins athrill in unison, and she saw the violets come back to the greening meadows, the quaker-ladies and the windflowers to the little glades of the wood; and the wild ducks returned from the south to nest by the lake, and the blackbirds chirred again in the swaying tops of the pine-trees,—her spirit chafed more fiercely at every bar. The maddest rides over upland field and pasture lot at dawn, the fiercest paddlings up and down the lake when the wind was driving and the chop sea tried her skill, were insufficient vent to her restlessness. Her thoughts kept

reverting, in spite of herself, to the idea of seeking her uncle. Misunderstandings with Mistress Mehitable grew more frequent and more perilous. But just as she was beginning to feel that something desperate must happen at once, there came to her a responsibility which for a time diverted her thoughts.

The kitchen cat presented the household with four kittens. Having a well-grounded suspicion that kittens were a superfluity in Second Westings, the mother hid her furry miracles in the recesses of a loft in the barn. Not until their eyes were well open were they discovered; and it was Barbara who discovered them. With joyous indiscretion, all undreaming of the consequences, she proclaimed her discovery in the house. Then the customary stern decree went forth—but in this case tempered with fractional mercy, seeing that Mistress Mehitable was a just woman. One was spared to console the mother, and three were doomed to death.

Barbara, all undreaming of the decree, chanced to come upon Amos in the cow-shed, standing over a tub of water. She saw him drop a kitten into the tub, and pick up the next. She heard the faint mewing of the victims. For one instant her heart stood still with pain and fury. Then, speechless, but with face and eyes ablaze, she swooped down and sprang upon him with such impetuous violence that, bending over as he was, he lost his balance and sprawled headlong, upsetting the tub as he fell. As the flood went all abroad, sousing Amos effectually, Barbara snatched up the dripping and struggling mewer, clutched it to her bosom, seized the basket containing the other two, burst into wild tears, fled to the house, and shut herself into her room with her treasures. Straightway realising, however, that they would not be safe even there, she darted forth again, defying her aunt's efforts to stop her, ran to the woods, and hid them in the secret hollow of an old tree. Knowing that Amos would never have committed the enormity at his own instance, she hastened to make her peace with him,—which was easy, Amos being at heart her slave,—with a view to getting plenty of milk for the tiny prisoners; but against Mistress Mehitable her wrath burned hotly. She stayed out till long past supper, and crept to bed

without speaking to any one—hungry save for warm milk supplied by Amos.

This was an open subversion of authority, and Mistress Mehitable was moved. In the morning she demanded the surrender of the kittens. Barbara fiercely refused. Then discipline was threatened—a whipping, perhaps, since duty must be done, however hard—or imprisonment in her room for a week. Barbara had a vision of the kittens slowly starving in their hollow tree, and her face set itself in a way that gave Mistress Mehitable pause, suggesting tragedies. The next moment Barbara rushed from the room, flew bareheaded down the street, burst into Doctor Jim's office, and announced that she would kill herself rather than go back to her Aunt Hitty. Past events precluding the possibility of this being disregarded as an idle threat, it was perforce taken seriously. Doctor John was summoned. The situation was thrashed out in all its bearings; and finally, while Barbara curled herself up in a tired heap on the lounge and went to sleep, her two champions went to confer with Mistress Mehitable. Hard in this case was the task, for the little lady considered a principle at stake; but they came back at last triumphant. Barbara was to be allowed to retain the kittens, on the pledge that she would keep them from becoming in any way a nuisance to the rest of the house, and that she would, as soon as possible, find homes elsewhere for at least two of them. This last condition might have troubled her, but that Doctor John and Doctor Jim both winked as they announced it, which she properly interpreted to mean that they, being catless and mouse-ridden, would help her.

So Barbara went back to Aunt Hitty—who received her gravely; and the kittens came back from their hollow tree; and the shock of clashing spheres was averted. But the peace was a hollow and precarious one—an armistice, rather than a peace. For about a week Barbara's heart and hands were pretty well occupied by her little charges, and Mistress Mehitable found her conciliatory. But one day there came a letter from Uncle Bob, accompanied by a box which contained macaroons and marchpanes, candied angelica, a brooch of garnets, and a piece of watchet-blue paduasoy sufficient to make Barbara a

dress. The letter announced that Uncle Bob was at Bridgeport, and about to sojourn for a time at the adjoining village of Stratford. Why, Stratford was in Connecticut—it could not be very far from Second Westings! Barbara's heart throbbed with excitement. The very next day she made excuse to visit Lawyer Perley, and consult a map of the Connecticut colony which she had once observed in his office. She noted the way the rivers ran—and her heart beat more wildly than ever. Just at this point conscience awoke. She put the dangerous thought away vehemently, and for a whole week was most studious to please. But Mistress Mehitable was still austere, still troubled in her heart as to whether she had done right about the kittens. One morning just after breakfast Barbara was set to hemming a fine linen napkin, at a time when she was in haste to be at something else more interesting. She scamped the uncongenial task—in very truth, the stitches were shocking. Hence came an unpleasantness. Barbara was sent to her room to meditate for an hour. She was now all on fire with revolt. Escape seemed within reach. She meditated to such purpose that when her hour was past she came forth smiling, and went about her affairs with gay diligence.

It was on the following morning that, when the first pallor of dawn touched the tree-tops, she climbed out of the window, down the apple-tree, and fled with her bundle and her kittens.

CHAPTER VII.

After her breakfast at old Debby's, Barbara urged forward her canoe with keen exhilaration. Now was she really free, really advanced in her great adventure. A load of anxiety was lifted from her mind. She had succeeded in

arranging so that the letter would be delivered to her aunt—a matter which had been fretting at her conscience. Moreover, old Debby had shown no surprise or disapproval on hearing of her rash venture. It nettled Barbara, indeed, to have so heroic an enterprise taken so lightly; but she augured therefrom that it was more feasible than she had dared to hope, and already she saw herself installed as mistress of Uncle Bob's home in Stratford.

"He'll love us, my babies!" she cried to the kittens in the basket, and forthwith plied her paddle so feverishly that in a few minutes she had to stop and take breath.

The river at this point wound through low meadows, sparsely treed with the towering, majestic water poplar, sycamore, and arching elm, with here and there a graceful river birch leaning pensively to contemplate its reflection in the stream. The trees and flowers were personal to Barbara, her quick senses differentiating them unerringly. The low meadow, swampy in spots, was a mass of herbs, shrubs, and rank grasses, for the most part now in full flower; and the sun was busy distilling from them all their perfumes, which came to Barbara's nostrils in warm, fitful, varying puffs. She noted the tenderly flushing feathery masses of meadowsweet, which she could never quite forgive for its lack of the perfume promised by its name. From the dry knolls came the heavy scent of the tall, bold umbels of the wild parsnip, at which she sniffed with passing resentment. Another breath of wind, and a turn of the stream into a somewhat less open neighbourhood, brought her a sweet and well-loved savour, and she half rose in her place to greet the presence of a thicket of swamp honeysuckle. She noted, as she went, pale crimson colonies of the swamp rose, hummed over softly by the bees and flies. Purple Jacob's-ladder draped the bushes luxuriantly, with wild clematis in lavish banks, and aerial stretches of the roseate monkey-flower on its almost invisible stems. Her heart went out to a cluster of scented snakemouth under the rim of the bank. She was about to turn her prow shoreward and gather the modest pinkish blossoms for their enchanting fragrance, when she observed leaning above them her mortal enemy among the

tree-folk, the virulent poison sumac. She swerved sharply to the other side of the stream to avoid its hostile exhalations.

The little river now widened out and became still more sluggish. A narrow meadow island in mid-stream intoxicated Barbara's eyes with colour, being fringed with rank on rank of purple flag-flower, and its grassy heart flame-spotted with the blooms of the wild lily. The still water along the shores was crowded with floating-heart, and pale-blossomed arrowhead, and blue, rank pickerel-weed; and Barbara, who did not mind the heat, but revelled in the carnival of colour, drew a deep breath and declared to herself (giving the flat lie to ten thousand former assertions of the like intimacy) that the world was a beautiful place to live in. No sooner had she said it than her heart sank under a flood of bitter memories. She seemed once more to feel the water singing in her ears, to see its golden blur filling her eyes, as on that morning when she lay drowning in the lake. The glory of the summer day lost something of its brightness, and she paddled on doggedly, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left.

But this was a mood that could not long hold dominion over Barbara's spirit on this day of days, when she was journeying to freedom. It took no more than the scarlet flash of a tanager across her bow, the flapping of a startled brood of ducks from their covert in the sedge, to lure her back to gladness and the seeing eye. At last the river carried her into quite different surroundings. Still slow, and smooth, and deep, it entered the neighbourhood of great trees growing close, the ancient and unviolated forest. The day grew cool and solemn, the diffused light floating hushed under the great arches of brown and gray and green. By contrast it seemed dark, but the air was of a wonderful transparency, and Barbara's eyes, opening wide in delicious awe, saw everything more distinctly than in the open. She whispered to the yellow birch, the paper birch, the beech, the maple, and the chestnut, each by name lovingly, as she slipped past their soaring trunks, knowing them by the texture and the features of their bark though their leaves hung far overhead. Her paddle dipped without noise, lest the

mysteries of the forest conclave should be disturbed by her intrusion. So keen and so initiated were her young eyes that she discerned the sleeping nighthawk on his branch, where his likeness to a knotted excrescence of the bark made him feel secure from the most discriminating vision. Passing a dead pine with a small, neatly rounded hole about ten feet up the trunk, she heard, or thought she heard, the safe conferring of the nest full of young woodpeckers in its hollow depth—which, indeed, was probably but the stirring of her own blood-currents within her over-attentive little ears. Suddenly the vast stillness appeared to close down upon her, not with oppression, but with a calm that was half fearful, half delicious; and it seemed as if the fever of her veins was being slowly drawn away. The mystic shores slipped by with speed, though she hardly knew she was paddling. And when, suddenly, a great brown owl dropped from a beech limb and went winnowing soundlessly down the stream ahead of her, she caught her breath, feeling as if the soul of the silence had taken palpable shape before her eyes.

Now, as it seemed to Barbara, life and movement began to appear, at the summons of those shadowy wings. A little troop of pale-winged moths drifted, circling lightly, over the stream; and a fly-catcher, with thin, cheeping cries, dropped some twenty feet straight downward from an overhanging limb, fluttered and zigzagged for a moment in mid-air, capturing some small insect darters which Barbara could not see, then shot back into the leafage. Then upon a massive, sloping maple-branch close to the bank, she saw a stocky black-and-white shape slowly crawling. The head was small and flattened, the bright little eyes glittered upon her in defiance, and a formidable ridge of pointed quills erected itself angrily along the back. The animal uttered a low, squeaking grunt, and Barbara, with prompt discretion, steered as close as possible to the opposite bank, glancing apprehensively over her shoulder as she passed. She was strongly inclined to like the porcupine; but his ill-temper was manifest, and she had faith in the superstition that he could shoot his needle-like quills to a distance and pierce the object of his dislike. Barbara could not contemplate the possibility of appearing before her uncle like a pin-cushion, stuck full of

porcupine quills.

Barely had she left the resentful porcupine behind, safely out of quill-flinging distance, when she observed a small, ruddy head cleaving the water in mid-channel. A pair of prominent eyes met hers apprehensively. Two smooth ripples curved away from the throat of the small swimmer. It was a red squirrel whom unwonted affairs had summoned to the other side of the river. Whatever the affairs, Barbara was determined to expedite them as far as she could. Overtaking the swimmer with a couple of smart strokes, she politely held out to him the blade of the paddle. The invitation was not to be resisted. With a scramble and a leap he came aboard, skipped along the gunwale, and perched himself, jaunty and chipper for all his bedragglement of tail, on the extreme tip of the bow. There he twitched and chattered eagerly, while Barbara headed toward the shore where he would be. While he was yet a wide space distant from it, he sprang into the air. Barbara held her breath—but the little traveller knew his powers. He landed safely on a projecting root, flicked off behind a tree, and was gone. In a few seconds there came echoing from a tree-top far back in the shadows a loud, shrill chattering, which Barbara took for an expression of either gratitude or impudence. Caring not which it was, she smiled indulgently and paddled on.

And now to her sensitive nostrils there came suddenly an elusive wafture of wintergreen, and she looked around for the gray birch whose message she recognised. The homely, familiar smell reclaimed her from her mood of exaltation, and she realised that she was hungry. Just ahead was a grassy glade, whereinto the sun streamed broadly. She saw that it was far past noon. With a leap of the heart she realised that she must be nearing the point where the stream would join the great river which was to bear her, her kittens, and her fortunes, down to the sea and Uncle Bob. Yes, she recognised this same open glade, with the giant willow projecting over the water at its farther end. She and Uncle Bob had both remarked upon its fairy beauty as they passed it going and coming, when they had explored the stream. She had but two or three miles

farther to go, and her paddle would greet the waters of the great river. This was fitting place to halt and renew her strength.

Pulling up the prow of the canoe upon a tuft of sedge, she took out the basket and the bundle. From the heart of the bundle she drew a small leather bag, containing barley cakes, gingerbread, a tiny parcel of cold meat done up in oiled paper, a wooden saucer, and a little wooden bottle which she had filled with fresh milk at old Debby's. Having poured some of the milk into the saucer, and laid three or four shreds of the meat around its edges, she released the kittens from their basket. For two or three minutes, glad of freedom, the fat, furry things frisked and stretched and tumbled hither and thither, while Barbara kept watch upon them with solicitous eyes. But soon they grew afraid of the great spaces and the woods, being accustomed to an environment more straitened. They came back mewing to Barbara's feet, and she turned their attention to their dinner. While they lapped the milk, and daintily chewed the unaccustomed meat, she dined heartily but abstractedly on the barley cakes and gingerbread. Then, having satisfied her thirst by lying flat on the wet, grassy brink of the stream and lowering her lips to the water, she decided to rest a few minutes before resuming her voyage. Close by was a beech-tree, around whose trunk the moss looked tempting. Seating herself with her back against the tree, and the kittens curled up in her lap, she looked out dreamily over the hot grasses—and presently fell asleep.

She had slept perhaps half an hour when a crow, alighting on a low branch some half score paces distant, peered into the shade of the beech-tree and discovered the sweet picture. To him it was not sweet in the least, but indubitably interesting. "Cah—ah!" he exclaimed loudly, hopping up and down in his astonishment. The sharp voice awoke Barbara, and she rubbed her eyes.

"Gracious!" she exclaimed to the kittens, "what sleepyheads we are! Come, come, we must hurry up, or we'll never get to Uncle Bob!"

Before she was really well awake, the kittens were in the basket, the canoe was loaded and shoved off, and the adventurers were once more afloat upon their quest. Then only did Barbara give herself time to stretch and rub her eyes. After a few strokes she let the canoe drift with the current, while she laid down the paddle, and cooled her wrists and refreshed her face with handfuls of water.

As she straightened her brave little shoulders again to her labour, she was arrested by a strange sound as of the ripping of bark. It was an ominous kind of noise in the lonely stillness, and apprehensively she peered in the direction whence it came. Then she grew afraid. On the other shore, about a couple of rods back from the water, she saw a large black bear sitting upon its haunches beside a fallen and rotten tree. As she stared, wide-eyed and trembling, he lifted his great paw and laid hold of the dead bark. Again came the ripping, tearing noise, and off peeled a huge brown slab. To the exposed surface he applied a nimble tongue—and Barbara's terror subsided. She saw that he was quite too absorbed in the delights of an ant-log to pay any attention to a mere girl; and she remembered, too, that the black bear was a rather inoffensive soul so long as he was not treated contumeliously. For all this, however, she made as much haste from the spot as was consistent with a noiseless paddle—and kept furtive watch over her shoulder until she had put a good half-mile between the canoe and the ant-log.

By the time her concern about the bear had begun to flag she found that the current was quickening its pace. The trees slipped by more swiftly, and the shores grew bolder. A mellow, roaring clamour came to her ears, and with delicious trepidation she remembered a little rapid through which she must pass. Around a turn of the stream it came into view, its small waves sparkling where the forest gave back and admitted the afternoon sun. Her experience in running rapids had been slight, but she remembered the course which Uncle Bob had taken, between two large rocks where the water ran deep and smooth; and she called to mind, the further to brace her confidence, that Uncle Bob had stigmatised this particular rapid as mere child's play. Her heart beat rather

wildly as she entered the broken water, and the currents gripped her, and the banks began to flee upward past her view. But her eye held true and her wrist firm. The clamour filled her ears, but she laid her course with precision and fetched the very centre of the channel between the big rocks. From that point all was clear. The canoe went racing through the last ripple, which splashed her lightly as she passed; and in a reach of quiet water, foam-flecked and shining, she drew a deep breath of triumph. This, indeed, was to live. Never had she experienced a keener consciousness of power. She felt her enterprise already successful. The ancient woods, with their bears, their porcupines, their wide-winged brown owls, lay behind her. Second Westings was incalculably far away. There in plain view, rising over its comfortable orchard trees, not half a mile distant, were the roofs and chimneys of Gault House, overlooking, as she had heard, the waters of the great river. And beyond the next turn, as she thought with a thrill, she would see the great river itself.

CHAPTER VIII.

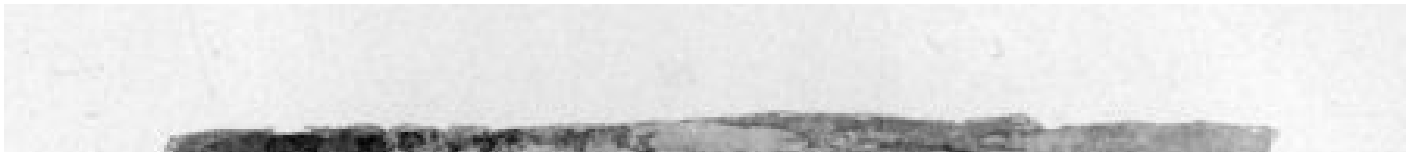
Barbara rounded the next turn. There before her, widely gleaming, spread the waters of the great river itself. She cried out in her joy, and paddled madly —then paused, abashed, perceiving that she was the object of a critical but frankly admiring scrutiny. Her attention was diverted from the great river. Here was a tall boy—of her own caste unmistakably—poling himself out on a precarious little raft to meet her. Her flush of confusion passed as quickly as it had come, and laying her paddle across the gunwale, she waited with interest to discover what he might have to say.

Barbara had met but few boys of her own class, and those few had seemed,

under her merciless analysis, uniformly uninteresting. Their salient characteristics, to her mind, were freckles, rudeness, ignorance, and a disposition to tease cats. But this youth was obviously different. Apparently about seventeen years of age, he was tall and graceful, and the way the clumsy log-raft on which he stood surged forward under the thrusts of his pole revealed his strength. Barbara loved strength, so long as delicacy saved it from coarseness. The boy was in his shirt sleeves, which were of spotless cambric, and Barbara noted, with approbation, the ample ruffles turned back, for convenience, from his sinewy brown hands. She observed that his brown, long-fronted, flowered vest was of silk, and his lighter brown small-clothes of a fine cloth worn only by the gentry; that his stockings were of black silk, and his shoes, drenched most of the time in the water that lapped over the raft, were adorned with large buckles of silver. She admired the formal fashion in which his black hair was tied back in a small and very precise queue. But most of all she liked his face, which was even darker than her own—lean, somewhat square in the jaw, with a broad forehead, and gray-blue, thoughtful eyes, set wide apart.

Now, Barbara's fearless scorn of conventions was equalled only by her ignorance of them. This boy pleased her, so why should she hesitate to show it? When the raft ranged up alongside the canoe, she laid hold upon it for anchorage and the greater convenience in conversation, and flashed upon the stranger the full dazzle of her scarlet lips, white teeth, and bewildering radiance of green eyes. The boy straightened himself from the pole in order to bow with the more ceremony—which he accomplished to Barbara's complete satisfaction in spite of the unsteadiness of the raft.

"What a nice-looking boy you are!" she said, frankly condescending. "What is your name?"



"What a nice-looking boy you are!" she said.

"What a nice-looking boy you are!" she said.

"Robert Gault, your very humble servant!" he replied, bowing again, and smiling. The smile was altogether to Barbara's fancy, and showed even, strong, white teeth, another most uncommon merit in a boy. "And I am sure," he went on, "that this is Mistress Barbara Ladd whom I have the honour to address."

"Why, how do you know me?" exclaimed Barbara, highly pleased. Then, quickly apprehensive, she added, "What makes you think I am Barbara Ladd?"

The boy noted the change in her countenance, and wondered at it. But he replied at once:

"Of course the name of Mistress Barbara Ladd, and her daring, and her canoe-craft, and her beauty" (this he added out of his own instant conviction), "have spread far down the river. When I came up here the other day to visit my grandmother" (he indicated slightly the distant roofs of Gault House), "I came with a great hope of being permitted to meet you!"

Evidently he knew nothing of her flight. Her uneasiness vanished. But she had never had a compliment before—a personal compliment, such as is dear to every wise feminine heart—and that word "beauty" was most melodious to her ears. As a matter of fact, she did not herself admire her own appearance at all, and even had an aversion to the mirror—but it occurred to her now, for the first time, that this was a point upon which it was not needful that every one should agree with her. It was practically her first real lesson in tolerance toward an opinion that differed from her own.

"I'll warrant you heard no good of that same Barbara Ladd, more's the pity!" she answered, coquettishly tossing her dark little head and shooting at him a distracting sidelong glance from narrowed lids. "Anyhow, if you are Lady Gault's grandson, I am most happy to meet you."

She stretched out to him her brown little hand, just now none too

immaculate, indeed, but with breeding stamped on every slim line of it, and eloquent from the polished, well-trimmed, long, oval nails. Instantly, careless of the water and his fine cloth breeches, Robert went down upon one knee and gallantly kissed the proffered hand.

Barbara was just at an age when, for girls with Southern blood in their veins, womanhood and childhood lie so close entwined in their personalities that it is impossible to disentangle the golden and the silver threads. Never before had any one kissed her hand. She was surprised at the pleasant thrill it gave her; and she was surprised, too, at her sudden, inexplicable impulse to draw the hand away. It was a silly impulse, she told herself; so she controlled it, and accepted the kiss with the composure of a damsel well used to such ceremonious homage. But she did not like such a nice boy to be kneeling in the water.

"Why did you come out on that rickety thing?" she asked. "Why haven't you a boat or a canoe?"

"This was the only thing within reach," he explained, respectfully relinquishing her hand. "I saw you coming; and I knew it must be you, because no other girl could handle a canoe so beautifully; and I was afraid of losing you if I waited."

"That was civil of you. But aren't you getting very wet there? Won't you come into the canoe?"

"Really?" he exclaimed, lifting his chin with a quick gesture of eagerness. "Are you going to be so good to me? Then I must push this old raft ashore first and secure it. I don't know whom it belongs to."

As he poled to land in too much haste for any further conversation, Barbara paddled silently alongside and admired his skill. When the raft was tied up, and the pole tossed into the bushes, he took his place in the bow and knelt so as to face her.

"You must turn the other way," laughed Barbara.

"No, I was proposing, by your leave, to make this the stern, and ask you to let me paddle," he answered. "Won't you let me? You really look a little bit tired, and I want you to talk to me, if you will be so condescending. How can I turn my back to you?"

"I am not the least, leastest bit tired," protested Barbara, a little doubtfully. "But I don't mind letting you paddle for awhile, if you'll paddle hard and go the way I want you to." And with that she seated herself flat on the bottom of the canoe, with an air of relief that rather contradicted her protestation.

The boy laughed, as he turned the canoe with powerful, sweeping strokes.

"Surely I will paddle hard, and in whatsoever direction you command me. Am I not the most obedient of your slaves?"

This pleased Barbara. She loved slaves. She accepted his servitude at once and fully.

"Paddle straight out into the river, and then down!" she commanded.

At the imperious note in her voice, the boy looked both amused and pleased. Obeying without a word of question, he sent the canoe leaping forward under his deep, rhythmical strokes at a speed that filled Barbara with admiration.

"Oh, *how* strong you are and *how* well you paddle!" she cried, her eyes wide and sparkling, her lips parted, the crisp, rebellious curls blowing about her face. Never had Robert seen so bewitching a picture as this small figure curled up happily in the bow of the canoe, her little shoes of red leather and her black-stockinged ankles sticking out demurely from under her short blue striped skirt, her nut-brown, slender, finely modelled arms emerging from short loose

sleeves. He was proud of her praise. He was partly engrossed in displaying his skill and strength to the very best advantage. But above all he was thinking of this picture, which was destined to flash back into his memory many a time in after days, with a poignancy of vividness that affected his action like a summons or an appeal.

In a few minutes the canoe was fairly out upon the bosom of the main stream, and headed downward with the strongly flowing current. Barbara clasped her hands with a movement which expressed such rapture and relief that the boy's curiosity was excited. He began to feel that there was some mystery in the affair. Slackening his pace ever so slightly, he remarked:

"I suppose you are staying with friends somewhere in this neighbourhood. How fortunate I am—that is, if you will graciously permit me to go canoeing with you often while you are here."

But even as he spoke, his eyes took in, for the first time, the significance of the bundle and the basket, which he had been so far too occupied to notice. His wonder came forward and spoke plainly from his frank eyes, and Barbara was at a loss to explain.

"No," she said, "I am not staying anywhere in this neighbourhood. I don't know a soul in this neighbourhood but you."

"Then—you've come right from Second Westings!" he exclaimed.

"Right from Second Westings."

"All that distance since this morning?" he persisted.

She nodded impatiently.

"Through those woods—through the rapids—all alone?"

"Yes, all alone!" she answered, a little crisply. She was annoyed.

In his astonishment he laid down his paddle and leaned forward, scanning her face.

"But—" said he, embarrassed, "forgive me! I know it is none of my business,—but what does it mean?"

"Go on paddling," commanded Barbara. "Did you not promise you would obey me? *I* know what it means!" And she laughed, half maliciously. The boy looked worried,—and it was great fun to bring that worried look to his face.

He resumed his paddling, though much less vigorously, while she evaded his gaze, and a wilful smile clung about her lips. The current was swift, and they had soon left the imposing white columns of Gault House far behind. A tremendous sense of responsibility came over the boy, and again he stopped paddling.

"Oh, perhaps you are tired!" suggested Barbara, coolly. "Give me the paddle, and I'll set you ashore right here."

"I said just now it was none of my business," said he, gravely, appealingly, "but, do you know, I think perhaps it ought to be my business! I ought to ask!"

He retained the paddle, but turned the canoe's head up-stream and held it steady.

"What do you mean?" demanded Barbara, angrily. "Give me the paddle at once!"

Still he made no motion to obey.

"Do you realise," he asked, "that it's now near sundown,—that it will take till

dark to work back against the current to where I met you,—that there's no place near here where a lady can rest for the night—"

"I don't care," interrupted Barbara hotly, ready to cry with anger and anxiety; "I'm going to travel all night. I'm going to the sea—to my uncle at Stratford! I just don't want you to interfere. Let me put you ashore at once!"

Robert was struck dumb with amazement. To the sea! This small girl, all alone! And evidently quite unacquainted with the perils of the river. It was superb pluck,—but it was wild, impossible folly. He did not know what to do. He turned the canoe toward shore, and presently found himself in quieter water, out of the current.

Observing his ready obedience, Barbara was mollified; but at the same time she was conscious of a sinking of the heart because he was going to leave her alone, when it would soon be dark. She had not considered, hitherto, this necessity of travelling in the dark. She made up her mind to tell the nice boy everything, and get him to advise her as to where she could stay for the night.

"I'm running away, you know, Master Gault," she said, sweetly, as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world.

"Are you at all acquainted with the river?" he asked, gently, without a trace of resentment for the way she had spoken to him a moment before.

"No!" confessed Barbara, in a very small voice, deprecatingly.

"A few miles farther down there is a stretch of very bad water," said the boy. "Clever canoeist as you are, you would find it hard enough work going through in broad daylight. At night you would just be dashed to pieces in a minute."

"Oh, what shall I do?" cried Barbara, the perils of her adventure just

beginning to touch her imagination.

"Let me take you to my grandmother's," he pleaded. "And we will paddle back to Second Westings to-morrow."

Barbara burst into a storm of tears.

"Never! never! never!" she sobbed. "I'll die in the rapids before I'll ever go back to Aunt Hitty! Oh, why did I like you? Why did I trust you? Oh, I don't know what to do!"

The boy's heart came into his throat and ached at the sight of her trouble. He longed desperately to help her. He had a wild impulse to swear that he would follow her and protect her, wherever she wanted to go, however impossible her undertaking. Instead of that, however, he kept silence and paddled forward resolutely for two or three minutes, while Barbara, her face buried in her hands, shook with sobs. At last he ran the canoe into a shadowy cove, where lily leaves floated on the unruffled water. Then he laid down his paddle.

"Tell me all about it, won't you, please?" he petitioned. "I do want so much to help you. And perhaps I can. And you *shall not* be sorry for trusting me!"

How very comforting his voice was! So tender, and kind, and with a faithful ring in its tenderness. Barbara suffered it to comfort her. Surely he would understand, if old Debby could! In a few moments she lifted her wet little face, flashed a smile at him through her tears, and said:

"How good and kind you are! Forgive me if I was bad to you. Yes, I'll tell you all about it, and then you can see for yourself why I had to come away."

Barbara's exposition was vivid and convincing. Her emotion, her utter sincerity, fused everything, and she had the gift of the telling phrase. What wonder if the serious, idealistic, chivalrous boy, upon whose nerves her fire and

her alien, elusive beauty thrilled like wizard music, saw all the situation through her eyes. Her faults were invisible to him ere he had listened a minute to her narrative. She was right to run away. The venture, of course, was a mad one, but with his help it might well be carried through to success. As she talked on, an intoxication of enthusiasm and sympathy tingled along his blood and rose to his brain. Difficulties vanished, or displayed themselves to his deluded imagination only as obstacles which it would be splendid to overcome. In the ordinary affairs of life the boy was cool, judicious, reasonable, to a degree immeasurably beyond his years; but Barbara's strange magnetism had called forth the dreamer and the poet lurking at the foundations of his character; and his judgment, for the time, was overwhelmed. When Barbara's piercing eloquence ceased, and she paused breathless, eyes wide and lips parted in expectation, he said, solemnly:

"I will help you! To the utmost of my power I will help you!"

The words had the weight and significance of a consecration.

Barbara clapped her hands.

"Oh!" she cried, "How can I ever thank you for being so lovely to me? But I knew you were nice the moment I looked at you!" And a load rolled off her mind. With such a helper, already was her enterprise accomplished.

"I will try hard to be worthy of your favour," said Robert, with deep gravity, feeling that now indeed was boyhood put away and full manhood descended upon his shoulders. His brain was racked with the terrific problem of finding Barbara fit lodging for the night; but meantime he turned the canoe and paddled swiftly out into the current. Hardly had he changed his course when he noticed a light rowboat creeping up along the shore. But boats were no unusual sight on the river, and he paid no heed to it. As for Barbara, she was so absorbed in watching his great strokes, and in thinking how delightful it was to have found such an ally, that the sound of the oars passed her ears unheeded, and she did

not turn her head.

CHAPTER IX.

At length, however, the boy noticed with a tinge of surprise that the boat was steering as if to intercept his course. He was about to pass greeting to its occupants when something in the face of the big man sitting in the stern arrested his words. At the same moment the sound of the oars caught Barbara's attention, and she turned her head.

"Oh!" she cried, shrilly. "Doctor Jim!—and Doctor John!" she added, as one of the two rowers looked around and grinned at her in humourous triumph. Then, her visions of life at Stratford with Uncle Bob falling to ruin about her, she wept aloud in her disappointment.

Robert understood, and quick as thought swerved in his course, making a dart for the swifter water of mid-channel. His heart swelled with exultation.

"They can't catch us!" he declared to Barbara.

"Stop! you young rascal!" thundered the mighty voice of Doctor Jim. "I know you, Bobby Gault. Don't I know your father's son? Stop this instant!"

"Quit this tomfoolery, Bobby!" roared Doctor John, albeit a little breathless from his labour. Barbara lifted her face and stared through her tears. But the boy paid no heed, paddling mightily, and the distance between boat and canoe was surely widening.

But Doctor Jim knew Barbara.

"Very well!" he said, grimly, in a loud voice. "I'm sorry to do bodily hurt to the son of my old friend Richard, but it can't be helped."

He drew a long-barrelled pistol from under the flap of his green coat.

"I'll have to wing you, my boy!" he said, taking careful aim, while one eyelid quivered in the direction of Doctor John.

The boy's face paled a little, but his jaw set firmly, and he kept right on.

"Stop! stop! stop!" screamed Barbara, but with no result. She half arose in the canoe, glancing with horror from the boy's resolute face to the muzzle of the pistol.

"If you don't stop, Robert, I will throw myself overboard this minute!" she vowed.

The terror in her face convinced him. He sullenly drew in his paddle, laid it down in the canoe, folded his arms, and looked off over the western hills, as if scornful of all that might take place.

In a few seconds the boat came up alongside of the drifting canoe, the oars were drawn in, and strong hands laid hold upon the gunwale. There were some awful moments of silence, broken only by Barbara's sobbing and the splashing of waves on the boat and the canoe. The owner of the boat, a gaunt farmer from Westings Landing, a few miles down the river, who had not been initiated into the mystery, looked on in discreet astonishment. This was indeed a strange situation in which to see the grandson of Lady Gault. At last Barbara, to whom suspense was hideous, broke out.

"Oh, do say something!" she wailed. Indeed, neither Doctor John nor

Doctor Jim knew just what to say. They were embarrassed. But the child was right. Somebody had to say something. By interchange of quick glances the lot fell to Doctor John.

"Well, this is pretty gallivanting, running away with a young man,—carrying him off in your aunt's canoe!" said Doctor John.

Barbara's eyes opened very wide.

"I never!" she cried, indignantly.

"As for you, Bobby Gault," interposed Doctor Jim, severely, and in a tone that made Robert feel himself hatefully young, "I cannot comprehend how *you* should come to be mixed up in this affair. I know well what my friend, Richard Gault, your lamented father, with his nice notions of honour, would have thought of such an escapade." (Robert's father and mother had died within a few days of each other, by an epidemic of typhus, when the boy was only five years old.) "But I shall lay the matter before your good grandmother, and your uncle, who will doubtless deal with you as you deserve."

Robert shut his lips tight and eyed the speaker proudly; but Barbara made reply in her vehement way.

"It is not Robert's fault at all, I tell you, Doctor Jim!" she cried, forgetting that she had said nothing whatever on the subject. "I just met him, an hour or two ago, on an old raft; and he knew who I was; and because he was getting his feet wet on the raft, I invited him to get into the canoe; and I made him promise to paddle me just wherever I wanted to go. So there! And it is not his fault one bit! And you may do what you like to me, but I won't have him punished when he has not done anything at all!"

Doctor John tried to look quite grave; and Doctor Jim, who was really annoyed, succeeded.

"Oh, ho! young man!" he remarked, sarcastically, "it appears that you have a champion. Now, what have you to say for yourself?"

"Mistress Barbara has neglected to add," said he, with all the dignity that he could assume, "that I insisted upon her narrating to me all the unhappy circumstances of her life in Second Westings. The story commanded my fullest sympathy, and I had just given her my word that I would aid her in escaping to her uncle, Mr. Glenowen, where she would be happy, when you came and violently interfered with her purpose. I ask you, sir, to consider. Are you not ashamed to be instrumental in restoring a young lady to conditions where she has been made to suffer so cruelly?"

In spite of his indignation, Robert could not help feeling proud of this effort. In his own ears it sounded imposing, unanswerable, and altogether grown up. Barbara thought it was a miracle of eloquence, and cast him a grateful look. But Doctor John could not conceal his delight in the stilted periods. He burst into a huge guffaw, at which Barbara's eyes snapped and Robert's dark skin reddened angrily. But Doctor Jim exclaimed, hotly:

"Hoity-toity! How big we do feel! To think how often I dandled you on my knee when you were a mewling baby. If I had but known enough to spank you once in awhile, you might not have grown up to be such a priggish young coxcomb. Richard's son! Who would have thought it? Eh, what?"

Meanwhile the boat and canoe were drifting rapidly down-stream. Doctor John looked at the sun, now touching the horizon.

"Don't you think, Master Gault," said he, drily, "that unless you propose to honour us with your company to Second Westings, we had better set you ashore hereabouts, that you may stretch your legs in the direction of Gault House?"

"Thank you!" said Robert, stiffly, his heart bursting with humiliation and the longing to strangle his huge, supercilious antagonist. But Barbara interrupted.

"I'm not going back to Second Westings!" she declared obstinately, trying hard to set her full red lips together in the resolute way that Robert's had. "I will never go back to live with Aunt Hitty. I'll drown myself first. I'm going to Uncle Bob, at Stratford."

The threat, once so effective, seemed now to have lost its potency. No one appeared impressed but Robert,—and perhaps the stranger-man who owned the boat.

"My dear child," said Doctor John, eying her indulgently, "among the more or less serious obstacles to your plan is one of which I believe that even you will see the magnitude. Mr. Glenowen is no longer at Stratford."

"Uncle Bob not at Stratford?" wailed Barbara, overwhelmed, subjugated in an instant. Robert started aghast.

Doctor John paused dramatically, while the full effect of the news worked upon his victims in the canoe. Then he said, coolly:

"Mr. Glenowen is just now at Hartford, or has lately left that town. Mistress Ladd had a letter from him to-day, saying he expected to arrive at Second Westings not later than the end of next week, I think, moreover, that I saw a packet on the mantel-shelf addressed to Mistress Barbara Ladd!"

With one bound Barbara's heart passed from despair to ecstasy. Everything else was forgotten. She was as eager now to get back to Second Westings as she had been to escape from it. All she knew or cared for was that Uncle Bob would be there. He would make everything right. Her face was all radiance, as it turned to Doctor John, then to Doctor Jim, then to Robert,—who eyed her gloomily, feeling himself now cast out into the cold. But in her joy Barbara did

not forget him after all.

"Just think, Robert," she cried, "Uncle Bob so near, and we would have missed him if Doctor John and Doctor Jim, the dears, had not come and caught us. They are always *angels* to me, you know. Now we will put you ashore right here. And you must be sure to come over to Second Westings and see me,—won't you?—while Uncle Bob is there. Come next week."

"I thank you for the gracious invitation," answered the boy, bowing a little stiffly. "But I think I had better wait for Mr. Glenowen's permission, as these gentlemen are not likely to present me to him in a very favourable light."

"Don't be silly and disagreeable, Robert," said Barbara, impatiently. "Uncle Bob will think of you just as I do. We always agree about people. Now you must hurry!"

"I think, however," persisted Robert, "I ought to wait for Mr. Glenowen's invitation."

"Right, my lad!" exclaimed Doctor Jim, much mollified by this attitude. "That's my old friend Richard's son speaking now. And I doubt not that our little mistress here will see to it that the invitation is forthcoming in good season,—eh, what?"

There was a doubtful expression on Barbara's face, over the lack of instantaneous obedience to her will on the part of her champion; but Robert, encouraged by Doctor Jim's commendation, now made a bold proposal.

"If you would be so kind, sir," he suggested, diffidently, "I should like to go down with you to the Landing, where I can lodge very well for the night at the house of an old servant of my grandmother's. It will be a long and difficult tramp for me up the shore now, in the dark, and with no road through the woods. By going with you to the Landing I might be of some service, to paddle the canoe.

She will be an awkward craft to tow; and Mistress Barbara is very tired, I perceive."

"Sly young dog!" growled Doctor John. "But, seeing that he is Richard's son, we'll have to take him along with us as far as the Landing, eh, Jim?"

"Let him work his passage, then!" roared Doctor Jim. "Let him paddle the canoe, and Barbara, and her kittens, and all her contraptions,—and we'll see about not being too hard on him when we come to tell his grandmother!"

This arrangement was highly satisfactory to all concerned. The gloom fell from Robert's face, and his mouth grew boyish and happy as he paddled on in musing silence. He kept the canoe alongside of the boat, just out of reach of the oars, so that Barbara could talk conveniently with Doctor John and Doctor Jim, which she did in the most usual manner in the world, as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. But presently, upon a lull in the conversation came the voice of Robert, who had been thinking about Barbara's life at Second Westings.

"Is not Mistress Ladd a very harsh, tyrannical sort of woman?" he inquired, solicitously.

There was a huge roar from Doctor Jim, which made even Barbara jump, inured though she was to these explosions.

"I'd have you remember, young sir, that you are speaking of the gentlest, sweetest, truest, most gracious lady that ever lived, for whose little shoes you are not worthy to sweep the ground!"

Robert stared in confusion, too astonished to be at once ready with an apology. Before he could gather his wits, Doctor John spoke up, more gently. He was no less loyal a champion to Mistress Mehitable than was Doctor Jim, but with him his humour was ever at hand to assuage his wrath. Subduing his

great tones to a quizzical and confidential half-whisper, that feigned itself not meant for Barbara's ears, he said, amiably:

"My son, when you come to know well this little firebrand of ours, whom we have just plucked from a watery burning, this sower of dissension in our good village of Second Westings, I doubt not that you will spare a moiety of your sympathies for that very noble lady, Mistress Ladd. In truth, for all her tears and anxiety on this mad little maid's account, I have a misgiving that we are doing the sweet lady no great kindness in taking Mistress Barbara back to her. A pretty gallant you are, to undertake to carry a lady off, and then make a mess of it, and leave her embarrassed friends to straighten out the snarl!"

Under this daunting blend of rebuke and raillery, Robert fell into a deeper confusion. He floundered through a few awkward phrases of deprecation and apology, but Barbara cut in upon his struggles without mercy. The gibes of Doctor John troubled her not a whit, but one thing which he had said captured her interest.

"*Did* Aunt Hitty *really* cry when she found I had gone away? Did she really feel so badly about it? I thought she would be rather glad!"

"She was in great grief, bitter grief, Barbara. Do you think no one has feelings but yourself?" answered Doctor Jim, with some severity.

This pertinent question Barbara ignored. She turned to Robert.

"You must understand, Robert," she explained with care, "that Aunt Hitty is not really cruel to me,—at least she never intends to be. But she and I do not understand each other, and so we can't get on!"

"You will simply have to learn some of the rudiments of obedience and self-control, Barbara," said Doctor Jim. Never had he spoken to her so severely before, and she was amazed. But she saw that this time she had gone very near

to forfeiting the sympathy of her most faithful allies. Perhaps, after all, she *was* in the wrong to run away. The suspicion only made her the more obstinate.

"I don't think one ought to obey any one, except one's father and mother," she proclaimed rebelliously. "One's father and mother, if they are good, and wise, and kind," she added, still further enlarging her freedom.

"And the king!" added Robert, sententiously. He flung out the word as a shibboleth.

There was a moment of silence. Barbara darted upon him a glance of petulant disappointment. Doctor John laughed hugely. But as for Doctor Jim, his face underwent a swift change, as he scanned the boy with new interest.

"Well said, well said; spoken as Richard's boy should speak, as a Gault should ever speak!" he thundered, in high approval. "I am sorry if I seemed abrupt a moment ago, Robert. Pardon my quick temper. I see your heart is in the right place, and you have not let them stuff your head with pestilent and plebeian heresies. Yes, yes, you must certainly come to Second Westings. I shall be honoured if my old friend's son will be my guest!"

From that moment dated a friendship between Robert and Doctor Jim which no after vicissitude was ever able to disturb.

But Barbara was of another mind.

"King George is just a stupid old tyrant, and I hate him!" she exclaimed. "I'm sorry, Robert, you have not quite so much sense as I thought you had. I'm really disappointed in you. But there are *some* nice Tories! You know even dear Doctor Jim is a Tory, though we can't see why, and he's just as lovely as if he were on the right side. So you may come to Second Westings,—though you must promise not to argue with me. But I know, Robert, I sha'n't like you now so well as I thought I was going to!"

"Let the young people fight it out, eh, Jim?" said Doctor John, greatly amused. "Let them fight it out between them!" Then, suddenly grave, he added, "God grant the differences now distracting our colonies grow not beyond the point of children's quarrels!"

Doctor Jim shook his head sorrowfully.

"There's trouble ahead, John. I feel it coming. This is a stiff-necked and disloyal people, and I have a foreboding. There's a sword in the air, John!"

"It's surely a stiff-necked king, Jim," muttered Doctor John.

"The sword of a Gault will ever leap from its scabbard to serve the king!" said Robert, loftily, his grave eyes aglow with exaltation.

As he made this proclamation of his faith, devoting himself to a cause of which she disapproved, and quite ignoring her feelings in the matter, Barbara felt a sudden pang of loneliness. She seemed forgotten, or, at least, grown secondary and trivial.

"Do let us hurry home to Uncle Bob!" she pleaded, her voice pathetic, her eyes tired and dissatisfied.

Then silence, with the twilight, descended upon the voyaging company; and in a little while, coming noiselessly to the landing-place, they stepped ashore into the dewy, sweet-smelling weeds and the evening peace.

CHAPTER X.

A green lane, little used, but deeply rutted, led up from the wharf to the main street of Westings Landing. The village was silent, with no sign of life, except here and there a glimmer from a candle-lit window. From the pale sky overhead came the strange twang of swooping night-hawks, as of harp-strings suddenly but firmly plucked. In the intervals between these irregular and always unexpected notes was heard the persistent rhythm of a whippoorwill, softly threshing the dusk with his phantom song. Barbara felt the whole scene to be unreal, her companions unreal, herself most unreal of all. Could it be that she was the girl who had that same morning run away, that same morning made so brave and triumphant a start upon so splendid a venture? Now, somehow, she felt rather than understood the folly of it. The fact that she would have missed her Uncle Bob if she had succeeded in her plan took out of it all the zest, and it became to her a very ridiculous plan indeed. But her change of attitude was emotional rather than intellectual. She was convinced in mood, not in mind. Only she felt herself on the sudden a very small, tired girl, who deserved to be punished, and wanted to go to bed. Her conviction of childishness was heightened by the fact that Robert, who was walking just ahead with Doctor Jim, in grave discussion, seemed not only to have suddenly grown up, but to have quite forgotten her once imperious but now discredited existence. Her exhaustion, her reaction, her defeat, her disappointment in Robert, these all at once translated themselves into a sense of hopeless loneliness. She seized the large, kind hand of Doctor John, who walked in silence by her side, and clung to him.

Presently Doctor John felt hot tears streaming copiously down his fingers. Without a word, he snatched her up into his arms, carrying her as if she were a baby; and shaking with voiceless sobs, she buried her small, wet face in his comforting neck. She felt as if she wanted to cry wildly, deliciously, for hours and hours. But she managed to remember that even a very small girl may be heavy to carry over a rough road in the dusk, when the man who carries her has had a hard day's work chasing her. And, furthermore, she thought how

very, very little, how poor and pitiful a heroine she would seem in Robert's eyes if he should chance to remember her existence and look back! She pulled herself together with a fierce effort, and choked down her sobs.

"Thank you so much, dear Doctor John!" she whispered in his ear. "I'm better now, and you must put me down. I'm too heavy."

"Tut, tut, sweetheart!" growled Doctor John, softly; "you bide where you are, and rest. *You* heavy!"

"But,"—she persisted, with a little earthward wriggle to show she meant it, —"I want to get down now, please! I don't want to look like quite such a baby. Doctor John!"

"Tut, tut!" but he set her down, nevertheless, and kept comforting hold of one cold little hand. Doctor John was quick in his sympathetic comprehension of women and children, and tolerant of what most men would account mere whim. In a moment he leaned down close to her ear, and whispered:

"What are you but a baby, after all,—a tired out, bad baby, sweetheart? But we'll just keep that a secret between you and me, and not let Jim Pigeon or Master Robert even guess at it!" And Barbara squeezed his hand violently in both of hers by way of answer.

At this moment, Doctor Jim and Robert, reaching the corner of the street, turned and waited for them to come up. Doctor Jim had Barbara's precious basket of kittens on his arm, while Robert was carrying her little red bundle, which he now handed over to Doctor John. A certain reluctance with which he gave it up was quite lost upon Barbara in her unwonted humility and depression; and it was a very white, wistful little face which she turned glimmeringly upon him as he bowed over her hand.

"Why are you leaving us here, Robert?" she asked, in a small voice, most

unlike the wilful tone with which she had talked to him in the canoe.

"My way lies down the street, sweet mistress," said the boy. "Your horses, Doctor Jim tells me, are waiting for you at the Blue Boar yonder. This has been a wonderful day for me. When you think of it, will you try to remember me kindly as one who would ever be your most devoted, humble servant?"

Delighted by this elaborate courtesy, so rehabilitating to her self-esteem, Barbara began to feel herself almost herself again. She thought, with a sudden prickling heat of shame, of how childish she had been during all the past year,—and she almost fifteen! And here was Robert, who was certainly very grown-up, treating her with a deference which he would never dream of paying to a mere little girl! She resolved to justify his deference, to conceal her pet childishnesses till time should mature them away; yet even as she registered this resolve, she registered a vague but deeper one, that she would cling for ever to every childish taste and pleasure in spite of the very utmost that time could do. But the feeling that came uppermost and found expression was a sharp little pang at something in his words which sounded as if he were bidding farewell for a long, indefinite time.

"But I shall see you again soon, sha'n't I, Robert?" she exclaimed, impulsively. "You'll come over to Second Westings right away, won't you, and meet Uncle Bob?"

"Yes," said the boy, bowing low again, and speaking with a mixture of hesitation and triumph, "I am promising myself that pleasure, Mistress Barbara, within a very few days. You see—Doctor Jim—he has been so kind—"

"To be sure," broke in Doctor Jim, with an emphasis to preclude any discussion of consistency,—"I've asked the lad over to visit us, John. Richard's son!—And his heart's in the right place,—and his head, too,—eh, what? We'll see that Mistress Mehitable is not too hard on him,—eh, what? You know you're not going to be too hard on the boy yourself, John Pigeon, for all you've

been so uncommonly unpleasant to him!"

Doctor John chuckled softly, and squeezed Barbara's left hand, which he had retained while she was receiving Robert's adieux.

"Tut, tut, Jim! You know well enough we've got to pardon anything in breeches, young or old, that gets led into mischief by this little limb o' darkness here. It's a peck of trouble she's been getting you and me into, time and time again. You needn't make excuses for Robert to me, Jim Pigeon. At least, not yet!"

"Thank you, sir," said Robert, a little stiffly, not relishing a pleasantry at Barbara's expense, though Barbara herself had broken into a peal of gay laughter, flattered at Doctor John's implications, and comforted to know that Robert was not slipping beyond her reach. "Thank you, indeed, sir; but I have no excuse; I was fully committed to Mistress Barbara's venture, and I'm just as much to blame as she is!"

Barbara's heart glowed. This was the kind of unreasonable championship she adored. But truth compelled her to protest.

"Oh, no, no, Robert, not at all! It wasn't you that ran away from Aunt Hitty, and took the canoe, and persuaded a nice, civil gentleman whom you'd never seen before in your life to do a perfectly crazy thing like you read of in story-books—" But, as she paused for breath, Doctor Jim, too impatient to be amused, interrupted her:

"Well, well, Robert, you and Barbara can settle all that between you some other time. We must get away. Good night—good night. My best compliments to your honoured grandmother! And ride over the first day you can, lad!"

And Doctor John, shaking his head sorrowfully, exclaimed:

"Tut, tut, tut! How small a petticoat can turn how great a brain! I see trouble ahead for you, Bobby!"

"I shall be so glad to see you at my aunt's, Robert!" cried Barbara, over her shoulder, as they moved up the street toward the Blue Boar and the waiting horses. Robert, standing hat in hand, gazed after them till they were swallowed up in the shadows. Still he waited, till a pulse of light across the gloom and the sound of the inn door closing told him that he was alone under the night. Then, suddenly, he became conscious of the lonely, wonderful night sounds, and suddenly the night perfumes sank into his heart. The spicy breaths from the clover field and blossoming thicket, cooled with dew, gave him a strange intoxication as he drew them into the depths of his lungs. The pulsing rhythm of the whippoorwill seemed to time itself to the pulsing of his heart and translate it to the terms of an impassioned, inarticulate chant. The plucked harp-strings sounding from time to time in the hidden heights of the sky set all his nerves vibrating mystically. Walking as if in a dream, he came to the door of the cottage where he had planned to stay the night. Then he turned on a swift impulse, hurried back to the landing, launched Barbara's canoe, and, without consciousness of weariness or hunger, paddled all the way back to Gault House against the current.

CHAPTER XI.

From Second Westings that morning, after old Debby's alarm, Doctor John and Doctor Jim had came posthaste on horseback to Westings Landing. Now, however, it was found that Barbara was quite too worn out by the fatigues of her long, strenuous day to sit a horse for a ten mile's ride over rough roads in the dark. Priding herself not less on her endurance than on her horsemanship, she vehemently repudiated the charge that she was done up, and was determined to ride back on the liveliest of the Blue Boar's horses. But Doctor John and Doctor Jim, scanning critically her white face and the dark rims coming about her eyes, for once agreed in a professional judgment. They ordered the horses hitched to the roomy old chaise, which was one of the landlord's most cherished possessions; and Barbara had to accept, rebelliously enough, the supineness of a cushioned seat for the free lift and swing of the saddle. Before the lighted doorway of the inn was out of sight, however, she was glad of the decision. Her overwrought nerves began to relax under the soothing of the wood scents and the tender summer dark. In a little while she was asleep in the strong curve of Doctor Jim's right arm,—so deep asleep that all the ruts and jolts and corduroy bridges of an old Connecticut back-country road were powerless to disturb her peace. When they woke her up, at her aunt's door, she was so drenched with sleep that she forgot to dread the reckoning. With drowsy, dark eyes, and red mouth softly trustful as a baby's, she bewildered Mistress Ladd by a warm kiss and "I'm sorry, Aunt Hitty!" and went stumbling off to bed with her basket of sleeping kittens, oblivious and irresponsible as they.

Mistress Mehitable looked after her with small, stern mouth, but troubled eyes. Then she turned half helplessly to her friends, as if to say, "What can I—what ought I to do?"

Doctor John threw up both big, white hands in mock despair, and his sympathetic laugh said, "What do you expect?" But Doctor Jim, more direct and positive, said, "Best leave her alone till to-morrow, Mehitable; and then talk to her with no talk of punishing. She's not the breed that punishing's good for."

Mistress Mehitable looked sorrowful, but resolute.

"I fear that would not be right, Jim!" she said. But there was a note of deep anxiety in her voice. "People who do wrong ought to be punished. Barbara has done very, very wrong!"

Doctor Jim was as near feeling impatient as he could dare to imagine himself with Mistress Mehitable.

"Nonsense—I mean, dear lady, punishment's not in itself one of our numerous unpleasant duties. It's a means to an end, that's all. In this case, it just defeats your end. It's the wrong means altogether. Therefore—pardon me for saying it to you, Mehitable—it's wrong. It's hard enough to manage Barbara, I know, but to punish her, or talk to her of punishing, makes it harder still, eh, what?"

"Don't let your conscience trouble you, Mehitable," said Doctor John. "I'm thinking the little maid will manage to get for herself, full measure and running over, all the punishment that's coming to her. She's not the kind that punishment overlooks."

Was there a suspicion of criticism in all this? Could it be that John Pigeon and Jim Pigeon, her lifelong cavaliers, in whose sight all she did was wont to seem perfection, whose unswerving homage had been her stay through many an hour of faintness and misgiving, were now, at last, beginning to admit doubts? Two large tears gathered slowly in the corners of Mistress Mehitable's blue eyes, the resolution fled from her mouth, and her fine lips quivered girlishly. She twisted her shapely little hands in her apron, then regained her self-control with

an effort.

"Dear friends," said she, "I fear I have made a sad failure of the duty which I so confidently undertook. I thought I could surely do so much for her,—could so thoroughly understand Winthrop's child. But that foreign woman—that strange blood! There is the trouble. That is what baffles all my efforts. Oh, perhaps it is partly my fault, too. Perhaps the child was right in the very singular letter she left for me, saying—just as if she were a grown woman and had the same rights as I had—that the trouble was that we could not understand each other! Oh, I fear I am not the right woman to have the care of Barbara!"

"You are the rightest woman in the world, Mehitable!" thundered Doctor Jim, in explosive protest against this self-accusation. "The rightest woman in the world to have the care of any man, woman, or child that ever lived."

"Jim Pigeon's right, Mehitable, as he usually is, outside of medicine and politics," declared Doctor John. "The little maid will be ready enough some day, I'll warrant, to acknowledge how lucky she was in having her Aunt Hitty to care for her. But here in Second Westings we are not just at the centre of things exactly, and it may be we get into ruts, thinking our ways are the only ways. Shall we try new ways with this very difficult little maid, Hitty?"

Mistress Mehitable brushed off the tears which had overflowed, and held out a hand to each of the big brothers.

"You are the best friends a woman ever had," she averred with conviction; "and if you both disagree with me, I must be wrong. It shall be your way to the best of my power. After you've had the horses put up, come back here and I'll have a hot bite ready for you. But—oh, I do wish Winthrop had married among his own people!"

"It is late, dear lady, and you are tired after your anxieties," said Doctor Jim. "But, nevertheless, since you are so gracious, we will soon return,—eh, what,

John?—for a bowl of that hot sangaree which Mehitable's fair hands know how to brew so delicately."

"Don't misunderstand Jim, Mehitable," said Doctor John, as the two withdrew. "The comfort of your punch is nothing to us as the comfort of your presence. Had you ever consented to make one man happy, how miserable would you have made others, Mehitable!"

There was deep meaning and an old reproach under Doctor John's tender raillery; and Mistress Ladd's cheeks flushed as she stood a few moments motionless, alone in her low-ceiled, wide parlour. She was convicted of failure at every point. Well she knew how happy she might have made either one of the big-limbed, big-hearted brothers, had she not shrunk from making the other miserable. And she had never been able to decide which was the dearer to her heart; for, though she was apt to turn first to Jim in any need, or any joy, the thought of pain for John was ever hard for her to endure. Her heart was very full as she set about preparing the brew which they both loved: and before they came she stole noiselessly up-stairs to the room over the porch, and softly kissed the dark, unrepentant waves of the sleeping Barbara's hair.

CHAPTER XII.

It was late morning when Barbara awoke—so late that she saw, by the position of the square of sunshine on the wall beyond her bed, that the hour for breakfast was over. Her first vague waking sense was one of joy to come, which she presently caught and fixed as the knowledge that her Uncle Bob would soon be with her. Then a great flood of depression rolled over her,

blotting out the joy, as she remembered that she had Aunt Hitty yet to reckon with. To make matters worse, she had slept past breakfast time,—which was almost an immorality in that punctual household. A lump came up in her throat, and tears ached behind her eyes, for she had meant to try so hard to make up,—and now she had gone and sinned again. She shut her eyes tight, and made a determined effort to regain hold of the sleepiness which still drenched and clouded her brain. This effort was too much, and on the instant the last vestige of her drowsiness cleared away, and her brain grew keen as flame. She sat up, determined to face the conflict and get it over.

As she sat up, her eyes fell upon the little table by her bedside, whereon she was wont to keep her candle, her filagreed bottle of lavender water, her much marked copy of Sir Philip Sidney's sonnets, and her Bible, which was thumbed chiefly at Isaiah, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. Her eyes opened very wide as she saw there now,—event unprecedented and unbelievable,—a little tray with white linen napkin. On the tray were a glass and a jug of milk, a plate of the seed-cakes which she particularly loved, a big slice of barley bread, and a bowl of yellow raspberries. She stared for half a minute, and rubbed her eyes, and thought. Abby, certainly, could not have done it. She would neither have dared nor cared to. Then—it was Aunt Hitty,—and after the way she had treated her,—and after that cold, hateful letter! She reached out a doubtful hand and touched the bread and berries. She started to eat a seed-cake, but it stuck in her throat, quite unable to get past a certain strange, aching obstruction, which had gathered there all at once. Tears suddenly streamed down her face; and springing impulsively out of bed, she ran, barefooted and in her white nightgown, straight to the little bow-windowed sewing-room, where she knew that at this hour her aunt would be busy with the needle.

Mistress Mehitable had just time to thrust aside her needle and the fine fabric she was fashioning before Barbara flung herself into her arms, sobbing passionately. The good lady's heart warmed in response to this outburst, and she held Barbara close to her breast, whispering, "There, there, dearie, we just

won't talk about it at all! We'll just try hard to understand each other better in the future!"

At the same moment, while her eyes were filling with tears, she could not help a whimsical thought of what Doctor John would say. "He would say,"—she said to herself at the back of her brain,—"'Seed-cakes may save a soul quicker than switchings, Mehitable!'" Mistress Mehitable's earnest mind had no apprehension of humour save as it reached her by reflection from Doctor John or Doctor Jim.

Presently Barbara found her voice.

"Forgive me, Aunt Hitty, forgive me!" she sobbed.

Mistress Mehitable held her a little closer by way of reply.

"I'm not worth your while, Aunt Hitty—I'm not one bit worth all the trouble you take for me—I'm nothing but a wretched little reptile, Aunt Hitty,—and I just wonder you don't hate and despise me!"

"There, there, dear," murmured Mistress Mehitable, patting her hair. She was sure of her feelings, but could not be quite sure that words would rightly express them at this crisis. If she talked, she knew she might say the wrong thing. She'd leave it all to Barbara, and be safe at least for the moment.

"I knew how bad I was," continued Barbara, justifying the statement by remembrance of some brief and scattered moments of self-questioning. "I knew how bad I was, but I couldn't say so, and I never, never knew how lovely you could be, Aunt Hitty! I was so dreading to see you this morning,—and then, oh, you just brought me the seed-cakes, and the yellow raspberries, and never said one word!"

As she dwelt on this magnanimity, Barbara's sobs broke forth afresh.

"There, there, dear," murmured Mistress Mehitable again, and kissed her tenderly, still refusing to be drawn from her intrenchments, but deeply rejoicing in the triumph of her new strategy.

"To think—why, I never really knew you till now, Aunt Hitty!" and Barbara hugged her with swift vehemence. "When I saw the things by my bed, and thought of you stealing in and putting them there, and stealing out without waking me,—oh, Aunt Hitty, I thought such a lot all in one instant, and I knew you couldn't have done that, after me being so bad, unless you loved me,—could you?"

"Indeed I couldn't!" answered Mistress Ladd, with conviction.

"And you will really and truly forgive me?" persisted Barbara.

This was a direct challenge, and Mistress Mehitable was too honest not to come forth and meet it. She gently pushed Barbara off, and held her so she could look straight into her fearless young eyes.

"I really and truly forgive you—and love you, Barbara!" she said. "And"—she continued, with a slight hesitancy, in an instant's resolve achieving a resolution,—"I ask you to forgive me for my misunderstandings of you, and all my many mistakes."

"Why, Aunt Hitty!" exclaimed Barbara, too tender in her mood to agree with these self-accusations, but too honest to contradict.

"I have failed to realise how, being so different from other girls, you required different treatment from other girls," went on Mistress Mehitable, firmly abasing herself. "I thought there was only one right mould, and I must try to force you into it, however much the effort should hurt us both, dear. I have been blind, very blind, and wrong. In this remote little world of ours, Barbara, we get into ruts, and come to think that the only way is our way."

Barbara's eyes were glowing with enthusiasm. She had discovered Aunt Kitty's heart,—and now she was discovering a breadth and insight which she could never have believed possible in that competent but seemingly restricted brain. If Aunt Hitty could thus lift herself to look beyond the atmosphere of Second Westings, and to understand people different from those she had always been used to, she must be a very great woman. Barbara's eyes flamed with the ardour of her appreciation. She did not know what to say, but her expression was eloquent.

"That's a quotation from Doctor John," said the conscientious Mistress Mehitable, suddenly afraid from Barbara's glowing look that she was getting more credit than her due. "But I have become convinced of its truth."

"How wise and good you are, Aunt Hitty! I'll never, never misunderstand you again!" cried Barbara, rashly, breaking down Mistress Mehitable's guard, and once more hugging her with vehemence.

Mistress Mehitable smiled, gratified but doubtful. She was surprised at her own unexpected appreciation of Barbara's demonstrativeness and warmth, so unlike anything that had ever before invaded the cool sphere of her experience. She felt it her duty, however, to qualify Barbara's extravagant expectations, not realising that what the impetuous girl intended to express was rather a hope than a conviction.

"We hardly dare expect quite that, dear," she said, gently. "But at least we can agree to trust each other's good intentions. We can promise that, can't we?"

"Of course, I'll always trust you now, Aunt Hitty, since I've seen your lovely heart!" exclaimed Barbara, with flattering fervour.

"I have failed to realise," continued Mistress Mehitable, "that you are no longer a little girl, but very nearly a grown woman. Many girls are grown

women at your age, Barbara, so that I have decided on something that will surprise you. From this time forward, I shift my responsibility for you largely to your own shoulders, and shall hope to be more your friend than your guardian. I hand you over to yourself, Barbara. You must learn to discipline yourself!"

Barbara slipped down to the floor, and leaned against her aunt's knee, her dark, small face grown very thoughtful.

"All I dare say, Aunt Hitty," she said, slowly, weighing her words with unwonted care, "is that I'll try with all my might. But I warn you that you are leaving me in very bad hands. I want to be good, but sometimes I can't help being bad!"

"Well," said Mistress Mehitable, with a curious reflex of Doctor John's humour, "you'll have to punish yourself after this. I warn you that you must not look to me for punishment after this!"

Barbara's eyes got very wide, and danced; and she gave a little shriek of delight, such as that with which she was wont to greet Doctor John's whimsical sallies.

"Why, Aunt Hitty," she cried, clapping her hands, "you said that just like Doctor John!"

Mistress Mehitable flushed faintly, and laughed like a girl. She stooped over and kissed Barbara fairly on the mouth. Then she arose rather hurriedly.

"I have often wished I could make myself in many ways more like those two great-hearted gentlemen!" she said.

Barbara remained sitting upon the floor. Her eyes narrowed thoughtfully as she stared out of the window.

"They are perfectly dear," she agreed, without reservation, "Isn't it splendid that they love us so, Aunt Hitty?"

"I'm going to the still-room now," said Mistress Mehitable, moving toward the door. "I put in the bergamot just before breakfast."

"I'll come and help you in a little while,—dear!" said Barbara, suddenly realising the changed relations, and suddenly making practical application of it. That caressing, equal, half-protecting "dear" sounded strange to Mistress Mehitable. It gave her something of a shock, yet she was not sure she didn't like it. It made her feel less alone than of old. She appeared not to notice it, however, merely saying before she vanished:

"If I'm not in the still-room, I'll be down the back garden, gathering herbs. The lemon-thyme's in flower, if you're going to distill any more of your 'Maryland Memories.' Uncle Robert might like a flask of it."

"Lovely," said Barbara, dreamily. "We will make him some. I'll hurry."

But for a few minutes she did not hurry at all. Her rich, rebellious hair all down about her vivid face, her thin little shapely feet peeping out from under the frills of her white nightgown, she sat in the square of sunshine and pondered. Since she fled away yesterday morning, what a change had come about! She felt as if that wild and foolish adventure was years behind her. A certain vague sense of responsibility oppressed her, a responsibility to herself hitherto unacknowledged. She made the momentous resolve that she would learn to know herself a little, as a step to enabling other people, Robert Gault and Aunt Hitty in particular, to understand her. She got up and scrutinised herself keenly in the glass.

"You didn't know you were getting so grown up, did you, you ugly, skinny, little black thing!" she muttered.

Then she flitted back to her own room, poured out a dish of milk for the hungry kittens, and snatched at her breakfast by mouthfuls, while she made her toilet and dressed. Last of all, before going to join Mistress Mehitable, she sat down on the edge of her bed, and took the kittens into her lap. One by one she held up their round, pinky-nosed faces, and gazed seriously into their enigmatic young eyes.

"I want you to remember, now, my babies," said she, insisting upon their unwilling attention, "that your missis is now most grow'd up—she's grow'd up in one night, like old Mr. Jonah's gourd. I want you to remember that we mustn't be silly and childish any more, except just in private, and where we can't help it. And I want you to remember that you mustn't try to coax your missis into mischief any more like you did yesterday, going and helping her run off with the canoe, and such foolishnesses. And I want you to remember that after this, if we can think of it, it isn't going to be 'Aunt Hitty' this, and 'Aunt Hitty' that, all the time,—but 'dear,' and 'honey' (as we used to say in Maryland), and 'blue-eyed lady,' and 'small person,' because we're just as tall as she is,—and we're too big to be punished any more, if we are bad,—and Uncle Bob's coming next week,—and Robert Gault may come any day, if he's impatient!"

With a face of unwonted sobriety, but dancing lights in her eyes, she went to the door. With her hand on the latch she changed her mind. Rushing to her glass, with a few deft touches she changed the arrangement of her hair, heaping it over her ears, and leaving just one crinkly curl to hang down over her left shoulder.

The change added years to her appearance. Then, snatching up a pair of scissors, she swiftly ripped out a deep tuck in her frock, letting the skirt down a good three inches. With vigorous brushings and assiduous pattings she smoothed out the crease so that it was not obtrusive; and severely checking her wonted rush and skip, she went to join Aunt Hitty in the fragrant mysteries of the still-room.

CHAPTER XIII.

To both Mistress Mehitable and Barbara the new order of things proved itself, all through that first day, supremely satisfactory; and each vowed most solemnly in her heart that she, at least, would not be the one to blame if it did not last. During the afternoon, when Doctor John and Doctor Jim were drinking a pot of tea with them, and wondering delightedly at the unexpected atmosphere of peace, Barbara asked, suddenly:

"How did you ever manage, Aunt Hitty, to get Doctor John and Doctor Jim off after me so quickly. I thought I had *such* a good start! And how *did* you know which way I was going?"

Both men looked meaningly at Mistress Mehitable, but failed to catch her eye. Doctor Jim began to shake his head violently, but stopped in confusion under Barbara's look of questioning astonishment. But Mistress Mehitable, serenely unconscious, answered at once:

"Old Debby Blue," said she, "with whom you breakfasted, rode over as fast as she could to Doctor Jim with the news. The poor old woman was nearly dead from her exertions, I think you told me, Jim. She has a good heart, and truly loves you, Barbara. I am sorry if I have seemed harsh to her at times."

Barbara's eyes grew wide, her face darkened ominously, and her full, bowed lips drew together to a straight line of scarlet. Doctor John sat up straight, with twinkling eyes, expecting the outbreak of a characteristic Barbara storm, such as he always enjoyed in his big, dry way. But Doctor Jim made

haste to interpose.

"You mustn't be too hard on Debby, Barbara, because she told what she had promised not to tell. What else *could* she do? You know well enough she couldn't stop you herself, you headstrong baggage. I won't have you unfair to Debby. She loves you, and nearly killed herself to save you!"

Barbara's look of anger changed to a sort of obstinate sullenness for an instant. Then with an effort she forced herself to smile, while tears sprang into her eyes.

"Of course, Debby was right," she acknowledged. "But I wish she'd done it some other way. She shouldn't have let me trust her. She *fooled* me when I trusted her. Oh, I'll *forgive* her, of course," she continued, bitterly, "but never, never, will I *trust* her again!" Then she sprang up impetuously, and ran and flung both arms around Mistress Mehitable. "*Of course* I'd forgive her, anyway, because if she hadn't fooled me I might have never found out how lovely you were,—honey!"

Both Doctor John and Doctor Jim were breathless with amazement for a moment. What was this miracle? Whence came this understanding and this sympathy, all in a night? They saw a new glad warmth in Mistress Mehitable's eyes. They exchanged significant glances.

"All I can say, Barbara," growled Doctor Jim, at length, "is that you've been a long while finding out what ought to have been as plain as the nose on your face,—eh, what?"

"For a young lady who was able to discern at first glance the fascinations of Jim Pigeon," chimed in Doctor John, "I think you have been rather undiscriminating, Barbara!"

"She could see two battered old tallow dips, when she couldn't see the

moon!" added Doctor Jim, solemnly.

There was always a relish of peril in rallying Barbara, whose audacity in retort was one of the scandals of Second Westings. She flashed her white teeth upon them in a naughty smile, and her eyes danced as she kissed Mistress Mehitable on both cheeks.

"Of *course*," she cried. "Nobody knows better than you two great big dears what a perfect little fool I've been, not to be in love with Aunt Hitty all this time."

"Barbara!" protested Mistress Mehitable, in a tone of rebuke,—and then again, bethinking herself, "Barbara, child!" in a tone of appeal.

"But now, you can tell a hawk from a handsaw, eh, baggage?" chuckled Doctor John; while Doctor Jim exploded noisily, and then, checking himself, cast upon Mistress Mehitable a glance of apprehension.

But Barbara had heeded neither the rebuke nor the appeal.

"I know, I know," she went on, clapping her hands with delight. "You didn't *want* me to find her out,—you didn't want me to know how lovely she is! Conspirators! I won't love you any more, either of you. And I'm going to keep Aunt Hitty all to myself here; and not let you even *see* her; and make you both so jealous you'll wish you had let me run away in the canoe and get drowned in the rapids."

"Barbara, Barbara," murmured Mehitable.

Doctor Jim wagged his great head, and growled inarticulately.

"It's we who are the victims of conspiracy, John," said he. "If Mehitable and Barbara have discovered each other, what becomes of us, I'd like to know!

But it sha'n't last. We'll sow seeds of dissension presently,—eh, what?"

"Just let us wait till Bobby Gault comes!" suggested Doctor John, with gentle malice.

Barbara's face grew grave on the instant.

"Of course, Aunt Hitty, they have told you all about Robert," she said, earnestly, "but all they know about his reasons is what he told them himself, you know. And he was determined to shield me, of course. But it was *all* my fault. How could he know how bad and foolish I was? I just mixed him all up; and it makes me ashamed to think how horrid I was; and I will never forgive myself. But you mustn't let them prejudice you against Robert, honey,—but just wait and see what you think of him yourself, won't you, please?"

Mistress Mehitable smiled, and exchanged looks with Doctor John and Doctor Jim.

"Really, dear," said she, "they have not given me any very bad impressions of Robert. I think both Doctor John and Doctor Jim knew where to put the blame. And *I* know, too!"

Barbara looked at her doubtfully. Such complete acceptance of her position almost seemed unkind and critical. But her aunt's smile reassured her. This was not criticism, but something as near raillery as Mistress Mehitable would permit herself.

"I believe they have been abusing me behind my back,—and they pretending to love me!" cried Barbara, tossing her head in saucy challenge.

"Never, child; we hug our delusions, Jim Pigeon and I," said Doctor John.

"No, hug me," laughed Barbara, darting around the tea-table and seating

herself on his lap.

"You are our worst delusion, baggage!" said Doctor Jim, shaking a large finger at her. "And now I see you're setting out to delude your poor aunt, after making life a burden to her for two years. And poor Bobby Gault,—he'll find you a delusion and a snare!"

"I think you are unkind, even if you are just in fun," protested Barbara, half offended, half amused. But at this moment both men rose to go. Doctor John, as he raised his towering bulk from the chair, lifted Barbara with him as if she had been a baby, held her in his arms for a moment while he peered lovingly and quizzically into her swiftly clearing face, gave her a resounding kiss, and set her on her feet.

"Bless the child!" said Doctor Jim, noticing now for the first time the change in appearance. "What's become of our little Barbara? How she's grown up over night!"

"And how her petticoats have grown down!" added Doctor John, backing off to survey her critically. "Tut, tut, the wanton hussy! How did she dare to kiss me! Goodness gracious! To think I had a young woman like that sitting on my lap!"

"You had better be careful what you say, Doctor John," retorted Barbara, firmly, "or I *will* be grown up, and never kiss you or let you hold me on your lap any more!"

"I humbly crave your pardon, gracious fair. I am your most devoted, humble servant!" said Doctor John, setting his heels together at a precise right angle, and bowing profoundly over her hand till his brocaded coat-tails stuck out stiffly behind him.

Barbara rather liked this hand-kissing, after Robert's initiation, and took it

with composure as her due. Why should she not have her hand kissed, as well as Aunt Hitty? But Doctor Jim made his farewell in different fashion.

"I won't have her grow up this way!" he growled, snatching her up and holding her as if he feared she would be taken away from him. "She's just our little Barby, our little, thorny brier-rose! Eh—what?"

"Our *barby* brier-rose, you mean!" interjected Doctor John, with a chuckle.

But every one ignored this poor witticism, and Doctor Jim continued, while Barbara softly kicked her toes against his waistcoat. "It would break my heart to have her grown up, and young missish, and prim. What have you done to her, Mehitable?"

Mistress Mehitable gave a clear little ripple of laughter, flute-like and fresh. She was feeling younger and gayer than she had felt for years.

"I have just tried to carry out your own suggestion, Jim!" said she, cheerfully. "I must say, I think it was a very wise suggestion. I have handed Barbara over to her own care, that's all. I am sorry you don't like the results!"

"Don't worry, Doctor Jim!" cried Barbara, purchasing her release by kissing him hard on both cheeks. "Don't worry about me being changed. I was *born* bad, you know. And I'm afraid I'll be just as bad as ever by to-morrow—except to Aunt Hitty! If I'm bad to you any more, dear,"—and she turned impetuously to Mistress Mehitable, "I'll—I'll—" and feeling a sudden imperious threat of tears, she fled away to her own room. It had been a wonderful, wonderful day for her, and she felt that she must have a little cry at once. On her white bed she wept deliciously. Then she thought, and thought, and thought, and made resolves, in sympathetic communion with her pillow.

In the parlour below, Doctor Jim had said, before leaving:

"I think you are going to get a lot of comfort out of her now, Mehitable, eh, what?"

And Doctor John, troubled by a maudlin kind of moisture about his eyes, had said nothing.

And Mistress Mehitable had said, fervently:

"I hope she is going to get a lot of comfort out of me, Jim. I see that I have been greatly in the wrong!"

CHAPTER XIV.

All the next morning Mistress Mehitable and Barbara were busy overhauling Barbara's frocks. Such as would admit of it were let down some three or four inches. Of the others, two of rich material were laid away in Mistress Mehitable's huge carved oak chest lined with cedar, a repository of varied treasures of the loom. The rest, three in number and plain of weave, were set aside to be given to Mercy Chapman. There was much important planning, much interesting consultation; and in this feminine intimacy they grew ever closer to each other, throwing off the watchful self-consciousness, the sense of admiring and reciprocal discovery, which made them more happy than at ease in each other's company.

Early in the afternoon Barbara decided she would go out to her favourite apple-tree in the back garden and read. She openly took down the second volume of "Clarissa Harlowe,"—having already got through the first volume in

surreptitious moments. Mistress Mehitable discreetly, but with difficulty and some soul-questioning, refrained from admonition. Barbara felt in her heart a faint quaver of trepidation, as she thus frankly assumed her independence; but she had the full courage of her convictions, and outwardly she was calm.

"Mr. Richardson does not seem to me a very strong writer," she remarked at the door,—"especially after one has read those wonderful plays of Mr. Shakespeare and Mr. Ben Jonson, as I did at home in Maryland! But every one should know 'Clarissa,' shouldn't they, dear?"

Mistress Mehitable gasped. She, too, had read those wonderful plays of Mr. Shakespeare and Mr. Ben Jonson. But she was thoroughbred, and gave no sign of her dismay.

"I never liked the lady, myself, dear," she answered, casually. "She always seemed to me rather silly."

This was Barbara's own judgment, and confirmed her new appreciation of her aunt's intelligence. At the same time, this apparently easy acceptance, on Mistress Mehitable's part, of Barbara's emancipation, seemed almost too good to be true. Her heart swelled passionately toward this blue-eyed, calm, patrician little woman, whom she had so long misunderstood. She came back, put a caressing arm around Mistress Mehitable's waist, kissed her fervently, and looked deep into her eyes. Mistress Mehitable actually trembled in the recesses of her soul lest that searching gaze should discover what she had nearly said about young girls and novel-reading! But she kept the blue deeps of her eyes clear and tranquil, and her lips smiled frank response.

"Oh, you are so good and wonderful and wise, honey," Barbara said, at length. "What a foolish, foolish child I've been,—and you, my dear, dear father's sister! Why, just to look at you ought to have brought me to my senses. So *many* ways you look like him!"

Then a thing very remarkable indeed took place. Mistress Mehitable's fine poise wavered and vanished. She almost clutched Barbara to her breast, then buried her head on the firm young shoulders and cried a little quite unrestrainedly, feeling a great ache in her heart for her dead brother Winthrop, and a great love in her heart for her dead brother's child. Barbara was surprised, but greatly touched by this outburst. She held her close, and patted her hair, and called her soft names suddenly remembered from the soft-voiced endearments of plantation days; till presently Mistress Mehitable recovered, and laughed gently through her tears.

"Don't think me silly, dear," she pleaded, "but I've just realised for the first time that you have your dear father's wonderful eyes. Your colouring, and your hair, and your mouth, are all very different from his. But your eyes,—they are his *exactly*. Such wonderful, deep, clear, *true* eyes, Barbara, sometimes sea-gray, sometimes sea-green. Where have my eyes been all this time?"

Barbara sighed happily. "Isn't it lovely we have found each other at last, Aunt Hitty? I don't think it will be so hard now for me to be good!"

Then she picked up "Clarissa" again, and ran gaily out to the garden.

Barbara's apple-tree had three great limbs branching out at about five feet from the ground, forming a most luxurious crotch in which to sit and read. Smaller apple-trees, interspersed with tangled shrubbery and some trellised vines, almost surrounded it, so that on three sides it afforded perfect seclusion. Sweet airs breathed through it, from the neighbouring thyme and mint beds; and sunshine sifted down through its leaves in an intricate and exquisite pattern; and a pair of catbirds, nesting in the shrubs close by, made it their haunt without regard to Barbara's presence. As she looked at this dear nook, with all its memories of intimate hours and dreams, Barbara thought to herself how glad she was that she had not succeeded in running away from Second Westings. She clambered cleverly into the tree, settled herself with a long breath of

satisfaction, swung her little scarlet-shod feet idly too and fro, and made a long, absorbing survey of her green realm. Then, locking her ankles lithely as only a slim girl can, she opened her book, and was soon engrossed in the fortunes of Lovelace and Clarissa.

About the time that Barbara was settling herself in the apple-tree, Robert Gault was triumphantly pushing Barbara's canoe to land through the gold-green sedges on the Second Westings shore of the little lake. With pole and paddle he had made the ascent of the stream from Gault House, having been seized that morning with a violent conviction that it was his duty to return the canoe without delay. He had poled through the rapids, and paddled eagerly through the silent solemnities of the woods, too intent upon his purpose to be alive to their mystic influences. The furtive eyes that watched him from pine-tree boll and ironwood bush, from skyey branch or moss-veiled root, touched not his consciousness. To his self-centred mood the peopled stillness was empty as a desert. His eyes, at other times alert and not uninitiated, were turned inward upon his own dreams. He emerged from the great shadows, paddled through the meadowy windings with their iris-beds and lilies, and passed at length old Debby's clamorous dooryard, giving hardly a glance to the green slope with its ducks and fowls, the little red-doored cabin against its trees, or old Debby herself, with the cock-eared yellow pup beside her, sitting on the stoop. He was in a hurry, and had caught glimpses of the open waters of the lake beyond; and he knew from Barbara's description that Mistress Mehitable's landing-place was straight across the lake.

But old Debby, sitting knitting in the sun with the cock-eared yellow pup beside her, saw him, and chuckled at his haste. She had been over to Second Westings the day before, and had got the whole story from Doctor Jim. She had made up her mind to keep well out of the way, till Barbara's indignation should have time to cool; but she was mightily interested in the youth who had been so readily persuaded to the backing of Barbara's mad venture. A moment later she made up her mind that she must have a good look at him, a word with

him if possible. She got up and hobbled actively down to the shore; but Robert's haste had carried him already beyond earshot.

Following the path up from the lake-shore, Robert crossed the cow-pasture and climbed the bars back of the barn. Here he was met and challenged by Keep, the mastiff, who, with the discernment of a well-bred dog, appreciated Robert's good clothes, nosed his hand cordially, and let him pass without protest. Keep knew a gentleman at a glance, and was convinced that good manners meant good morals. He had no fear of Robert setting fire to the barn.

Seeking a way to the front of the house, Robert passed through the wicket leading into the back garden. Suddenly, between the tall clumps of hollyhocks, he stopped short, and his heart gave a queer little sliding leap. His breath came quick and light, in a way that greatly perplexed him. What he saw to so disturb him was a pair of little scarlet shoes, two small ankles, and a few inches of slim, shapely silk stockings, lithely intertwined, and vividly in evidence beneath a screen of apple-leaves.

Robert did not need any one to tell him that the rest of the bewildering picture, hidden behind the screen of apple-leaves, was the small, inspiring lady, Mistress Barbara Ladd. He hesitated, and was almost on the point of slipping away,—he knew not why, for the life of him. Then, recovering a part of his composure, he stepped forward in trepidation, hat in hand, forgot the graceful speeches on which he was wont to pride himself, and stammered—"Mistress Barbara!—I beg your pardon!"

The slim ankles unlocked, "Clarissa" fell upon the grass, and lightly as a bird Barbara sprang down from her perch, unconscious, unembarrassed, gracious in her greetings. She smiled him radiant welcome, frankly pleased, and held out her hand to be kissed.

"Why, how did you come?" she cried, gaily, "stealing in this way through the back premises?"

"By water, dear lady," he answered, still stammering. "I brought back the canoe, you know!"

"By my dear river, and through the great, still woods!" she exclaimed, looking him over with clear eyes of approval. "How lovely! I wish I'd been with you!"

"I wish you had!" said Robert, with devout conviction.

"But how tired you must be, all that journey against the current. Really, Robert, it was *very* nice of you to come so soon!"

Now Robert was in a sad state of bewilderment, dazzled by eyes and lips and scarlet shoes. And he was further shaken from his customary poise by his perception of Barbara's change in the arrangement of her hair, and by what seemed a sudden increase in her stature through the lengthening of her frocks. Otherwise he would not have been so stupid as to imagine that the promptitude of his coming called for any apology in Barbara's eyes, whatever might be the opinion of Doctor John, or Doctor Jim, or Mistress Mehitable Ladd!

"I thought I ought to come at once, you know," he explained, "to bring back the canoe! Otherwise I should have waited, as I ought, for Mr. Glenowen's coming, and an invitation from him."

"Oh!" said Barbara, her face changing slightly, her voice growing a little cooler. "That was very thoughtful of you. I couldn't sleep for thinking of the canoe!"

Robert looked at her doubtfully, wondering if that were sarcasm in her voice.

"It's a dear canoe. I love it!" said he.

"I wonder you did not want to keep it a little longer, then,—at least, till Uncle Bob could come and send you a proper, formal invitation to bring it back!" said Barbara.

"But I wanted to bring it back now,—I thought it was such a good excuse for coming at once, though I knew I *ought* to have waited for the invitation, of course," persisted Robert, vaguely worried.

"Oh!" exclaimed Barbara, again, allowing herself to be mollified in part, but still feeling a shade of disappointment. She was too inexperienced to appreciate the tribute of Robert's confusion and unexpected awkwardness. She liked him so much better in his grand, elaborate, self-possessed manner, paying stately compliments, making her feel important and grown-up by formal homage. However, he certainly was very nice, and he certainly looked very distinguished; and she realised that, for all his apparent solicitude about returning the canoe, the canoe was not his reason for coming so soon. She would forgive him,—but she would punish him! In fact, she was making progress in the arts of the imperishable feminine.

"Well, we shall *all* be glad to see you, Robert," she said. "And now you must go straight to Doctor Jim, who did invite you, as you seem to have forgotten! You go through that white gate, over there, and turn to the left, and then the first turn to the right puts you right on the main street. You're almost at Doctor Jim's then,—any one will point it out to you."

"But,—I didn't come to see Doctor Jim," protested Robert, much taken aback. "I came to bring back the canoe, you know!"

"Of course, I understand!" said Barbara, sweetly. "Tell Doctor Jim and Doctor John that I want them to bring you back here presently, in an hour or two, to present you to Aunt Hitty, and have tea with us!"

"But can't I stay a *little* while *now*,—while no one knows I am here at all?"

pleaded Robert.

Ordinarily, this was just what would have seemed reasonable and delightful to Barbara. But just now it pleased her to discipline the boy.

"Decidedly *not*, Robert!" said she. "You know how careful you are about etiquette,—so troubled over the idea of coming here at all on the mere invitation of mere me! You shall not talk to me any more till you have been properly presented to Aunt Hitty! Besides, I am just at a *most* interesting place in this lovely book,"—and she snatched 'Clarissa' up from the grass, where it had lain forgotten since Robert's appearance,—"and I can't really take my mind off it till I find out what is going to happen. I will see you in the house, with Aunt Hitty, in—let me see—about an hour and a half! Now go right away!"

Robert looked very miserable, but bowed submission, and backed off.

"How will Mistress Ladd receive me?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Oh," replied Barbara, one small brown hand on the apple-tree as she waited for Robert to depart ere she climbed back to her nook, "Aunt Hitty is just perfect. She will be very nice to you, and will quite approve of you, I know. Since everything has turned out for the best, she has already forgiven you for leading her young niece into mischief the way you did!"

Robert stared at her in speechless amazement. But Barbara would not let him ask any more questions. With a mocking little grimace at his confusion, she pointed to the white gate.

"Go away immediately!" she commanded. "And be sure you come back in an hour and a half!"

Robert turned and strode off with an aggrieved air, between the hollyhock rows. When he was half way to the gate, Barbara, who had stood looking after

him with a smile on her lips, called imperiously:

"Robert!"

He turned quickly, and snatched off his hat.

"What is it, my lady?"

"You forgot to help me into my tree!" said Barbara.

He was beside her in an instant, his face brightening. He knelt on one knee, and held out his two hands firmly locked, to form a sort of stirrup. Setting one light foot into this support, Barbara sprang up and in a flash was perched gracefully in her niche. It was done with such swiftness that Robert had hardly time to realise her foot had touched him. She laughed down upon him with gay commendation.

"That was very handsomely done, indeed, Robert!" she declared. "Now hurry right away to Doctor Jim, or you'll never manage to get back in one hour and a half!" And she buried her eyes in the first page at which "Clarissa" chanced to open.

Robert hesitated, opened his lips as if to speak, and went without a word. Barbara, watching him from the corner of her eye, was puzzled at the look upon his face, but felt satisfied that it was not displeasure. About half-way up the walk toward the gate, when he believed himself unobserved, Robert gazed curiously at the palms wherein the little foot had rested for that fraction of a heart-beat. Light as was the touch, it had left a subtle tingling behind it. He pressed the place to his lips. This action astonished Barbara, but greatly interested her, and gave her, at the same time, an inexplicable thrill. Her heart understood it, indeed, while it remained an enigma to her brain. And purposeless, profitless, absurd though it seemed to her, that Robert should kiss his own hand, she decided nevertheless that in some way the action had

expressed a more fervent homage to her than when the hand that he kissed was hers. She forgot to go on reading the excellent Mr. Richardson's romance.

CHAPTER XV.

Mistress Mehitable liked Robert, whose bearing and breeding were in all ways much to her taste. She had seen him when a babe in arms, just before his father and mother had taken him away from Gault House to New York. So gracious was she, that Robert was filled with wonder as he thought of the piteous story which Barbara had told him in the canoe. But this wonder was as nothing, compared to the amazement with which he viewed the warm affection between Barbara and her aunt. What could it all mean? It was plain that they two understood each other, trusted each other, admired each other, loved each other. He had an uneasy feeling that Barbara had made a fool of him. Then, as his dignity was beginning to feel ruffled, and his grave young face to darken, he would remember other details of that eventful afternoon which forbade him to question the girl's sincerity. At this the cloud would lift. There was a mystery behind it all, of course, which he would doubtless, in his determined fashion, succeed in penetrating. Meanwhile, every one seemed extremely happy,—Barbara gaily, whimsically gracious, Mistress Mehitable composedly glad, Doctor Jim as boisterous in his joy as good manners would permit, Doctor John quizzically approving, and filled with mellow mirth. Robert was made to feel himself an honoured guest, for his own sake as well as for the sake of his parents; and in this cordial atmosphere he soon justified all good opinions. Barbara was intensely gratified with him. She audaciously claimed credit for having discovered him, and rescued him from the barbaric wilderness that lay beyond Second Westings. She began to plan expeditions and amusements to

make his visit memorable; and when he announced his intention of returning to Gault House on the morrow, there was a unanimous protest. Mistress Mehitable said it was not to be heard of, for one moment. Doctor Jim growled that his hospitality was not to be flouted in any such fashion. Doctor John levelled bushy eyebrows at him, and suggested that no true Gault would run away in the hour of triumph.

"You will do nothing of the kind, Robert," decreed Barbara, with finality. "We want you here. I wonder you are not ashamed, after all the trouble you made for us so lately, when you were old enough and big enough to know better!"

Robert's face flushed with pleasure at all this warmth; and he hugely wanted to stay. But with astonishing discretion he refused to be persuaded. Some intuition taught him the wisdom of timely reserve. Without at all formulating any theory on the subject, which would have been impossible to such inexperience as his, he felt instinctively that at this moment, when she was most gracious to him, a judicious absence would best fix him in Barbara's interest. He said there were matters to be attended to for his grandmother which would not well bear delay. At this unexpected firmness on the part of her cavalier, Barbara was so annoyed that for nearly an hour she seemed to forget his existence; but Robert hid his discomfort under an easy cheerfulness, and no one else seemed to notice the passing shadow. Mistress Mehitable insisted that the guests should stay to sup with her and Barbara; and the boy's coming was made a little festival. Mistress Mehitable was one of those notable housekeepers who seem to accomplish great things with little effort by being craftily forehanded. Before anything was said of supper she had vanished for a few minutes to the kitchen; and in those few minutes she had planned with Abby for a repast worthy the event. The larder of the Ladd homestead was kept victualled beyond peril of any surprise; and Mistress Mehitable, for all her ethereal mould and mien, believed in the efficacy of good eating and good drinking. Well regulated lives, she held, should also be well nourished, and her Puritan conscience was not

illiberal in regard to the seemly pleasures of the board.

Both Doctor John and Doctor Jim, as befitted their stature, were valiant trenchermen; and Robert was a boy; and the lavish delicacies of Abby's serving met with that reception which was the best tribute to their worth. Gaiety made herself handmaid to appetite; and the ale was nutty-mellow from last October; and Mistress Mehitable's old Madeira wine, of which herself partook but sparingly, was fiery-pungent on the tongue. As she toasted him, and her blue eyes sparkled upon him over the glass, Robert wondered anew how Barbara could have wanted to run away from so admirable an aunt. As for Barbara, reduced for a little to silence by supreme content, she sipped at her Angelica cordial, surveyed Mistress Mehitable with grateful ardour, and took it all as largess to herself.

At last, with a happy sigh, she cried, "Oh, if only Uncle Bob could have come in time for this!" And so electric with sympathy was the air that on the word every eye turned and glanced at the door, as if expecting that a wish so well-timed might bring fruition on the instant. There was silence for some seconds.

Then Mistress Mehitable said, "He will be here in a very few days, dear! And then you, Robert, must come to us again without delay. I agree with Barbara that nothing I can think of except Mr. Glenowen's presence could add to our happiness to-night!"

After supper there was music in the candle-lit drawing-room, Mistress Mehitable having a rare gift for the harpsichord, and Doctor Jim a nice art in the rendering of certain old English ballads of the robuster sort. Where they might have seemed to the ladies' ears a trifle more robust than nice, Doctor Jim had fined them down to a fitting delicacy. But they suited his rolling bass, and he loved them because, being Cavalier-born, they appealed to his king-loving sympathies. Doctor Jim was an exemplary Congregationalist, but solely by

force of environment, Congregationalism being the creed of all the gentry of that region. Episcopalianism he looked upon with a distrust mingled with affection; but in all other respects he was a king's man, through and through, an aristocrat, and a good-natured scorner of the masses. It was a stupendous triumph for accident and atmosphere to have succeeded in fitting Doctor Jim to his inherited environment of Second Westings. His Congregationalism was a thing that might conceivably be changed to meet changed conditions; while his Toryism was bred in the bone. With Mistress Mehitable, on the other hand, her Congregationalism was deep-rooted, a matter of conscience. It was by conscience, too, no less than by blood, that she was an aristocrat. She was a royalist, a Tory, no less unquestioning than Doctor Jim, but this by a chance election of that strenuous conscience which, by a different chance twist, would have made her an equally sincere Whig.

When Doctor Jim had sung till Doctor John told him he was getting hoarse and spoiling his voice, Barbara, in a burst of daring, started up a wild plantation song, patting her accompaniment. To Mistress Mehitable, as to Robert, this was an undreamed novelty, and their eyes opened wide in wonder. At first they thought it barbarous, but in a few minutes the piquing rhythms and irresponsible cadences caught them, and they listened in rapture. Barbara's store of these songs was a rich one, and she had perfected the rendering in many a secret performance to the audience of Doctor John and Doctor Jim. When she was quite sure of the effect she was producing, she sprang to her feet, flung her hair loose by a quick movement of both hands, and began to dance as she sang. And now, to the ever-growing amazement of Mistress Mehitable, Doctor Jim took up the patting, while Doctor John, seating himself at the harpsichord, began a strange staccato picking of the keys. Then Barbara stopped singing, and gave herself up wholly to the dance. She danced with arms and hands and head and feet, and every slender curve of her young body. She moved like flames. Her eyes and lips and teeth were a radiance through the live, streaming darknesses of her hair. Light, swift, unerring, ecstatic, it was like the most impassioned of bird-songs translated into terms of pure motion. Doctor John

played faster and faster his wild, monotonous melody. Doctor Jim patted harder and harder. Barbara's dance grew madder and stranger, till at last, with a little breathless cry that was half a sob, she stopped, darted across the room, flung herself down, and buried her dishevelled head in Mistress Mehitable's lap.

On ordinary occasions Mistress Mehitable would have felt inclined to hold that anything so extraordinary, so utterly outside the range of all conceptions, and at the same time so very beautiful, must be wrong. Now, however, she was under the spell of Barbara and under the spell of the whole situation. "I cannot see any possible harm in it!" she said to herself. And to Barbara she said, tenderly and deftly arranging the disordered locks:

"Most beautiful, and most singular, dear. I suppose that is your *dance* of 'Maryland Memories,' is it not? It seems to me not only amazingly beautiful, but as if it might be the most wholesome and desirable of exercises."

Barbara gurgled a gasping laugh from the depths of Mistress Mehitable's taffeta. It had never occurred to her that these mad negro dances, in which she found expression for so much in herself which she did not understand, could be regarded in the light of exercise. But she was glad indeed if they could be so regarded by Aunt Hitty.

"Oh, yes, honey," she agreed, in haste. "I'm *sure* it's wholesome; and I *know* it's *desirable*,—isn't it?"

This appeal was to every one, but it was Robert, at last awaking from his rapture and finding breath, who answered:

"There was never anything else so wonderful in all the world," he said, solemnly.

Doctor John and Doctor Jim, with one impulse, jumped up, each seized one of Barbara's hands, and plucked her to her feet. They then stood hand in hand

in a row before Mistress Mehitable and Robert, bowing their thanks for such appreciation of their poor efforts to please.

"We are going to London to perform before the king!" declared Doctor Jim.

Mistress Mehitable gravely took a shilling from her purse, and bestowed it upon Doctor John because he was the tallest. He pretended to spit on it, for luck, but kissed it instead, and slipped it into the bosom of his ruffled shirt. When the approving laughter had subsided, Mistress Mehitable said, musingly:

"I see now how you have been teaching Barbara her Latin. It was that peculiar dialect of Latin that prevails in Maryland!"

After this a sack posset was mixed by Mistress Mehitable, with the eager assistance of every one but Robert, who was still too much possessed by Barbara's dancing to do more than stand about and get in the way, and smile a gravely fatuous smile whenever spoken to.

When the posset began to go around, calling forth encomiums at every sip, Doctor Jim demanded the cards. There was silence. To Robert, just from the Tory circles of New York, it seemed the most natural thing in the world. To Barbara it seemed natural, but foreign to Mistress Mehitable and Second Westings. To Doctor John it seemed right and desirable, but he chuckled and said nothing, being aware of Mistress Mehitable's views. And this time Mistress Mehitable was firm.

"No, Jim," said she, "we won't play. I know good people do play,—people who know just as well as I do what is right and what is wrong. But for some reason card-playing does not seem right to me. You know Doctor Sawyer would strongly disapprove!"

"Officially, that's all, dear lady!" corrected Doctor John.

"But you have them in the house,—yonder in that very drawer, most gracious mistress!" persisted Doctor Jim.

"My dear father used them," confessed Mistress Mehitable. "Therefore I would not for a moment think of refusing to have them in my house. But I think it is better not to play, Jim."

And though Mistress Mehitable spoke with appeal and apology rather than with decision, the matter was plainly settled. There was nothing to do but tell riddles and drink up the rest of the posset. The pervading satisfaction was in no way checked by Doctor Jim's failure, for all agreed that cards were stupid anyway. Barbara, in spite of her excitement, and to her intense self-disgust, began to grow sleepy. She was horribly afraid she might show it, which, for one but forty-eight hours grown-up, would have been humiliating beyond words. She felt herself divided between a fear lest so perfect an evening should end too soon, and an equally harassing fear lest it should end not soon enough. At length the keen and loving eyes of Doctor John discerned her trouble; and at the dissolute hour of half-past ten he broke up the party. Adieux were made with a warmth, an abandon of homage held in fetters of elaborate courtliness, which might have seemed excessive at a less propitious conjunction of time and sentiment. At last the three, Doctor John, Doctor Jim, and Robert, found themselves arm-in-arm on the street, and all talking at once, overbrimming with happiness and reciprocal congratulations, as they took their discreet way homeward.

Barbara and Mistress Mehitable, left alone, silently put out the lights. Then, each lighting her candle, they paused at the head of the stairs to say good night. Each set down her candle on the little mahogany table under the clock, and looked into the other's eyes. Barbara was first to break the sweet but too searching scrutiny. She flung both arms around Mistress Mehitable's neck, and kissed her with a tremulous fervour that told much. Mistress Mehitable, whose eyes were brighter than Barbara had ever guessed that they could be, pressed

her in a close embrace which concealed much, even from Mistress Mehitable herself. Then Barbara, after whispering something to the kittens, went straight to bed, and straight to sleep. But Mistress Mehitable sat looking out of her window.

CHAPTER XVI.

It had been arranged that Robert should borrow a horse from Doctor John's stables, ride it over to Gault House, and keep it there till his return to Second Westings. But as he was strolling down the village street before breakfast, he saw, in a paddock beside an unpretentious cottage, a splendid Narragansett pacer, a dark sorrel, one of the handsomest of the breed that he had ever seen. He had long coveted one of these horses, famous in all the thirteen colonies for their easy gait, speed over rough country, and unparalleled endurance. With characteristic promptness in getting to his point, he went in, interviewed the owner, tried the horse, loved it, and asked the price. The owner was not anxious to sell; but when he found out who the would-be purchaser was, and the liberal price he was ready to pay, the prospect of an immediate draft on the bank at Hartford proved irresistible, and Robert rode off with his prize. He knew horse-flesh, and did not grudge the price; and both Doctor John and Doctor Jim, who knew this sorrel pacer well, were constrained to commend the purchase, though to them it seemed that so weighty an action demanded, if but for form's sake, the tribute of delay and pondering.

"Buy a horse like that, Robert, in three shakes of a ram's tail? It's undignified!" roared Doctor Jim, eyeing the beast with unmixed approbation. "It's an insult to the horse. And it's a slight upon the value of our assistance, you

cock-sure young rascal. But it's just the mulish way your father would have gone and done it, so I suppose we must forgive you."

Doctor John, meanwhile, had been handling the beast critically, and looking at its teeth.

"Worth all you gave for him, Bobby; and not a day over five years old!" was the verdict. "I see you're old enough to go about alone. Don't you mind what Jim Pigeon says. He'd have had you run to him and ask if you might have a horse of your own, and then get him and me to go down and look at the beast, and come back here and talk it all over in council, and then go back and bully Enoch Barnes some more about the price, and then all three of us ride the beast up to Mistress Mehitable's, to ask the opinion of her and Barbara on the subject, and then—"

But Robert interrupted at this point in the tirade.

"That *would* have been a good idea," he asserted, regretfully. "I wish I had thought to consult the ladies. But, you know, I *knew* that horse was just the one I'd so long been wanting the moment I set eyes on him. So I didn't dare wait, lest some one else should come along and snap him up. Of course you both know a thousand times more about horses than I do,—but I knew enough to know I wanted this one!"

"You *generally* seem to know what you want, Master Gault!" said Doctor Jim. "And you seem like to get it, generally, if I don't mistake the cut of you,—eh, what?"

"Tut, tut," said Doctor John, scowling upon him quizzically. "That's all very well as far as horses are concerned, and men! But wait till it comes to women, Robert. You've a lot to learn, my son. If I'm not much mistaken, you'll be taught a lot, and not spared in the teaching!"

"I'm always anxious to learn," answered Robert, modestly.

"You will! You will!" said Doctor John.

Breakfast was a substantial meal of boiled "Yokeag" with molasses, and broiled salmon, and venison cutlets, and fried ham, and rich guava jelly from the West Indies. Robert was surprised to see each of his friends preface the repast with a quart mug of the hardest and headiest old cider, he himself being accustomed to a small cup of light ale merely, or a sip of claret, at this hour. Both Doctor John and Doctor Jim assured him that there was nothing like sound cider to tone up the stomach for its day's adventures; and on their advice he tried it, though sparingly, and therefore with no tragic results.

After breakfast, he was so obviously restless that the big-hearted brothers made no effort to detain him. With heavy hands upon his shoulders, they told him to make the least possible delay in his return, and to bear in mind how warm the welcome ever awaiting him at Second Westings.

"How like to Richard in the saddle!" exclaimed Doctor John, when Robert had mounted the sorrel pacer.

"And that's a compliment not many a lad of your age could win, my son!" said Doctor John.

Robert's dark face flushed with pleasure.

"I try hard to be as like my father as possible," said he. "Don't you think I might properly ride around and pay my respects to the ladies before I leave?"

"Unquestionably you might! 'Pon my word a capital idea!" laughed Doctor Jim, with huge derision.

"Unquestionably, my boy, you would find yourself in hot water if you didn't!"

said Doctor John.

So Robert, without more ado, turned the head of his Narragansett pacer toward Westings House, whose wide white gables were partly visible through the trees.

A very erect, graceful, and masterful young figure he made, as he reined in his tall sorrel before Mistress Mehitable's porch. Mistress Mehitable from her window above had seen him coming, and was on the steps to greet him. He flung himself from the saddle, kissed her hand deferentially, thanked her with fervour for her delightful hospitality,—and at the same time cast a solicitous eye about the walks and windows, wondering where Barbara could be. Mistress Mehitable had an amused smile, but would not help him. She said polite things, and assured him of the pleasure with which she would look forward to his next visit,—and even added that he had better not postpone that next visit beyond five or six days, or a week at most, as Mr. Glenowen was expected at once, and might not be able to stay long at Second Westings. But of Barbara she said not a word. Robert showed her, with pride, his sorrel pacer, related with an abstracted air the circumstances of its purchase, and enlarged upon the special merits of the breed, while Mistress Mehitable patted the silky white nose, and murmured boundless admiration. But still no sign, no word, of Barbara.

At last Robert could contain himself no longer.

"I ought to be on the road," he stammered, "but I should be sorry to leave without making my adieux to Mistress Barbara. Is she within?"

"She went out about half an hour ago!" said Mistress Mehitable, "and did not say where she was going!"

Robert's face fell so pathetically that Mistress Mehitable felt a little flush of resentment against Barbara for her cruelty.

"She left kindest messages for you," she continued, hastily. "She told me to say how sorry she was not to see you this morning, and that she would never forgive you if you did not come again to Second Westings very soon. And I was to say good-bye to you for her!"

"I thank you," said Robert, heavily. "Pray you give her my devotions, and tell her how grieved I am to be denied the privilege of paying them in person. I kiss your hand again, dear Mistress Ladd!" And with that he rode off musingly, through a morning whose sunlight had on the sudden lost its sparkle, whose spicy airs had all at once lost their zest. His pride in the new pacer, which he had hoped to show off to Barbara, was all fallen flat. He forced the restive beast to walk soberly for some moments. Then a swift heat of anger, a sense of undeserved injury, went over him. He swore he would come no more to Second Westings all that summer; and setting spurs to the willing sorrel, he tore away down the road at a pounding gallop.

CHAPTER XVII.

The road toward Westings Landing, which was the shortest way to Gault House, was joined about a mile out by another, equally rough and unfriendly to travel, coming from Westings Centre. Robert had passed this junction at full gallop, but a few rods beyond a stretch of mire compelled him to rein in and pick his way. As he did so he caught a sound of beating hoofs behind him, and turned in the saddle to see who came.

Careering recklessly down the road from Westings Centre, her black curls flying from beneath the rim of her little white beaver, came a slim figure in a black habit on a great black horse. She burst into a peal of laughter as Robert turned, and cried, gaily:

"I'm coming. Wait for me, Robert!"

Robert wheeled his horse as if on a pivot, fairly lifted him with voice and spur, and was with her in a few great strides.

"You!" was all his voice could say; but his face said so much more that the greeting did not seem curt to Barbara. Her small face was radiant with excitement, audacity, and delight. At the beginning of the miry ground she reined in, patted her beast's wet neck, and said, breathlessly:

"I thought you might like me to ride a little way with you, Robert, to make sure of your getting the right road. Wasn't it very nice of me,—when you don't one bit deserve any such attention?"

"You are an angel!" cried Robert, in an ecstasy.

Barbara laughed clear and high at this.

"*Oh!*" she shrilled, melodiously derisive, "that's what *I* think I am, of course. But no one has ever agreed with me after knowing me more than three days. This is your third day, Robert. It's well for me you're going while you labour under this flattering delusion."

"It's no delusion," averred Robert, stoutly, far past wit, and with no weapon left but bluntness. "You are the loveliest thing in the world."

This, in Barbara's own opinion, was nonsense. But she liked to hear him say it, nonsense or not. She pondered for a moment, her face turned away indifferently, that he might not see she was pleased.

"You contradict yourself," she retorted. "You know angels are not in the world!"

"One is!" said Robert.

"I like you so much better, Robert, when you're saying clever things like that," said Barbara, patronisingly, "than when you are just stupid, and don't do anything but just look at me, as you do sometimes!"

She was too young to know that when a man can be witty with a woman he is not, at the moment, so engrossed in her but that he is able to think of himself.

Before Robert could reply they were past the miry ground, and Barbara had once more set her black horse at the gallop. The sorrel needed no urging to follow,—and indeed, for a few minutes both riders were fully occupied in preventing the ride from degenerating into a headlong race, so emulous were the two horses. The road was still very bad, broken with ruts, holes, and boulders, and the pace was therefore full of peril. The black just escaped plunging his fore legs into a bog-hole, and the narrowness of the escape seemed to make him lose nerve. Robert saw with anxiety that Barbara, though her horsemanship equalled her canoeing, was just now in a far too reckless mood.

"Wait, please, my dear lady," he begged. "This is no road for fast riding. That good beast of yours just escaped a bad fall, and he's a bit nervous. Let's walk them till we get to better ground."

But Barbara had not noticed her escape, and she was thrilling with exhilaration. She did not know how beside herself she was.

"If you're afraid, follow at your own pace!" she cried, mockingly. "*I* came out to *ride*!" And with a wild word of encouragement to the black, and a throwing forward of the reins upon his neck, she shot on at full speed.

"I *beg* you don't be so reckless!" cried Robert. "You will get a bad fall riding this way on such a road!" There was intensest anxiety in his voice, but the faintest tinge of reproof went with it, as Barbara's sensitive pride was quick to discern.

"I shall ride as recklessly as I please," said she. "But don't let that trouble you. Be careful if you like. Ride like an old woman if you like!"

This taunt did not touch Robert, as he knew the quality of his own horsemanship,—which, indeed, Barbara's attentive eyes had been quick to note. But the mood it betrayed alarmed and half angered him. He saw in fancy that fleeing, daring, wayward little figure stretched lifeless on the roadside, the radiant face white and still. His own face paled and his jaw set obstinately as he urged forward his big sorrel in silence.

The new horse proved worthy of Narragansett fame. Over the worst ground his peculiar pace carried him with an ease which the big black's heavy tread could not match. And when the ground was firmer, and he could stretch out at full run, he soon closed up the gap between himself and his rival. This nettled Barbara, who thought her Black Prince a record-breaker; and she even went so far as to wave her riding-crop, as if she might be inclined to use it on this beast, which had never felt the whip. Nevertheless, the heavy hoof-beats

behind crept closer; and soon the sorrel's nose was at her stirrup; and then Robert's stirrup and his knee were level with her own,—and with a quick sidelong glance she caught the grim resolve on his dark face. She was feeling by this time the least bit ashamed of herself, and awaking to the risks of the road, so she said, sweetly:

"That's a *splendid* horse of yours, Robert. And you can ride!"

"Thank you, Mistress Barbara!" said Robert, unmollified. And just then the road straightened out, a stretch of hard, dry level, inviting to the loose rein and the unchecked run.

"There's no danger *here*, Master Careful!" cried Barbara.

"No, not here,—except branches!" acknowledged Robert, drawing a deep breath of relief.

And now for more than a mile the road was good. It wound in slow curves, the high-branched ash and white maple meeting over it in stately arches. Under foot it was hard and fairly even, with a thin turf between the shallow ruts. Sunlight and shadow flecked it in vivid patches; and the summer winds, which were blowing briskly in the open, breathed down this sheltered corridor only as half-stirred exhalations of faint perfume. Neck by neck the horses galloped, their riders silent, looking straight ahead, but thrillingly conscious of each other's nearness. And the strong rhythm of the hoof-beats beneath them seemed to time itself to the rushing of their blood. It was now no longer with vexation, but with a sort of half pride, that Barbara realised the superiority of the sorrel over her own mount. She saw that only Robert's firm hand on the rein kept his beast from forging ahead. Thus they rushed along through the vast solitudes,—really alone together, although those solitudes were populous with the furtive kindreds of fur and feather. For the sound of their coming travelled far before them, and gave the shy folk time to withdraw from such unwelcome intrusion. Even the big black bear,—he whom Barbara had seen tearing the ant-log,—now withdrew

as noiselessly and shyly as the wood-mouse, not delaying for even a glance at the two wild riders. Only the red squirrel, inquisitive, daring, and impudent, stuck to his vantage-post on a high-arched limb and jabbered shrill derision at them as they raced by.

At length, just as the intoxication of the ride and the companionship were beginning to bewilder his brain, a turn of the road showed Robert a stretch of very bad ground right ahead. The careless roadmakers had tried, in a half-hearted way, to fill up a long bog with brush and poles. Had the attempt been fully carried out, the result would have been a rough but thoroughly passable piece of "corduroy road." As it was, however, the brush and poles together had in spots sunk a foot below the surface, at one side or the other, and in other spots had been quite engulfed by the hungry black mire, making that stretch the curse of wheel-travellers, and perilous enough to any but the most cautious horsemen.

The sight cooled Robert's nerves. Instead of reining in, however, he let his beast push a half-length to the front, that he might the better control the situation if need should arise. Then he said, resolutely:

"If you have no care for your own life, dear lady, I beg you to think of that good beast of yours. He will break a leg in yon bog-holes, and then he will have to be shot!"

Barbara had been fully prepared, by now, to listen to reason and check the pace. She knew she had been unreasoning in her excitement. But the fact that Robert knew she had been unreasonable, and dared to show, by his tone as well as by his argument, that he knew it, stirred a hot resentment in her heart. In a flash she forgot that she had ever been unreasonable at all. Her first impulse was to spur on with added speed. Had it been her own neck, merely, that she would risk, she would not have hesitated. But Robert had hit on the one compelling plea. She could not face the risk of hurt to her horse, or to any kindly beast whatever. She reined in sharply, therefore, without a word; and at

a walk the two horses began to pick their wary way over the corduroy.

"There's danger to the good beasts, even at this pace," remarked Robert, with more truthfulness than tact.

"Did you suppose," retorted Barbara, in a voice of withering scorn, "that I was going to ride my Black Prince at a gallop over such a piece of road as this?"

This was exactly what Robert had supposed, of course. But a sudden ray of insight entering his candid brain in time, he refrained from saying so. He was on the point of saying, however, by way of explanation, that the ground which Barbara had already insisted upon traversing at full speed was but little better than this; but here, too, a sharpening perception checked him. He kept silence, seemingly absorbed in guiding his horse between the miry pitfalls, until they found themselves once again on firm ground,—firm but rough. The horses, still apprehensive, showed no disposition to resume their vehement gait.

"It's an outrage," cried Robert, "that the township should permit such a piece of road as this. I shall have a voice in affairs here in three or four years, and then I'll see that the road-work is properly done. I'll have no traps in this township to break good horses' legs!"

This sentiment was so much to Barbara's taste that she found it an excuse for being mollified.

"That's right, Robert!" she answered, very graciously. "Now, be sure you remember that when the time comes!"

"I'll remember it," cried Robert, with cheerful confidence.

By this time, when the leisurely walking of the horses offered no affront to the forest quiet, the birds were resuming their busy calls and the bustle of their intimate affairs; and the less shy members of the furry fellowship went once

more about their business in the busy precincts of the road. Barbara's sympathetic and unerring vision singled them out, differentiating them from their harmonious surroundings, when Robert's eye, as a rule, could not without help see anything but lichened stumps and stones, or bunches of brown weed, or odd-shaped excrescences on the trees. Yet Robert's eye was the eye of the hunter, skilled in the ruses of all quarry. Barbara's woodcraft went immeasurably beyond his,—and perceiving this, her last resentment faded out and she began to initiate him. She named and distinguished for him birds of which he had never even heard, and corrected him with gleeful pride when he innocently mistook the cry of a woodpecker for that of a jay. As for Robert, his delight in this initiation was second only to his delight in his wilful initiator, who was now all earnestness and to him a marvel of abstruse erudition. He learned very quickly, however, and so Barbara was pleased not less by his comparative ignorance than by his superlative aptitude, which was an incense of flattery to his instructress. Only on the subject of deer and grouse Barbara could teach him nothing.

"You know all about those," she cried, reproachfully, "because you have taken the trouble to learn about them, so you can kill them!"

"It does seem a pity to kill such lovely, interesting creatures," acknowledged the lad, thoughtfully. "But what can we do? Surely they were given to us for our use. Providence intended them for our food. It must be right for us to kill them!"

"Of course," assented Barbara, unequipped with any philosophy which might have enabled her to combat this argument. "Of course, it is right for us to *eat* them. But you, Robert, you *take pleasure* in *killing* them. I don't quite like you for that!"

Robert's face grew more and more thoughtful, for this was to him a hard saying, indeed, and he had no answer ready. He was a skilled shot and a keen huntsman.

"I could not understand a man not taking pleasure in the chase," said he, "but I suppose if he got to know the wild things intimately, and love them, as you do, he could no longer bear to kill them, sweet lady!"

"I'm going to teach you to love them all, Robert," said Barbara, easily confident in her powers.

"I am taught already," he began, with the little elaborate air which Barbara liked. Then he changed his mind quickly. "No, I don't mean that at all! I shall need a great many lessons; but I shall learn at last, if you teach me faithfully!"

Barbara laughed, a clear, ringing laugh, that astonished the lurking weasel and made the red squirrel highly indignant.

"You don't mean anything at all you say, Robert. You just like to say pretty things!"

Which was wantonly unjust, as Barbara knew, and as her very gracious glance acknowledged.

A few rods farther on, Barbara suddenly drew rein, wheeled her horse about, and held out her hand.

"Now I must go home, Robert. I think I can trust you to find the rest of the way alone! Don't forget what I've told you. And don't forget to come and see Uncle Bob, the very first of next week. And thank you so much for bringing back the canoe."

Robert had promptly taken the little brown hand, and kissed it with somewhat more fervour than form required, till Barbara, without any sign of displeasure, snatched it away. Then, instead of saying good-bye, he wheeled his big sorrel. "You must allow me the honour of riding back with you, Mistress Barbara," said he.

"No, indeed!" cried the girl. "I cannot think of letting you do any such thing. It will be late enough as it is when you get to Gault House!"

Robert's mind was quite made up, but he scanned her face anxiously to see if she really meant her inhibition. Her dancing eyes and laughing mouth convinced him that she did not mean it with any serious conviction, so his obstinate jaw relaxed.

"Allow you to ride back through these woods alone, my lady?" he protested, gaily. "Do you think the wood spirits would let slip such an opportunity to carry off their queen? You are theirs, by rights, I know. But I must see you back safely into the hands of Mistress Mehitable."

So it came about that, in spite of his exigencies, Robert dined at Mistress Mehitable's, and did not start for Gault House till long past noon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Two days later Mr. Robert Glenowen arrived at Second Westings by the Hartford coach, alighting to be publicly kissed and embraced with a heedless fervour which would have been a scandal to the community, had not the community by this time grown accustomed to Barbara's joyous flouting of its conventions. Barbara had established for herself a general privilege, and Second Westings had ceased to do more than lift its eyebrows.

"It's the same Barbara, the same naughty little baggage of mine I left two years ago, for all that her petticoats are longer, and her lovelocks shorter, and she takes the trouble to powder her saucy little nose!" said Mr. Glenowen,

presently, holding her at arms' length, and eyeing her with critical approval.

Barbara endured the scrutiny for a moment or two, then her dark cheeks flushed, her lips pouted, and she impetuously thrust herself again into his arms.

"I have grown up since you saw me, Uncle Bob!" she cried, kissing him on both cheeks.

"Whose fault is that?" he asked, again pushing her away that he might search her eyes.

"Aunt Kitty's!" answered Barbara, innocently, her eyes as clear as a child's.

Mr. Glenowen laughed, held her with his left arm about her slim waist, and stepped up toward the inn door to greet Doctor John and Doctor Jim, who had held themselves in the background that Barbara might have the first greetings uninterrupted.

A few minutes later the four were on the way to Mistress Mehitable's, walking up the middle of the street. Barbara and her uncle, arm in arm, walked between, with the great bulks of Doctor John and Doctor Jim on either side, seeming to overshadow them; while a little way behind trudged Amos, in his blue duffle shirt and leather breeches, carrying the baggage.

In this position, framed as it were and set off by Doctor John and Doctor Jim, the likeness between Barbara and her uncle came out as never before, so that both the brothers exclaimed at it together. Glenowen was a shade above middle height, with square, athletic shoulders, and no suggestion of leanness; but he had the same indescribable lightness, swiftness, fineness of bearing, which characterised Barbara. Under his very smart three-cornered hat of black beaver with its fashionable rosette, his thick, bronze-black, vigorous hair, which was worn in a queue and tied with an ample ribbon, had the same rebellious wave in it that Barbara's had. His face, like Barbara's, was short, with slightly rounded forehead, rounded chin, firm jaw, cheeks somewhat thin, lips full and

passionate. But Barbara's mouth was sad, while Glenowen's was laughing, daring, tender; and Barbara's eyes were of a transparent, fathomless, gray-green, sometimes flaming, sometimes darkly inscrutable, while Glenowen's were of a sunny, merry brown, darkening and growing keen as steel when he was intent. As he was carrying his gauntlet gloves of light, American-made goat-leather, the further likeness to Barbara came out in his bare hands, which were dark and slender and fine like hers, with long-oval, polished, aristocratic nails. Barbara herself would never wear gloves about Second Westings in summer, save at meeting, or when riding, or in pulling herbs or cutting flowers. She loved nice gloves, as a dainty and suggestive article of toilet; but she loved the freedom of her little, sensitive fingers, and felt that Second Westings had no atmosphere to fit the suggestion of gloved hands. It was manifest that Barbara was chiefly a Glenowen,—but it was equally manifest that her eyes were the eyes of the Ladds; for they were profoundly different from those of her Uncle Bob, and so far as enigmatic gray-green could resemble untroubled sky-blue, they were like to the deep, transparent eyes of Mistress Mehitable.

Mr. Glenowen brought to Second Westings a lot of presents for Barbara, a whiff of freshness from the outside world, and an indefinable sense of ferment and change. It was as if the far-off tales of strife between king and colonies ceased on the sudden to be like the affairs of story-books, and became crystallised, by the visitor's mere presence, into matters of vital import. A premonition of vast events flashed through the quiet heart of the village; and from the day of the arrival of Mr. Robert Glenowen by the Hartford coach, the repose of Second Westings was never again quite the same.

Yet Glenowen at this time was no partisan. He was merely in active touch with the troubles of the time, and vexatiously divided within himself. By sentiment, taste, and tradition a Tory, and by intellectual conviction a Whig, he shunned rather than courted argument in which he could heartily support neither side. Nevertheless, before dinner was over, all the company, save Barbara, were at him,—Mistress Mehitable and Doctor Jim on the one side, and Doctor

John, with whimsical insinuations and Parthian shafts, on the other. As for Barbara, she was too happy to care whether kings thwarted colonies or colonies thwarted kings, so long as she might sit in unwonted and radiant silence and beam upon her Uncle Bob.

But Mr. Glenowen was not to be entrapped into any serious discussions so soon after his journey. He showed an unmistakable and determined desire to play. Barbara's one curl, where he had been wont to see many, was of concern to him. Her one kitten—now admitted to the dignified precincts of the dining-room since the other two had been given away, the day before, to Doctor Jim and Mercy Chapman respectively—appeared to him of more concern than Mr. Adams or Lord North. He was brimful of appreciative merriment over the story of Barbara's adventurous voyage, and troublesomely interrogative as to the various attributes of Robert. He had attentive inquiries for old Debby, and Mercy Chapman, and Keep, and the Reverend Jonathan Sawyer, and Black Prince, and many others whom none would have dreamed he could remember after two years of well-occupied absence. By the time dinner was over none had achieved to know whether Uncle Bob would call himself Tory or Whig. Barbara, of course, felt confident that he was a joyously established rebel; while Doctor Jim was equally sure he was a king's man through and through. The others were in doubt.

Nor was Mr. Glenowen more communicative when the meal was done. He was then too impatient even to smoke his pipe, for haste to get at his travelling-bags and show Barbara what he had brought for her. As he pulled out these treasures one by one, Barbara forgot all the dignity of her lengthened frocks, and screamed with delight, and kissed him spasmodically, and exhausted her rich vocabulary of endearments in the vain effort to give her rapture words; till Doctor John and Doctor Jim vowed they would have to go a journey themselves ere long, if only to bring Barbara presents and find out in person how sweet she could be. While Mistress Mehitable remarked demurely that "such knowledge of what would please a woman could only have been attained by more assiduity in effort than was quite becoming, surely, in a bachelor!"

"I hope, dear mistress," retorted Uncle Bob, with laughing eyes, "that the discernment with which you so generously credit me did not fail when I was selecting this little gift, unmeet as it is to adorn your charms." And on one knee he presented to her a bundle in green tissue, tied delicately with gilt cord.

All crowded about Mistress Mehitable while she undid the cord, and unfolded, with blushes, and with little breathless exclamations not unworthy of Barbara herself, an elaborately ruffled and laced French night-rail, embroidered heavily with silk, and lettered in gold thread with her initials.

It was such a gown as often served to make bedroom receptions popular. And Mistress Mehitable, though she held those customs in scorn as indolent and frivolous, had a healthy feminine delight in such sweet fripperies of apparel as this creation of French art. Amid the clamour of applause it was some moments before she could word her acknowledgments. At last she said:

"I shall perhaps thank you less fervently than I do now, Mr. Glenowen, for this delightful present, when its fascinations keep me from sleeping. I'm afraid I shall lie awake just to appreciate it!"

"Sleep, rather, I beg you, fair mistress, and honour me with some small place in your dreams!" cried Uncle Bob, gallantly.

"Fie! Fie! Fie!" said Mistress Mehitable, shaking at him a slim, reproving finger. "You must not put such gallantries into these young people's heads. Doctor Jim is steady enough, but such notions are very upsetting to John and Barbara!"

"Glenowen, you young scoundrel, sir!" roared Doctor Jim, "what do you mean by coming in here and turning our girls' heads with your bold compliments and French night-rails? I marvel at your devilish audacity, sir! You'll have trouble on your hands before you know what you're about,—eh, what?"

Uncle Bob was darting around the room like a pleased boy, delighted with the effect he had produced, delighted with his success in pleasing Mistress Mehitable, and in bringing out the gayer, brighter side of her conscience-burdened spirit.

"Pistols, Pigeon! Pistols let it be, this very night after moonset, under Mistress Mehitable's window!" he cried, slapping Doctor Jim's great shoulders. "I give you fair warning I shall bring the dear lady a far handsomer one the next time I come!"

Barbara, meanwhile, and Mistress Mehitable, and Doctor John, had their heads close together over the intricate and beautiful embroidery, admiring each fine detail in careful succession.

"It is *perfectly beautiful*!" pronounced Barbara, at length, with a deep breath of satisfaction and a consciousness of duty loyally done. There were several of her own presents which she admired more fervently, and she already had five, with the possibility of more yet to come from Uncle Bob's wonderful bag. But she felt it would not be playing fair if she failed to give full measure of time and fervour to sympathising with Aunt Hitty in her good fortune. At the same time, she felt that in her aunt's frank delight in such a frivolous and quite unnecessarily beautiful garment she had found a new bond of understanding with that long-misunderstood lady.

But Mistress Mehitable had yet one more word to say before she was ready, in turn, to give undivided attention to Barbara's fortunes.

"I am going to confess, Mr. Glenowen," said she, with a smiling, half-shamefaced glance, as she held up the dainty creation of lawn and lace and silk, caressing her smooth pink and white cheek with it, "I am going to confess that this lovely garment is just such a thing as I have longed to have, yet should have considered it wicked self-indulgence to purchase. Even so sober and prosy a dame as I may dearly love the uselessly beautiful. I'm beginning to doubt

whether I really want to be quite so useful and competent as I am thought to be. You, Mr. Glenowen, a comparative stranger, and with but a casual, courteous regard for me, have read my heart as these my dearest and lifelong friends, who would, I believe, give their right hands to serve me, could not do."

"Glenowen, you die to-night!" roared Doctor Jim, knitting his great brows.

But Doctor John was on one knee at Mistress Mehitable's black-satin-shod small feet, one hand upon his breast.

"Nothing more utilitarian than silk stockings, most dear and unexpectedly frivolous lady," he vowed, "shall be my tributes of devotion to you henceforth!"

"And mine shall be garters, fickle Mehitable!" cried Doctor Jim, dropping on his knee beside Doctor John, and swearing with like solemnity. "Silk garters,—and such buckles for silk garters!"

"And little silk shoes, and such big buckles for little silk shoes!" said Doctor John.

"And silk petticoats!" went on Doctor Jim, antiphonally. "Brocaded silk, flowered silk, watered silk, painted silk, corded silk, tabby silk, paduasoy silk, alamode silk, taffety silk, charrydarry—" till Mistress Mehitable put her hand over his mouth and stopped the stream of his eruditions.

"And silk—and silk—" broke in Doctor John, once more, but stammeringly, because his knowledge of the feminine wardrobe was failing him. "Tut, tut, silk night-rails, indeed! The scoundrel! The vagabond Welshman! May I die of Jim Pigeon's physic if I don't make shift—make silk shift—"

"John!" cried Mistress Mehitable, in tone of rebuke, and pushing them both away from her. "Get up at once, both of you, and don't be so silly!"

Her eyes shone, and her cheeks were flushed with mingled pleasure and

embarrassment, and Glenowen realised that she was much younger and prettier than he had been wont to think.

"O Mehitable-demoralised-by-Barbara!" vowed Doctor John, towering over her. "Your sweet and now perverted soul shall be satisfied with gewgaws! I, John Pigeon, swear it!"

"O Mehitable-demoralised-by Barbara!" vowed Doctor John.

"O Mehitable-demoralised-by-Barbara!" vowed Doctor John.

"Then I want a bosom-bottle, of Venice glass and gold filigree, to keep my nosegays from withering!" retorted Mistress Mehitable, flashing up at him a look of her blue eyes. "I've never had such a chance as this in all my life!"

"There now, hussy!" growled Doctor Jim, turning upon Barbara. "See what you have done. In three days you have demoralised her completely. And I see the ruin of John and Jim Pigeon, buying her things!"

But Barbara was by this time too absorbed in her own things to heed the catastrophe thus impending. It was plain that Uncle Bob had been prosperous these past two years,—and equally plain that he was in full sympathy with Barbara's tastes. First of all, there were books,—a handsomely bound copy of Sir Philip Sidney's "Arcadia," an old, time-stained copy of "England's Helicon," a copy in boards of the admired "Odes" of Mr. Gray, and a copy of Mr. Thompson's "The Castle of Indolence." With these, in strange companionship, a white silk mask,—a black velvet mask with silver buttons on silver cord behind the mouth, to enable the wearer to hold it in place with her lips, when both hands might chance to be occupied,—and a small pistol, inlaid with silver and mother-of-pearl. This seductive little weapon Barbara hugged rapturously to her breast. Though she would not kill anything for the world, she loved to feel she could be slaughterous an she wished!

Then came wonders of the wardrobe. Barbara hungered to try them on all at once, and in truth made marvellous efforts toward that unachievable end. There were kerchiefs of sheerest lawn and lace, and of embroidered silk. There were two pairs of silk garters, three pairs of silk stockings, and six pairs of fine thread stockings. She loved the silk stockings as she did the pistol and Sir Philip Sidney. There were shoes, low, shapely, thin-soled shoes of red morocco, and black chamois, and black satin, and a pair of daintiest slippers of white satin, all with buckles satisfyingly resplendent.

"I knew your feet would never be any larger than they are now," explained Uncle Bob, "so having the opportunity to get some uncommon fine shoes at a

price uncommon reasonable, I thought it just as well to embrace occasion boldly!"

"But how *did* you *ever* guess the right size, Uncle Bob?" cried Barbara, in ecstasy, trying on a black satin one with supreme forgetfulness of company manners, and poking out ingenuously the most bewitching foot in the thirteen colonies. "Do just look. It fits like a glove!"

Stooping quickly as if to examine it, Doctor Jim engulfed it in one large, white hand; and kissed it just above the glittering buckle.

"There, Bob Glenowen," he growled, as he straightened himself, "is that the proper civility to show a lady when she pokes out her foot at you? I suppose you would pocket the shoe and carry off the lady! Eh, what?"

"How dare you kiss my niece without my leave?" demanded Mr. Glenowen.

"He shall kiss me just whenever he likes, and no one in the world shall interfere!" declared Barbara, springing up, and pulling Doctor Jim's neck down to be swiftly hugged. "But—how *did* you know the right size, Uncle Bob?"

A look passed between Mistress Mehitable and Glenowen; and Barbara, intercepting it, understood in a flash.

"Oh! Oh! Aunt Hitty! *You* did it!" she shrieked, clapping her hands. "You sent him my green silk slipper for a pattern! And I've been thinking I had lost it! And I was ashamed to tell you! Oh, how dear, and deceitful of you, honey!"

"Here, indeed, is the delinquent slipper!" acknowledged Uncle Bob, drawing the green silk toy from his bag. He handed it over to Mistress Mehitable, for Barbara was again absorbed, her glowing face, with one massive black curl hanging straight past her cheek, bent low over her spoils, among which were lengths of silk,—a rich brocade, a taffeta, and a silk Damascus, out of which her quick fancy conjured up a dream of petticoats, panniers, and bodices that

should appear most sumptuously grown-up. There were gloves, too, and mitts; and a mighty handsome little "equipage" of silver-gilt, containing scissors, thimble, nail-trimmer, tweezers, and such small needments, to hang at the left side of her bodice. There was a flimsy affair of a "lovehood," silk and gauze and mystery, from which Barbara's vivid, petulant, dark little face flashed forth with indescribable bewitchment. This love-hood, swore Doctor John, should never be worn by Barbara on the streets of Second Westings, for reasons affecting the public weal, as it would bedevil the Reverend Jonathan Sawyer himself in the very sanctuary of his pulpit. Barbara suddenly looked forward with interest to going to meeting on the following Sunday, bedecked in the disastrous love-hood.

Last, but not least in Barbara's eyes, there was an exceedingly delicate frivolity in the shape of a carven gilt patch-box, about an inch and a half in length. In the top was set a painted china medallion, representing a richly dressed shepherdess enwreathed in roses, with the appropriate posy:

> "My love in her attire doth show her wit,
> It doth so well become her!"

On the inside of the cover was a tiny mirror. When Barbara, silent with delight, peered into this mirror, she caught a vision of herself in a gay ballroom, patched and powdered and furbelowed, shattering the hearts of a host of cavaliers, who every one of them looked like a relative of Robert Gault.

CHAPTER XIX.

That night, when she was going to bed, came Barbara's really deep reaction

from the exaltation and excitement which had possessed her since the morning with Mistress Mehitable. The joy of her uncle's coming, the whirl of childish delight over the presents he had brought her, had swept her spirits to a pinnacle which could not be maintained. She slipped, and fell down on the other side.

First she lighted the four candles that stood, two on each side of the mirror, on her shining mahogany dressing-table. Then she undressed, put on her long, white nightgown, and said her prayers with a troubled alternation of fervour and forgetfulness. She was slipping. Then, one by one, she looked her presents well over again, noted that each was just as perfect as it had seemed to her every other one of the dozen times she had examined it, and wondered with a pang what had become of all their magic. Her scintillant delight in them had faded to a mere dull drab perception of their merits. Her eyes filled, and a lump rose in her throat. She was far over the crest of the pinnacle, on the cold, enshadowed side of the steep.

The one kitten, whom she had named "Mr. Grim,"—a round-faced, round-eyed gray and white furred baby, not yet accustomed to the loss of his two saucer mates,—crept snuggling against her bare ankles and mewed mildly, begging to be noticed. Barbara picked it up, fondled it in her bosom, threw herself down on the bed with it, and burst into a passion of tears. She felt as if she had been long, long away. She was poignantly homesick for her old self, her old childishness. The burden of being grown-up suddenly arose, thrust itself upon her, and grew great and terrifying and not to be borne. She was oppressed, too, with self-reproach. Absorbed in vivid and novel sensations, during the past few eventful days she had not thought as much as usual about her old comrades,—the kittens, Keep, Black Prince, and Mercy Chapman. And now in her weakness she thought they had suffered from her neglect. As a matter of fact, the difference had been purely in her own mind. The kittens, who were quite dependent upon her, had been as tenderly cared for as ever, but while caring for them she had thought of other things more novel and significant. In giving away two of them she had done just what she had planned and promised from the first. But now she scourged herself for heartlessness and

inconstancy, pretending she had sent them away just because she was tired of taking care of them and wanted to be free for new interests.

"Did its missis forget all about the poor little lonely baby, and send away her other babies, and get cruel and hard-hearted, just because she thought she was grown-up, and a new friend came along?" she murmured, after the first tempest was over, to the gray and white kitten now purring comfortably against her soft throat. She sat up in bed with it to caress it more effectively.

"She is a bad missis, and perfectly horrid!" she went on, between sobs; and the kitten, who did not mind damp, was highly pleased. "She has been perfectly horrid. But to-morrow she's going to be just her old self again, and take up the tuck in her petticoats, and fix her hair like it was before we ran away. And we'll go to Doctor Jim and Mercy Chapman and just *snatch* back those other poor babies; and we'll all go off together down into the back garden, by our apple-tree, and have a lovely time. And—and—yes, we *will* forgive old Debby, and go and see her to-morrow. We'll take Uncle Bob, and then there won't be any bother about explanations."

Then her tears flowed forth anew, till the kitten was quite uncomfortably wet; and, with fresh resolves to be all child again on the morrow, she sobbed herself to sleep, with the thick hair tangled over her eyes and grieving lips.

But the long, sweet sleep brought complete renewal to Barbara's spent forces, and waking found her composedly happy, with a blessed sense of problems solved and desired things coming to pass. Her heart was a-brim with sunshine, but the only sunshine in the room was that she held in her heart, for the light that came through the diamond panes was gray, and the sky behind the leafy branch was gray, and, as she looked, the first of the rain came, blown in streaming gusts against the glass, and shedding a narrow line of drops across the polished floor. One leaf of the window was open, and Barbara sprang from bed to shut it, laughing as the cold drops spattered her feet. She had no quarrel with the rain that day, there being enough pleasures indoors to keep any maid's

mind busy.

After breakfast, however, when she found that Uncle Bob was going down into the village to call on the Reverend Jonathan Sawyer, to drink a glass with Squire Gillig in his snug office behind the store, and to pay his respects to Doctor John and Doctor Jim, then Barbara felt the lure of the rain, and said she would go with him.

"I *love* the rain," she explained,—"and it's so nice for the complexion, too! I'll go and tell Mercy Chapman about my presents, and take some jellies to her poor sick mother, while you are talking politics in the squire's back office, Uncle Bob. Then I'll meet you at Doctor John's office, and we'll step into Doctor Jim's, and bring both of them up to dinner with us, so we'll all be together as much as possible. Won't we, dear?" And she paused in the task of strapping on her goloshes, to appeal to Mistress Mehitable.

"You are proposing to make a lot of trouble for your aunt!" protested Glenowen.

"Indeed she is not," began Mistress Mehitable, warm to second Barbara's proposal. But before she could say more, there was a wilder gust among the trees outside, a fiercer burst of rain against the windows, and, with a huge stamping in the vestibule, came Doctor Jim, as if blown in by storm. All hurried to meet him, where he stood dripping in the hall door, and the expedition to the village was postponed. An hour later came Doctor John, even wetter and more dishevelled than his brother, from the bedside of a patient at the opposite end of the village. The two had planned that theirs should be the hospitality of that day, but the storm and Mistress Mehitable together triumphed. The old house was merry all day long with gay voices, its maiden fragrances of lavender and rose touched genially with breaths of the mild Virginia weed. And Barbara forgot, completely and for ever, how near she had been to drowning the furry "Mr. Grim" in the tears of her regret for her lost childishness.

Toward sunset the rain stopped, and a copper flame was reflected up from the windows of a cottage visible to the eastward through the trees; and the western sky, opening along the horizon under great smoky-purple battlements of cloud, revealed unspeakable glories of clear gold. Throughout the rare hour, till dusk fell, the thrushes sang ecstatically, so unusual an outburst that Barbara dragged every one out upon the wet porch to listen to the thrilling, cloistral-pure cadences, the infinite tranquillities of tone. So inspiring was that hour in the front of twilight that even the catbird down in the back garden forgot that he had been for days too busy to sing, and mounted the topmost bough of a tall cherry, and eased his soul in a chaos of golden phrases.

Very early the next morning,—the kind of morning when the sunlight itself seems as if it were just sparkling from a bath in cold fountains,—Barbara and Glenowen started out for a paddle across the lake to visit old Debby. They went through the barn-yard, through the bars, through the pasture, and through the wood; and in response to his bounding and wagging appeals, they took Keep, the mastiff, with them. They went early, in order to be back in time for the dinner with Doctor John and Doctor Jim. And Barbara insisted on letting Keep go in the canoe, that she might erase from his generous heart the memory of her harshness on the morning of her great adventure. At her command, the dog stepped in so circumspectly, and lay down with so nice a balance, that Uncle Bob was impressed.

"The dog's a born canoeist, Barb," he declared, as he headed up the shore instead of straight out across the lake. "I wonder you ever had the heart to leave him behind,—and to take those kittens, who couldn't tell a canoe from a horse-trough."

Barbara would have answered that the kittens needed her more than Keep did, who had all the world for his friend; but her thoughts were diverted by the direction in which her uncle was steering.

"Why do you go this way, Uncle Bob?" she demanded, looking at him over

her shoulder while her dripping paddle-blade rested on the gunwale.

"I want to examine a certain big rock, where a certain small girl did certain strange things!" replied Glenowen, gravely.

Barbara flushed, and drooped her head.

"I didn't know you knew about that, Uncle Bob!" she said, in a low voice. "Don't let's go there!"

"All right!" assented Glenowen, cheerfully. He had recalled the old tragedy of deliberate purpose, because, being of Welsh blood, and superstitious, he was afraid Barbara's unparalleled high spirits might bring her some keen disappointment. He had purposed to discipline her with a dash of bitter memories, that he might avert the envy of the gods; and when her head drooped he had accomplished his purpose. But Barbara had changed her mind.

"No!" she said. "Let's go close to the rock, and look right down into the water, just where I was lying when old Debby pulled me out!"

And they did so. The sand was clear gold down there, but as they looked a huge eel wriggled over it. Barbara shuddered, and seized her paddle once more to get away.

"It's good for me to be reminded, Uncle Bob," she said. "I forget, when I am happy, how wicked and foolish I can be when things go wrong! But oh, you can never know how unhappy I used to be! You'd have come to me if you had known, Uncle Bob!"

"Poor little girlie!" murmured Glenowen, his kind brown eyes moistening at the corners.

"But I was crazy, both naughty and crazy, and it was all my fault!" went on Barbara, resting her paddle again as the canoe skimmed fleetly out across the

water, away from the sorrowful spot. "It's all so different now! And it's always going to be different!"

Glenowen smiled to himself, as he was apt to do when confronted with any of the pathetic ironies of life. Barbara would not have liked him to smile, for to her a smile meant amusement or mirth, and she could never learn to appreciate the depth of tenderness that might lurk beneath a ripple of laughter. But she was looking straight ahead. In his heart and behind his smile, Glenowen said, "Child, dear child, is it all so securely different now, and just eight days gone since you climbed out of your window before daybreak?" But aloud he said, after a silence:

"It is indeed most different, Barb, old girl? Some of your troubles are really done now, thrown into the dark corner with the discarded dollies. The others will keep bobbing up now and then, claiming old acquaintance. But just you cut them dead. They are in sober truth not the same, now that you are older and more responsible. Well I know, what so many forget, that childish sorrows, while they last, are the most bitter and hopeless of sorrows. The wall that a man steps over blots out a child's view of heaven."

"How wonderfully you understand, Uncle Bob!" cried Barbara, with ardent appreciation.

As they neared the other side of the lake, a kingfisher dropped like an azure wedge into the ripples, missed his prey, and flew off down to the outlet clattering harshly in his throat. From the deep reeds of the point above the outlet a wide-winged bird got up heavily as the canoe drew near.

"There goes my old blue heron!" shouted Barbara, gleefully. "You should have seen the way he fixed me with his glassy eyes as I passed, the morning I ran away!"

"He is very old, and very wise, and thinks of lots of things besides frogs!"

said Glenowen.

They entered the outlet, and met old Debby's geese. The big gray and white gander, in the pride of many goslings, hissed fiercely at them as they paddled past, so that Keep raised his head and gave him a look of admonition over the gunwale. The next turn brought them out in full view of Debby's cabin, and straightway rose a clamorous outcry from watchful drakes and challenging chanticleers. The yellow pup ran barking down from the steps, and Keep cocked a sympathetic ear.

"Lie down, sir!" commanded Barbara, and Keep meekly suppressed his budding interest.

Mrs. Debby Blue was spinning flax, on the hard-beaten clean earth some paces in front of her threshold, when she saw and recognised her approaching visitors. In the presence of Mr. Glenowen she read peace, for her shrewd perception of Barbara's character told her that the girl would never have permitted her a glimpse of the cherished uncle except as a sign of favour. Nevertheless the grim old woman was conscious of a sinking qualm at thought of the first straight look of Barbara's eyes. She knew she had betrayed her; and that knowledge was not wholly mended by the fact that she knew she had done right to betray. Her lonely old heart so yearned to the child that she feared her reproach as she feared no other thing in life. She stopped her wheel, dropped her roll of flax, picked up her stick, and limped sturdily down toward the landing.

Before she had got half-way the canoe came to land, and Barbara unceremoniously skipped ashore.

"Lie down, Keep!" she ordered again, and then, leaving Glenowen to land and follow at leisure, she ran up the path to greet old Debby.

"This does my old eyes good, Miss Barby!" exclaimed the old woman, her

voice a trifle unsteady.

Barbara seized her, and kissed her heartily on both cheeks.

"You were very bad to me, Debby," she cried, cheerfully, "but you'd have been worse to me if you hadn't been bad to me! So I forgive you, and love you just the same, you old dear. The most *dreadful* things might have happened to me if it hadn't been for you!"

Mrs. Blue heaved a huge sigh of relief; but the subject was too difficult and delicate a one for her to expand upon. She gave Barbara a vehement squeeze, looked her up and down, and exclaimed:

"Land sakes alive, Miss Barby, why, if you hain't been an' growed up over night. What've they been doin' to you over there?"

"It was *you* did it, Debby, much as anybody!" And Barbara flicked her petticoats audaciously before the old woman's eyes, to emphasise their added length. "Such lovely things have happened; and Aunt Hitty and I have made up; and I've so much to tell you, that I must come over some day and spend the whole day with you, after Uncle Bob goes away. And here's Uncle Bob himself, who only came day before yesterday, and has come to see you, Debby dear, before any one else in Second Westings."

As Barbara stopped breathless, Glenowen came up and grasped the old dame warmly by the hand.

"You're looking ten years younger than when I saw you two years ago, Debby!" he declared, sweetly and transparently mendacious.

"'Tain't so much my youth, as my beauty, that I set store by, Mr. Glenowen, thankin' you jest the same!" retorted the old woman, as she led them into her cabin for refreshment. She was a cunning cook, if somewhat unconventional in her recipes, and she remembered with satisfaction that Barbara's uncle had

seemed to share Barbara's weakness for her concoctions. Eight days ago she would have offered Barbara milk to drink; but now she brought out only a strong root wine for which she was famous, a beverage which was extolled throughout the township as a most efficacious preventative of all disorders.

"It's a wonder how letting down one's petticoats seems to destroy one's fondness for milk!" said Barbara.

Instead of sitting on the edge of the high bed and swinging her legs, as she would have done eight days ago, she sat on a bench and kept her feet on the floor. And from this old Debby realised, with a pang, that the child had truly grown to womanhood.

CHAPTER XX.

Returning about noon to Westings House, early that they might have time to dress for dinner, Glenowen started to let down the pasture bars. But Barbara, in high spirits, went over them like a cat, forgetful of her new dignity. So Glenowen vaulted after her. As they rounded the end of the barn, Amos came leading a tall sorrel across the yard; and straightway Barbara assumed a more stately air, while a quick radiance went over her face.

"That's Robert Gault's horse!" she explained. "I want you to be very lovely to him, Uncle Bob, for he's such a nice boy, and was so very civil to me when I made him help me run away. I gave him a terrible lot of anxiety, you know!"

Glenowen laughed uproariously.

"I don't doubt you did, dear heart!" he agreed. "But Lord, oh, Lord, what a way of commending a young man to a young lady's doting uncle, to say he mighty civilly helped her to run away!"

"Now, Uncle Bob, I won't like you if you talk nonsense! You know very well what I mean. And you are to be nice to Robert!" retorted Barbara, crisply.

As they went up the long, box-bordered path, Mistress Mehitable and Robert came strolling down to meet them; and the warmth of Glenowen's greetings to Robert fulfilled Barbara's utmost demands. For her own part, however, under the sway of a sudden whim, she chose to be by no means extraordinarily civil. And Robert's contentment was dashed by a chilly doubt as to whether or no he had chosen the right day for his visit. Before they went to their rooms to dress, however, Barbara relented.

"You should have come last night, Robert," she said, turning to him graciously at the foot of the stairs. "Then Uncle Bob and I would have taken you over the lake with us this morning, in *the* canoe, to see old Debby!"

She threw an intimate emphasis on the "the,"—and watched with a curious sense of triumph the swift fading of the cloud from Robert's face.

For this dinner Barbara dressed with unwonted care. Her plain white silk petticoat, duly lengthened, worn under her cream brocaded satin panniers, with buff satin bodice, and white lace short sleeves, gave her, as she could not but think, a most genteel appearance. With her new white silk stockings and white satin shoes, two large red roses in her bosom, and one in the dark mass of her hair just where the curl hung down, a tiny patch from the adorable new patch-box discreetly fixed near the corner of her mouth, and the new love-hood to be thrown carelessly over her head in due time, she felt herself equipped to be as imperious and unpleasant to Robert as the caprice of the moment might suggest. When she went down-stairs she found Mistress Mehitable waiting in the hall, in a gayer gown than she had ever before seen her wear. It was a silk polonaise,

of a tender, gris-de-lin shade, which became her fair colouring to a marvel; and Barbara was astonished to see how young and pretty she looked.

"How *perfectly lovely* you look, dear!" she cried, turning Mistress Mehitable twice around, and putting a deft touch to the light, abundant, simply coiffured hair. "No one will give one look at me to-day!"

Her aunt flung an arm about her, smiling, then tripped away girlishly, flushed a pretty pink, lifted the edge of her petticoat, and displayed a slender ankle encased in embroidered sky-blue silk. Barbara clapped her hands with approval.

"It is five years since I have worn them," said Mistress Mehitable. "Seeing that I failed so, child, in my efforts to lead you along the paths of gravity, I have concluded to try and let you lead me along the paths of frivolity—a little! So I got out my blue silk stockings!" And spreading her skirts, she was in the act of making Barbara an elaborate curtsey, when Glenowen, coming up quickly behind her, caught her and kissed her lightly on the cheek.

Mistress Mehitable, startled and taken aback, blushed furiously, and stood for a second or two in confusion. Then she recovered herself. She made another stately curtsey, and saying, demurely, "Let me turn the other cheek also, Mr. Glenowen," presented her face again for a more formal and less hasty salute.

Barbara clapped her hands with gleeful approbation, but her comment brought a new rose to Mistress Mehitable's face.

"If I didn't love you so much, Uncle Bob," said she, "I'd tell Doctor John and Doctor Jim." And from the fact that she felt embarrassed by this raillery, the conscientious Mistress Mehitable was almost ready to believe she had done wrong.

The dinner was at two o'clock—an extremely formal hour for Second

Westings; and a further element of formality was added by the presence of the Reverend Jonathan and Mrs. Sawyer, which effectually removed it from the category of family affairs. These outsiders, however, were a kindly pair, and cast no serious shadow upon the gathering. The Reverend Jonathan kept his austerity pretty strictly for the Sabbath; and being both well-bred and well educated, knew how on occasion to lay aside his cloth without sacrifice of dignity or prestige. He was something of a *bon vivant*, too, in his scholarly way, and among folk who were unimpeachably of his own class. And his judgment on a butt of Madeira or a hogshead of old West India rum was accounted second to none in Second Westings. His hands were long and white, and he used them with impressive pulpit-gestures to point his carefully constructed witticisms. His presence was favourably regarded even by Barbara, who appreciated his brains and breeding in spite of certain disastrous associations which she could never quite erase from her memory. His wife was a non-significant, abundant, gently acquiescent pudding of a woman, not without her utility as a background; and no one but Barbara had the slightest objection to her presence. But Barbara, having a fierce impatience of nonentities in general unless they chanced to be animals instead of human beings, felt critical when her eyes fell upon the good lady's expansive red bosom. She could not refrain from a private grimace at Doctor John, and from whispering in his ear an acrid comment on the inviting of a feather-bed to dinner. She was greatly disconcerted, however, when Doctor John roared aloud; and, crediting the good lady with an intuition quite foreign to her placid substance, her conscience smote her smartly for the unkind comment. By calculated chance she managed to let herself drift into the scant, unoccupied corner of the sofa on which Mrs. Sawyer was sitting; and for the long half-hour before dinner was served she beguiled the good lady most successfully with thrilling descriptions of the presents which Glenowen had brought. Mistress Sawyer was dearly fond of dining; but so enthralled did she become in the description of Mistress Mehitable's French night-rail that she did not hear when dinner was announced. Then Barbara escaped, with an appetite and a proud conscience; and proceeded to deal Robert a cruel blow by seating herself as far

away from him as possible, between Glenowen and Doctor Jim, who wisely avoided trouble by avoiding interference on the dejected youth's behalf.

Doctor John and Doctor Jim being both tenacious of old Connecticut customs, the dinner began with a pudding of boiled Yokeag, or maize meal, stuffed with raisins and suet, and eaten with a rich sauce. Then came fish and meats in lavish variety, with ripe old ale, followed by elaborate confections, nuts and fruits, and a fiery, high-flavoured Madeira. With the Madeira came eloquence in conversation, and the elaborate interchange of repartee and compliment deepened into a discussion of the great matters which at that hour filled men's minds. Barbara tried by daring gaieties to stem the tide of seriousness, which seemed to her incongruous with the nuts and wine. But she was swept away, at first reluctantly, then willingly; for, during the past two years, in the intervals of fighting her aunt and loving her cats, dogs, and horses, she had studied history, both colonial and English, with a characteristic, avid zeal, and now had a pretty foundation of theory under her seemingly reckless conclusions.

In response to many interrogations, Glenowen had given at some length and with temperate fairness an account of the latest difference in Virginia between the royal governor and the stiff-necked House of Burgesses. As the result of this lamentable clash of authorities, the House had been dissolved, the Old Dominion was being governed in a fashion contrary to the terms of her long-cherished charter, and the trade of the colony was disastrously shrunken, because her people were refusing to import goods subject to duties which they had not themselves imposed. "When men and women begin to deny themselves voluntarily for the sake of a principle, whether it be right or wrong," continued Glenowen, "it is time for those at the helm to consider clearly the course on which they are steering the ship of state!"

"When kings lay hands on charters, free men rise up armed," said the Reverend Jonathan Sawyer, rolling the polished phrase with a relish. The sentiment sounded so at variance with those which he was commonly held to

cherish, that every one looked at him for a moment in silent question.

"I speak but in the abstract," he explained, waving a white hand airily. "In the concrete the question baffles me, and I wait for light!"

"I confess I am astounded at Virginia," said Doctor Jim, in a great voice, solemn with reprobation. "Virginia, colony of gentlemen, siding with the rabble against the king! Where are Virginia's aristocrats?"

"Would you impugn the gentility of Mr. Washington?" inquired Doctor John, mildly.

"Yes, I would, John Pigeon," snapped Doctor Jim, "or of any one else who did not show his gentility by his deeds. And so would you, if you were not a bit tarred with the same dirty brush as Mr. Washington."

"Don't you think," ventured Robert, with diffidence, "that our grievance—for, of course, there is a grievance, Doctor Jim—is against the English Parliament? What is Parliament to us, that we should bow down to it, when we have always had parliaments of our own? What's sacred in Parliament? But the king,—that's a question of loyalty. What's a gentleman without loyalty? Surely the gentry must stand or fall with the king! Surely—"

"What nonsense, Robert!" interrupted Barbara, severely scornful, indignant at him for his views, but grateful to him for the opportunity to express her own with point. "Who was it that whipped King John into submission, and made him sign Magna Charta? Was it the riffraff or the gentry, I'd like to know? Where there is a real aristocracy, Robert, there is no need of kings!"

"Barbara, dear!" cried Mistress Mehitable, appalled at this sweeping heterodoxy. But the others laughed, with varying degrees of sympathy or dissent. Doctor Jim wagged his head.

"That's right, Robert, my boy," said he, sympathetically. "You draw her fire,

and let me skirmish around. That's the kind of thing I get continually!"

"Is it true," inquired Doctor John, "that that clear and capacious intellect, James Otis, is permanently clouded since the wound he got in the affair with the king's officers?"

"'Tis true, 'tis pity; and pity 'tis, 'tis true!'" quoted Glenowen. "A fine brain wasted in a smuggler's brawl. I take it there's no wisdom to waste, among either Tories or Whigs, these days,—for these days are big with Fate!"

"Uncle Bob!" said Barbara, fixing him with a wide, level look, "what are you, Whig or Tory? You seem so careful!"

Glenowen laughed.

"You insist on pinning me down to it, do you, saucy hussy? Well, I wish I knew! I think there are some hundred thousand or more of honest men in these colonies who are trying to find out which they really are, right to the bone. But I can tell you in part. For one thing, I am an Englishman, just as much an Englishman here as if I lived in England! Do you know what that means?"

"No!" said Barbara, bluntly, dissatisfied at this caution when she counted on a hot partisanship.

"It means that I will not be taxed save by my own consent! I am too good an Englishman to let Englishmen in England treat me as less than an Englishman because I am a colonist. But I am no leveller. I have no patience with the doctrine of those sentimental Frenchmen who promulgate the palpable folly that all men are born equal. I am loyal to the king,—or, perhaps, rather, I should say, to the throne, which seems to me just now unfortunate in its occupant. But I will not pay a tax imposed by those who have no right to tax me! I would fight first. I stand on Magna Charta."

"Then you are a patriot now, Uncle Bob," said Barbara, fairly satisfied, "and

before long you will be a rebel! You wait and see! You're all afraid to say it, but before long the colonies will be fighting King George!"

There were exclamations of protest from every one, even Doctor John, the avowed and consistent Whig,—every one but Glenowen, who smiled thoughtfully at Barbara's rashness.

"Tut! Tut! You little fire-eater!" exclaimed Doctor John. "You mustn't bring discredit on your party! We will fight with constitutional weapons for our just rights, and bring that pig-headed George to his senses. We must teach him to reign properly, and not to meddle, that's all. No throat-cuttings in the English family!"

"It would break my heart to fight against my countrymen," said Robert, earnestly. "But if they should be so misguided as to take up arms against the king, I should have no doubt as to my duty. The king may be unjust; but if so, the injustice will doubtless be remedied by and by. But better, surely, suffer some injustice than be traitor to your king." This speech took courage on Robert's part, with Barbara's eyes blazing scorn upon him. But he looked into vacancy, and made his confession of faith regardless of consequence.

"You fatigue me, Robert!" said Barbara. "Would you rather betray your country than your king? Was the country made for the king? What's a king? Greece and Rome did pretty well without them!"

"What's this stuff and nonsense about fighting?" broke in Doctor Jim, ignoring Barbara's argument as the chatter of a child. "Stuff and nonsense! The notion of our clodhoppers standing up to the king's soldiers, who have whipped the armies of the world! It is easy for demagogues to rant, but they'd find it still easier to run!"

"I fear you all underrate the peril—except this sauce-box here!" said Glenowen, soberly. "And you, Pigeon, are like the king's purblind advisers in

underrating the spirit of the people. It is not a noisy, but a sullen temper that seems to be spreading. And clodhoppers are not all cowards! And those who call themselves patriots are not all clodhoppers."

"But who among our people can be so suicidal as to think of war?" asked the Reverend Jonathan Sawyer, taking a contemplative pinch of snuff. "To fight a hopeless battle, and in inevitable defeat lose all!"

"It is not the people who think of war as yet!" said Glenowen. "But the arrogant soldiery, the blindly self-confident officials, the insolent English officers, who seem chosen not to conciliate but to enrage. So many of the officers sent out here do dishonour to the repute of English gentlemen. They seem to look on colonists as a subject race. I have seen them, in New York and in Boston, treat our ladies with an insufferable condescension, such as they would never have dared to show toward the same ladies in England. And I have seen them studiously insolent to colonial gentlemen of birth and breeding far above their own, as if the accident of being born in the mother country instead of in America made them another race. Such conduct, while unimportant in itself, rankles deeply, and sets the two branches of the race in antagonism. Personal affront is mightier than argument, and men cannot overlook a slight to their women."

"I should think not!" cried Robert, loftily. "I would shed the last drop of my blood for the king, but I should not let the king himself put slight upon one of our ladies! I wonder you could endure to see such things, Mr. Glenowen!"

"I did not!" confessed Glenowen. "I have had several differences of late!"

Barbara's eyes sparkled, and her lips parted eagerly over her white teeth.

"You fought them, Uncle Bob! You fought them!" she cried. "Real duels! How many did you fight? Oh, how lovely!"

"Two, sweetheart, I'm sorry to say!" replied Glenowen, modestly. "It was

very inconvenient and annoying, because I have so many responsibilities and could not afford to be skewered."

"And how did you come off?" asked Doctor John, leaning far over the table in his eagerness.

"Nothing but a scratch or two, thanks to the righteousness of my cause!" said Glenowen.

"And the other chaps?" inquired Doctor Jim. "Doubtless they were low-bred scoundrels, whom London would have none of! I hope you pricked 'em!"

"I wish I could feel sure that their manners had mended as well as their wounds!" laughed Glenowen, gaily.

Then, to Barbara's ill-concealed disgust, Mistress Mehitable led the way into the drawing-room, leaving the men to smoke long pipes and thrash out problems of constitutional law to the accompaniment of the fiery old Madeira. In the drawing-room she was moody and silent, grudging all the arguments that were going on without her. And when Robert, who felt himself too unseasoned to stay with his elders beyond one pipe and an extra glass, followed the ladies at a decent interval, Barbara received him far from graciously. His last speech, in comment on the insolence of the officers, had mollified her a little, but she felt a smart resentment at his presumption in maintaining views so opposite to hers.

"I should think you would stay with the other men," she said, tartly.

"I couldn't stay a moment longer," said Robert, gallantly, "for longing to be with the most fair if *not* the most gracious of ladies!"

"You had better go back and learn something about your duty to your country, by listening to Doctor John and Uncle Bob!" she counselled, rudely.

Robert bowed low, having himself just now well in hand, though his heart

was sore.

"I take great pleasure in listening to them, as well as to Doctor Jim, who also seems intelligent!" said he.

"Oh," exclaimed Barbara, much nettled. "Doctor Jim talks a lot of nonsense just to tease me; but he doesn't mean it,—at least, not all of it. Besides, he is always interesting. But you, with your pedantic stuff about loyalty and kings and treason, I don't find you interesting at all! Please go and talk to Aunt Hitty and Mrs. Sawyer, and let me read. Perhaps I'll be able to forget what you said at dinner!"

"It is my pleasure to obey your lightest wish, fair mistress!" said Robert, inwardly indignant, but outwardly amused at her ill-humour. He went at once to the other side of the room, and exerted himself to such good purpose that soon Mistress Mehitable's rare and silvery laughter grew frequent, against an almost ceaseless gurgle of content from Mrs. Sawyer. Robert was completely absorbed, while Barbara's interest in her book was vexatiously divided. After half an hour she got up and left the room, but he never noticed her going. Fifteen minutes later she came back, with the gray and white "Mr. Grim" on her shoulder; and he never noticed her coming, so intent he was, and so successful, in his task of amusing Aunt Hitty and Mrs. Sawyer. This was carrying obedience a little too far, and it fretted Barbara. Then the men came in from the dining-room, smoky, and a little more fluent than ordinary, and Robert was ousted from his post by Glenowen and Doctor John. But instead of returning now to Barbara, he attached himself with an engrossed air to Doctor Jim; and Barbara found herself established in her nook with the Reverend Jonathan Sawyer. To be sure, his Reverence made himself most agreeable, flattering her by the attention he would have paid to a grown woman whom he considered intelligent. He appreciated her brains, and acknowledged the lengthening of her petticoats; and his attitude was a gratifying proof to her that she really had grown to be a personage, rather than a child, within the past few days. But she found herself unable to concentrate her wits on what he was saying, and passed

a rather grievous hour trying to look the attention which her brain was not giving. When, at last, Doctor Sawyer arose to go, she felt that he must think her the most stupid girl in the world. Doctor Sawyer, on the contrary, enchanted by the rapt silence and appreciation with which apparently she had hung upon his words, went away with the conviction that she was a young woman of astonishing intellect, whom they had, indeed, wronged greatly in striving to force her into the narrow Second Westings mould. From that hour, when she had watched him with glowing eyes, but hearing scarce a word of all his wit, the Reverend Jonathan Sawyer was one of Barbara's staunchest champions.

When she turned from saying good-bye to Mrs. Sawyer, Barbara found Robert standing close beside her in the hall door, apparently absorbed in contemplation of Mrs. Sawyer's billowy, retreating figure. Barbara touched him on the arm, and he turned to her with a quick apologetic courtesy, as if his thoughts had been far off.

"What were you thinking of, so far, far away?" she asked, feeling somewhat left out and forlorn.

"Why—why—I was thinking—" he stammered, as if unwilling to say, yet unready with an evasion.

"Oh, you needn't tell me, if it is so embarrassing as all that!" said Barbara, tossing her head. "I was going to say, that after all the talk and the excitement, I think the loveliest thing would be some fresh, sweet air, and the smell of the woods!"

"It would be, indeed—with you!" said Robert.

"Then we will ride till supper-time. No,—there is a moon. We will ride after supper. You may escort me if you want to! Do you?"

Robert drew a long breath before he answered—and to Barbara the answer was sufficient.

"Yes, I want to!" he said, simply. "I was afraid I was to go away without really seeing you at all!"

"Go away!" exclaimed Barbara, lifting her brows in sharp displeasure. "What do you mean, Robert?"

"I must go back to Gault House to-morrow morning, without fail, for I start for New York the day following, to be gone all winter."

"Oh!" said Barbara; and turned and led the way back into the drawing-room, leaving Robert completely mystified as to the meaning of that noncommittal interjection.

CHAPTER XXI.

After supper, when Barbara came down dressed for riding and calmly told Robert she was ready, Mistress Mehitable gasped, and looked at Glenowen, expecting that he would meet the emergency by making a third. As he seemed unconscious of the need of action, she shot an appealing glance at Doctor Jim and Doctor John in turn. But they only grinned inscrutably. Then she lifted her hands slightly and let them drop into her lap, as if to say, "Bear witness, Heaven, that I am helpless!" and thus she stifled the voice of protest in her bosom. She had given Barbara freedom, and the responsibility that goes with freedom; and she would not take back the gift. But it was one of the notable victories of Mistress Mehitable's career, when she forced herself to sit in smiling acquiescence while Barbara flew full in the face of all convention. Amos, meanwhile, had brought the horses to the door; and when the two young riders were gone, the hoof-beats sounding in slow cadence down the drive, Glenowen said to her, with an understanding smile, "You did right, sweet lady. 'Tis a filly, that, to be ridden without the curb. Give her her head, and you'll have no great trouble!"

"I feel sure you are right, Mr. Glenowen," said Mistress Mehitable, sweetly. "But you may well believe it was a hard lesson for me, a Ladd of Connecticut, to learn. And I fear I have not more than half learned it yet!"

"You can learn anything you have a mind to, Mehitable," said Doctor Jim, with emphasis, "in the time it would take another woman to learn the A, B, C of it!"

Neither Barbara nor Robert spoke till the horses emerged upon the highway. Then Barbara cried:

"Quick! Quick! I want the wind in my face!"

With two miles of good road before them, they set their faces to the night breeze and their horses to the run, and raced madly down the moonlight, their shadows dancing long and black before them. The saddle-leathers creaked a low, exhilarating music, and the galloping swung like a pulse, and the roadside fence and shrubs fled by, and the world was white in the moonlight. And still there was no speech, save a soft word now and then to the rejoicing horses, whose ears turned back for it sympathetically from time to time.

At length they came to rougher ground, and slowed to a gentle canter. Then Robert noticed a narrow wood-road turning off to the right, vaulted over with lofty trees, and mystical with moon-shadows.

"Where does that road go, my lady?" he inquired.

"Where we are going!" answered Barbara, turning into it at a walk. Then, as if she thought the answer too whimsical, she continued, "It will take us back to the village by a longer and more beautiful way!"

"Any longer way would be the more beautiful way!" said Robert.

The reply interested Barbara, and in musing over it she forgot to say anything more.

The wood-road, thick-carpeted with turf and moss, muffled the horses' hoofs, and an enchanted silence sank into the hearts of the young riders. Here and there the woods gave back for a little clearing with a lonely cabin; and the moonlight flooded in; and around the edges of the clearing the thick-leaved branches seemed afloat, bubbles of glass and silver on a sea of dream. Then,

again, the fairy-lit glooms, haunted but unterrifying! And Barbara began to think repentantly of her harshness toward Robert. Soon the road dipped sharply, and crossed a wide, shallow brook, upon whose pebbles the horses' hoofs splashed a light music. Here they let the horses drink a mouthful, because Barbara said the waters of that brook were especially sweet. When they emerged on the other side, Barbara discovered she wanted a drink of it herself, so sovereign were the virtues of that water.

"How shall I bring it to you?" asked Robert, instantly dismounting, and casting a hasty glance about him in quest of a birch-tree, from whose bark to make a cup.

"Make me a cup of your hands, of course!" said Barbara. "Give me your reins. I must have the water, at once!"

Robert removed his leather gloves, rinsed his hands in the sliding sand, and then, with mighty painstaking care, got at least two mouthfuls of the crystal uplifted to Barbara's lips. As she sipped, and light as a moth her lips touched his hands, his heart seemed to turn over in his breast, and he could not find voice for a word. Silently he remounted, and in silence they ascended the slope from the brook. His apparent unresponsiveness puzzled Barbara; but an awakening intuition suggested to her that it was perhaps not so uncomplimentary as it might seem; and she was not displeased.

For half an hour they walked their horses thus, Robert sometimes laying a light hand on Black Prince's shoulder or satiny flank, but never daring to touch so much as Barbara's skirt. Then they saw the highway opening ahead of them, a ribbon of moonlit road. Barbara reined up.

"I think my saddle is slipping a little," said she. "I don't believe Amos can have girt it tight enough!"

"Why, I—" began Robert, about to remind her that, like a good horseman,

he had himself looked well to the girth before letting her mount. But he cut the words short on his tongue, sprang from his saddle, and busied himself intently with Black Prince's straps. When he raised his head, Barbara smiled down upon him, and reached him her left hand, saying sweetly:

"Thank you, Robert. You are really very nice, you know!"

Whereupon Robert bent abruptly, kissed the instep of the little riding-boot which stuck out from under her skirt, and swung into his saddle.

The action thrilled Barbara somewhat, but at the same time piqued her interest; and the interest dominated.

"Why did you do that, Robert?" she asked, curiously, looking at him with wide, frank eyes. "I didn't mind it a bit, you know! But it's funny, to kiss my old shoe!"

Robert gave a little unsteady laugh.

"It was homage, my lady," said he. "Just my pledge of fealty, before I go. You forget—I have the misfortune to displease you by being a monarchist!"

Barbara was silent a moment. She was sorry he had reminded her of their differences of opinion. But, on the other hand, homage was not unpleasant; and her scorn of kings did not of necessity extend to queens.

"*Why* do you go?" she asked.

"My grandmother is sending me at a moment's notice, to represent her in a law-scrape which some property of hers—of ours—in New York has suddenly got into. You know that, now that I am through college, I have to get down to work at once in New York, and fit myself to look after our estates. But I didn't dream I should have to go so soon!"

"I am sorry!" said Barbara, simply. "We were having such a pleasant time together!"

"Were we, dear lady?" asked Robert.

"*Weren't* we?" demanded Barbara.

"I am broken-hearted at going. I dare not tell you how broken-hearted!" replied Robert, gravely. "But until this ride I have been rather unhappy to-day, for you have several times made me feel that you were displeased at my coming!"

Now Barbara hated explanations, and she hated still more to be accused justly. Urging Black Prince to a canter, she retorted:

"I have no patience with you, Robert. I have been an angel to you. Didn't I ride almost half-way home with you, when you were here before? And now, haven't I let you come this *perfect* ride with me,—when I know Aunt Hitty thought I oughtn't? And you don't *deserve* that I should even let you talk to me one minute, when you are such a stupid, bigoted Tory."

Robert thought of many things to say in answer to this dashing flank attack; but each answer seemed to carry unknown perils, so he kept a prudent silence. After some time Barbara spoke again, mistaking his silence for contrition.

"Robert," she began, in a voice of thrilling persuasion, "won't you do something I very much want you to do?"

"I can think of no other pleasure to compare with the pleasure of pleasing you, my lady!" he answered, ardently.

"Then, will you not *really study*, without prejudice, the things that are at the bottom of the trouble between us and King George? You have such a good

brain, Robert, I cannot think you will be on the side of a king against your own country, when you have fully informed yourself!"

Robert looked troubled.

"I can honestly promise," said he, "to study the question still more carefully than I have already. But I fear you will still consider me obstinate, even then. If I could imagine myself disloyal to the king, I should not consider myself worthy to profess myself your ever loyal and devoted servant, fair mistress!"

"To serve me, Robert, you must serve your country!"

"And to serve my country, most dear lady, I must serve the king!" persisted Robert.

Barbara set her lips tight together, and galloped on.

"I wish you better wisdom as you grow older!" she said, coldly, after some minutes.

"The best wisdom I may ever hope to attain will be all too little to serve you with, my lady!" answered Robert, half gallantly, yet all in earnest. And Barbara could not but vouchsafe a reluctant smile in acknowledgment of so handsome a compliment. Thereafter there was little more said. They rode through the village, past the lighted inn, up the dim moonlit road to the porch of Westings House. But when Robert, with a sort of bold deference, lifted her from her saddle, holding her, perhaps, just a shade more closely than was requisite, she felt in a forgiving mood. She knew that she liked him, she knew she had been unpleasant to him, she was most sorry he was going away; and what were old kings anyway that friends should be at loggerheads about them? Answering her own thought, she impulsively pulled off her glove, and gave Robert her bare hand.

"We will be friends, won't we, king or no king?"

And the radiance of the smile she lifted to him, as he held her thin little hand in both his own, nearly turned the poor boy's head. He bent over her—and just saved himself, with a gasp, from kissing the ignorantly provocative mouth so rashly upraised. But he recovered his balance, in part, and compensated himself by kissing the hand passionately,—fingers and soft palm, and rosy oval nails, and wrist,—in a fashion that seemed to Barbara very singular. At length she withdrew the hand with a soft laugh, saying, composedly:

"There, don't you think that will do, Robert? You did not kiss Mrs. Sawyer's hand like that, did you?"

"Of course I did!" declared Robert. "There was more of it to kiss, so I kissed it more!"

"Now you are horrid!" she cried, and ran past him into the house.

But when he said good-bye to them all on the porch the next morning, and set forth on his long ride back to Gault House, Robert carried with him in the pocket over his heart what Barbara considered the highest token of her favour, her well-studied, intimately marked, oft-slept-with copy of Sir Philip Sidney's sonnets.

CHAPTER XXII.

The life of the individual, within its limits, is apt to present a sort of microcosmic image of the life of the nation. There comes a period of stress,

when the germs of change and growth are sown. Then, apparently without reason, time drags. The seasons roll apathetically in their rut, and all is done as it was done last year. But in the deeps the great impulses are maturing, the great forces are gathering. The hour comes that looses them. Then in an instant, it seems almost without warning, the quiet heart is in an insurrection, the people of ploughshares is become a people of swords. With a life, or with a nation, the events of a day may crowd ten volumes, or the annals of ten years leave a page but meanly filled. Significance is all. We live in our great moments. The rest is a making ready.

That blue and yellow morning of sweet winds, when Robert rode away from Second Westings, and Barbara, looking after him, felt three-fourths regretful for his going and one-fourth for her dear copy of Sir Philip Sidney's sonnets, was a morning in the late summer of 1769. He was to have returned the following June. But neither that June nor the next, nor the next following nor the one thereafter, did he return to the quiet villages of Connecticut and the banks of the great river that had given him birth. From year's end to year's end he found himself tied to the desk in his mother's brother's office, the office with the coat of arms over the door, and the diamond windows looking out on Bowling Green. He worked faithfully; but, being of the king's party yet sturdily American, a loyalist yet alive to the grievances of the people, a Tory yet not intolerant of views hostile to his own, an aristocrat, yet unfettered by the traditions of his clique and clan, he had all the social diversion that the gay, extravagant, rich, and foppish little city in the toe of Manhattan Island could afford. Wealthy, well-born, courtly, and kindly, the garlanded snares of the mammas of Manhattan were laid thickly but vainly for his feet. He was squire to all the fair; but not one, unless by some of those thrilling fictions with which maids triumph over their rivals, could claim aught of him that was exclusive or committal. And he knew Sir Philip Sidney's sonnets by heart.

About once in two months, or thereabouts, went a letter to Second Westings, full of coloured comment on the doings of the city,—of remarks

sometimes stilted and sometimes illuminating on the latest books from London,—of elaborate compliments that concealed rather than revealed the emotion glowing behind them,—but of the questions of the day, of Penal Acts, Port Bills, Tea Duties, Coercion, and Continental Congresses, no word. Robert had fulfilled to the letter and the spirit Barbara's demand that he study minutely the points at issue between the colonies and the king. He had realised the blindness and folly of the king, he had acknowledged that the colonies were right to resist, by every constitutional means, taxation by a parliament in which they were not represented. But his loyalty to the throne was unshaken by his regret that the king should be unjust. He tried to believe that the counsels of the great Englishmen whom he adored,—Pitt and Burke, the friends of America,—would open the eyes of George III. in time to prevent the cruel arbitrament of war. But—should it be war,—well, his ancestors had bled cheerfully for Charles Stuart when they knew he was in the wrong, and Robert felt that he would maintain, at whatever cost, the tradition of his ancestors. To be loyal to a good king, a king in the right, where was the distinguishing merit of that? But to be loyal to king in the wrong, and at great cost,—that, to Robert, seemed loyalty worth the name.

Meanwhile to Barbara, in her green world of Second Westings, life seemed to have got caught in a drowsy eddy. The months went by in uneventful circuit, for all the echoes of great doings that came up from time to time and stirred the tranquil air. She rode, canoed, read, studied spasmodically, bullied Amos, loved the animals, distilled strange essences, repudiated the needle and the crochet-hook, as of old. As of old, she had wild whims, repentances, indignations, dreams, and ardours born of dreams. But all these things had grown paler, in a way, had lost something of their bite and vividness. It was as if Fate had turned a screw and changed the focus. Moreover, she could no longer, as before, believe each mood eternal and all-important. She had a consciousness that there were other interests lurking in life, and this kept her in an attitude of waiting. But the love between her and Doctor John and Doctor Jim lost nothing in this waiting time, but grew as Barbara grew in stature and self-knowledge; and she lost nothing of her delight in the friendship of Mrs.

Debby Blue, to whose cabin she would flee about once a month, when the vagrant blood, growing riotous in her breast, would make her tolerant of no company but that of the shrewd old outlaw dame. As for her aunt, Barbara's love for the blue-eyed little Puritan spinster, born that crucial morning of Mistress Mehitable's unexpected forbearance and seed-cakes, flourished and ripened with not one serious setback. Of course, a complete understanding between two such opposite tempers could not spring up in a day; but Mistress Mehitable was nothing less than heroic in the consistency with which she held herself to her new policy; and Barbara, having been astonished into an incongruous devotion, was ready enough to make sacrifices on the new altar. Whenever the atmosphere began to feel overcharged between them, they would say the nicest things they could think of to each other, and then, with much ingenuity of chance, keep apart for two or three days. In this way new misunderstandings were avoided; till gradually the natural love between them set deep root into their hearts, and grew strong enough to dare such tempestuous flurries of the mood as cannot but blow up once in awhile when two women are living alone together.

But while her own life had seemed to have grown so tranquil that she wondered if things had forgotten to happen, Barbara knew that in the outside world it was different, so different as to make her stillness seem like sleep. In the outside world she knew events were crowding and clamouring upon one another's heels, under a sky of strange portent. She kept herself informed. She wrangled lovingly with Doctor Jim; she argued tactfully, though hopelessly, with Mistress Mehitable; she debated academically with the Reverend Jonathan Sawyer; she ranted joyously with Doctor John, and Squire Gillig, and Lawyer Perley, and old Debby, all four patriots, and the last two frank rebels. For the sake of finding out the drift of Second Westings sentiment, she once in awhile emerged from her prickly exclusiveness to smile upon her fellows of quality, and was surprised to find them mostly patriots in their way, with souls that strove to rise above embroidery and tatting. As for the common people, the workmen and apprentices and their kind, she got at their hearts easily in her impulsive

fashion, and found the majority of them slowly heating to rebellion. In Amos, her devoted Amos, however, she unearthed a fiery royalist, ready to out-thunder Doctor Jim himself; so she ceased to do Amos the favour of bullying him, and Amos grew at times too dejected to care much about King George. The results of these observations she conveyed minutely in frequent letters to her Uncle Bob, who was now committed to the so-called 'Continental' side. To Robert Gault, also, in his office looking out on Bowling Green, Barbara would write about once in three months. But in these letters she wrote of the woods and the winds, of what blooms were out in the river-meadows, of what birds were nesting or winging,—and never a word of what was in all men's mouths. She was waiting for Robert to declare himself converted to her views, after digesting the course of study to which she had set him. And she refused to admit the possibility of a clear-headed gentleman, as she knew him to be, being so misguided as to cling to opinions different from her own. To her mind Truth was a crystal of which but one facet could be lighted at a time. One side of a question was apt to present itself to her with such brilliancy that all the other sides were thrown into obscurity together. As for the flamboyant Toryism of Doctor Jim, she regarded it with an invincible indulgence, as one of those things preordained from the first,—a thing which she could not even regret, because without it Doctor Jim, who was in every way adorable, would be so much the less himself. Who cared for an eccentricity or two in a being so big of body and soul as Doctor Jim? But she could not help being glad that Doctor John's eccentricity, to which she would have been equally indulgent in case of need, took a different form from Doctor Jim's. The Toryism of her Aunt Hitty she regarded as a part of the lady's religion, and with that Barbara would never dream of meddling. By an unspoken understanding, she and Mistress Mehitable had agreed to leave each other's sanctuaries unprofaned.

By the time of the "Boston Tea-Party," a little before Christmas in 1773, Second Westings was so established in its stiff-necked, though indolent, Whiggery, that Doctor Jim and Mistress Mehitable sat enthroned, as it were, in the lonely isolation of their Toryism, with Amos proudly humble at their feet.

The Reverend Jonathan Sawyer, whose interest in the controversy had been almost wholly academic from the first, and who cultivated on all matters outside his creed a breadth of mind to compensate for his narrowness within it, had judged it right to follow his flock where he could not lead it, and had amused himself by letting Barbara—of whose conquest he was genuinely proud—convert him to her doctrines. He was now a constitutional patriot, a temperate and conservative champion of colonial privilege, as opposed to kingly prerogative. When came the soul-stirring news of how the valiant men of Boston Town had confronted the dread tea-chests in their harbour, and torn them piecemeal, and cast their fragrant contents into the tide, then no soul in Second Westings but Doctor Jim, Mistress Mehitable, and Amos, would drink a drop of tea—except in private. Certain compromising spirits, anxious to be both patriotic and comfortable, had laid in a supply betimes, and so without public scandal could dally in secret with the uninebriating cup. But Barbara despised the alien leaf at all times; and Doctor John preferred hard cider or New England rum; and old Debby had a potent concoction of "yarbs" which made the Chinese visitor insipid; so Mistress Mehitable and Doctor Jim were free to victual their strongholds with nearly all the tea in Second Westings. Over the achievement of the Boston heroes Mistress Mehitable was gently sarcastic and Doctor Jim boisterously derisive; while Doctor John exclaimed, "Tut! Tut! such child's play does no good! Such mummery! Tut! Tut!" and Squire Gillig, ardent "Continental" but cautious merchant, said, "Such wicked waste! There's a lot of good money gone! They should have confiscated the stuff, an' hid it, an' sold it by an' by cheap, along through the back townships!"

But to Barbara it seemed that the act was one shrewdly devised and likely to bring matters to a head. Her reading of it seemed justified a few months later, when the port of Boston was closed, as a punishment for rebellious contumacy, —and the charter of Massachusetts abrogated,—-and a military governor, with four English regiments, established in the haughty city by the Charles,—and the capital of the province removed to its ancient rival, Salem.

The news of the billeting of the troops on Boston, and the removal of the capital to Salem, came with a shock to Westings House. It came in a copy of the *Connecticut Gazette*, delivered at Mistress Mehitable's dinner-table while she and Barbara were entertaining Doctor John and Doctor Jim, Squire Gillig, and the Reverend Jonathan and Mrs. Sawyer. It had been a gay repast, but when Mistress Mehitable, craving indulgence by reason of the times, read out the Boston news, a cloud descended upon the company. Squire Gillig began to say something bitter, forgetful of Mistress Mehitable's sentiments, but was stopped by a level stare from the Reverend Jonathan Sawyer's authoritative eyes. Then Doctor John spoke—no longer droll and jibing, but with the gravity of prescience, and turning by instinct to his brother.

"Jim! Jim!" said he, "this is going to mean *war*. I see it! I see it! The people will not stand much more,—and more is coming, as sure as my name's John Pigeon. Your precious king's gone mad. He's going to force it on us!"

Doctor Jim shook his great head sorrowfully. "I am sorry for this, John. I think the king is not well advised in this—on my word I do. It is too harsh, too sudden. But the people won't fight. They may riot, and talk,—but they won't fight. We are too strong for you, John. There will be no war. That would be absurd!"

"There will be war!" repeated Doctor John, still looking into his brother's eyes. The two men had forgotten every one else. "There will be war, if not this year, the next. The people will fight,—and that soon!"

"Then the people will be beaten, and that soon, John!" retorted Doctor Jim, firmly, but in a low voice.

"The king's armies will be beaten, Jim! You mark my words! But it is going to be a terrible thing! A horrible and unrighteous thing! There will be dividing of houses, Jim!"

There were several seconds of silence, a heavy, momentous silence, and Barbara held her breath, a strange ache at her throat. Then Doctor Jim brought down his fist upon the table, and cried in his full voice:

"A dividing of houses, maybe,—but not a dividing of hearts, John Pigeon, never a dividing of hearts, eh, what? eh, what?"

He reached out his hand across the table, and Doctor John seized it in a mighty grip. The long years of love and trust between them spoke suddenly in their strong, large faces.

"No, never a dividing of hearts, Jim, in the days that are to come, when our swords go different ways, and we see each other not for a time!"

Then their hands dropped apart, and both laughed uneasily, as they glanced with a shamefaced air about the table.

"Tut! Tut!" said Doctor John. "That precious king of yours bids fair to make life damnably serious, Jim. Send him away from the table at once!"

But the diversion came too late; for Barbara was weeping heedlessly, and Mistress Mehitable, with her white chin quivering, was dabbing her handkerchief to her eyes with an air of vexation at her own weakness; while good Mrs. Sawyer gazed at them both in wide-eyed, uncomprehending wonder.

"If there's a war," sobbed Barbara, "*you sha'nt* go to it, either of you! We need you, *here*. And—and—you'd both get killed, I know! You're both so splendid and big and tall,—and you wouldn't—take care of yourselves, and the bullets *couldn't* miss you!"

At this picture Mistress Mehitable grew pale, where she had been red, and cast a frightened look at Doctor Jim, then at Doctor John,—then back at

Doctor Jim.

"Barbara's right, I think," she said, with an air of having weighed the question quite dispassionately. "You should not leave your patients, on any account. There are so many men who can destroy life, so few who can save it. Physicians have no right to go soldiering."

"That's just it, honey!" cried Barbara, flashing radiant eyes through her tears. "Oh, what a wise little Aunt Hitty you are! What would we ever do without you!" And her apprehensions laid themselves obediently to rest.

"Well, well!" cried Doctor Jim. "What are two graceless old dogs like us, that the dear eyes of the fairest of their sex should shed tears on our account? We should go and kick each other up and down the length of Second Westings for the rest of the afternoon, for causing such precious tears,—eh, what, John Pigeon?"

"'Tis the least we can do, Jim!" said Doctor John. "But now I come to think of it, we needn't arrange to go to the war before there's a war to go to, after all."

"And when the war does come, you'll both stay right here, where you belong!" decreed Barbara, holding the question well settled.

"Who knows what may happen?" cried Doctor Jim. "You stiff-necked rebels may experience a change of heart, and then where's your war?"

"Barbara, sweet baggage," said Doctor John, wagging his forefinger at her in the way that even now, at her nineteen years, seemed to her as irresistibly funny as she had thought it when a child, "I cannot let this anxiety oppress your tender young spirit. Set your heart at rest. If there be war, Jim Pigeon may go a-soldiering and get shot as full of holes as a colander, and I'll do my duty by staying at home and looking after his patients. There'll be a chance of some of

them getting well, then! I've never yet had a fair chance to save Jim Pigeon's patients. *I* won't desert a lovely maiden in distress, to seek the bubble reputation at the cannon's mouth!"

"How can you lie so shamelessly, John Pigeon?" demanded Doctor Jim. "I'll lay you a barrel of Madeira you'll be leaning against the butt of a musket before I am!"

"Done!" said Doctor John.

"I think you are both perfectly horrid!" cried Barbara.

CHAPTER XXIII.

That day of the news was a boundary day. It set sharp limit to Barbara's years of calm. From that day events came quickly, change pressed hard on change, and no day, for her, was quite like its predecessor. A veering of the current had snatched her from her shining eddy, and swept her forth into the tide of life.

On the morning following the dinner, while still alive to a sense of menace in the air, Barbara received a letter from her uncle. As she read it, her eyes sparkled, her heart bounded. Then, as she passed it to Mistress Mehitable, and Mistress Mehitable took it with cheerful interest, her heart sank. She felt a pang of self-reproach, because she found herself willing to go away and leave her aunt uncompanioned in the solitude of Westings House. Glenowen had undertaken certain business, in the way of searching records and examining

titles, which was driving him at once to New York, and bade fair, he said, to keep him there for upwards of a year. He wanted Barbara to go with him. And Barbara's pulses bounded. There, she thought, were the lights and the dances, the maskings and the music, the crossing of swords and wits, the gallants and the compliments and the triumphs, which she was longing to taste. Mistress Mehitable's face grew grave as she read the letter. It grew pale as she looked up and saw by Barbara's face the hunger in her heart. Mistress Mehitable had a vision of what Westings House would be, emptied of the wilful, flashing, vivid, restless spirit which for the past few years had been its life. But she was unselfish. She would not say a word to lessen Barbara's delight.

"It will be lovely for you, dear!" said she, with hearty sympathy. "You are just at the age, too, when it will mean most to you, and be of most value to you. I am so glad, dear!"

But Barbara had seen the look in her face, and gave no heed to her brave words.

"I *can't* go, honey, and leave you here alone!" she cried, impetuously, jumping up and hugging the little lady with a vehemence born of the effort to convince herself that what she said was true. She felt that she could and must go; but that the joy of going would be more than damped—drenched, indeed, with tears—at the thought of how much Mistress Mehitable would miss her, of how empty Westings House would be without her, of the scar her absence would leave in their little world. With her intense individuality, her lively self-concentration, it almost seemed to her as if their little world could not even attempt to go on without her, but must sleep dully through her absence.

"Of course you will go, Barbara dear!" said Mistress Mehitable, decidedly. "It is only natural and right you should want to go, and go. I cannot pretend that it makes me very happy to think of doing without you for a whole year. No words can tell you how I shall miss you, dear child. But I should be a thousand

times more unhappy if I were to feel myself standing in the way of your happiness. No, no, indeed, don't talk any nonsense about not going. Besides, your Uncle Bob has the right to have you with him for a while."

"Oh, I wish you could go, too!" sighed Barbara. "*Can't* you? *Then* it *would* be lovely!"

Mistress Mehitable laughed softly. "Not very well just now, child!" she answered, assuming a gaiety. "Perhaps some other time it might be managed. Now, we'll have to plan about getting you ready,—and your uncle has only left us a wretched little week to do it in!"

So it was settled, without any stress or argument whatever, that Barbara should go to New York with Uncle Bob just eight days from that day; and so was decreed, with such effort as it might take to order a breakfast, nothing less than a revolution in Barbara's life.

While the two women were discussing weighty problems of dressmaking, lingerie, and equipment various,—what should be made at Second Westings, and what should be left to New York shops and the tried taste of Uncle Bob, —Doctor Jim came in, less robustious and breezy than his wont, his eyes big with momentous tidings. He kissed the ladies' hands, and sat down thoughtfully opposite, scanning their faces from under bushy, drawn brows. They both looked at him with expectant inquiry.

"You were most intent on whatever you were talking about!" said he, presently. "I hope I don't interrupt! May I hear all about it? Or should I run away, eh, what?"

"You never interrupt,—or if you do, you are forgiven beforehand, Jim!" said Mistress Mehitable.

"What we were talking about will interest *you*, Doctor Jim, you naughty old

thing!" cried Barbara, saucily. "It was petticoats, bodices, and silk stockings, and such like feminine frivolities! But what have *you* got to tell *us*? You are just *bursting*, you know you are. Tell us, and we'll tell you something!"

"John Pigeon's going away to-morrow!" said Doctor Jim, and then shut his mouth hard.

"What? Going away?" cried both women at once, scarce crediting their ears.

"Going away to Hartford, to-morrow, to take a hand in organising some of their rebellious militia!" continued Doctor Jim. "I'm ashamed to tell you. But he was ashamed to tell you himself, thinking you would not like it, so he sent me ahead to make his peace for him. It doesn't mean anything, you know. Just a sort of bragging counterblast to those four regiments of ours at Boston. I wouldn't be down on John for it, eh, what, Mehitable?"

"When will he return?" asked Mehitable, feeling that her world was being emptied.

"Down on him!" exclaimed Barbara. "Why, it's *noble* of him. Think how it will encourage all the patriots of our township!" Since she was going away herself, Doctor John's going was easy enough to bear.

"I wasn't talking to you, you saucy rebel!" retorted Doctor Jim. "We'll have that crazy little black head of yours chopped off for high treason, one of these days, if you don't mend your naughty manners. 'Patriots,' indeed! Addle-pated bumpkins! But"—and he turned to Mistress Mehitable, "you asked me, dear lady, when John Pigeon would return. Within a month, I think. He will tell you more precisely for himself!"

"Jim," said Mistress Mehitable, gravely, "we are going to be lonely for awhile, you and I."

"Lonely!" exclaimed Doctor Jim. 'That's not what bothers me. It's the pestilent, low, vulgar business that's taking him!"

"Yes, of course," assented Mistress Mehitable, "but 'tis not Doctor John only that purposes to forsake us, Jim. Barbara is going to New York, to stay a year."

Doctor Jim's face fell. He glared at Barbara for half a minute, his shaggy eyebrows working.

"Nonsense, child!" he cried, wilfully incredulous. "What cock-and-bull story's this? I won't have my feelings worked upon!"

"It's true, Doctor Jim. I'm to go with Uncle Bob, next week!" said Barbara, very soberly.

"But you sha'n't go! We can't spare our bad little girl. You're too young, Barby, for that wicked city down there. We *need* you here, to keep us from getting too *good*. You sha'n't go, that's all! You see what John Pigeon'll have to say about it, eh, what?"

"I must, Doctor Jim!" answered Barbara. "Aunt Hitty and Uncle Bob have both decided on that. I feel homesick, sort of, already, at the thought of it. And I know I shall miss you all just horribly. But, oh, I do want to go, after all. It's all so gay and mysterious to me, and I know I'll have such fun. And it will be so lovely, when I'm tired of it, to come back and tell you all about it! Won't it?"

"Well! Well! I suppose we'll have to let her go," sighed Doctor Jim. 'Thank Heaven, *you're* not going, Mehitable, dear lady!"

"I'm glad *you're* not going, Jim,—either to New York or to Hartford!" said Mistress Mehitable, with a little laugh. Then she held out her hand to him, flushing softly.

"It would be hard indeed for me to go anywhere, Mehitable, were you to bid me stay!" said Doctor Jim, kissing very reverently the hand she had held out. Then, without waiting for an answer to this, he hastily turned again to Barbara, saying:

"By the way, sweetheart, Bobby Gault is in New York, is he not,—eh, what? He will be glad to see you again, perhaps! It is possible he may help make things pleasant for you, eh, you baggage?"

But Barbara was not in a mood to repay his raillery in kind.

"I don't know that I'll make things pleasant for Robert," she answered, thoughtfully, "if he still clings to his ridiculous views about kings and things!"

"Tell that to the marines, you sly hussy!" exclaimed Doctor Jim, regaining mysteriously his wonted large good humour. "Don't tell me this isn't all made up between you and Robert!"

Barbara looked at him soberly for a moment. Then the old audacious light laughed over her face, her eyes danced perilously,—and Mistress Mehitable felt a tremor of apprehension. She always felt nervous when Doctor Jim had the hardihood to draw Barbara's fire.

"Do you know, Doctor Jim, I don't feel quite so badly as I did about leaving you and Aunt Hitty! I think, you know, you will be quite a comfort to each other, won't you, even if Doctor John should have to stay longer than he expects in Hartford!"

At this moment Doctor John himself came in, to Mistress Mehitable's infinite relief.

CHAPTER XXIV.

When Glenowen came to Second Westings he was in such haste that Barbara concluded he had other duties in New York than the searching of records and verification of titles; but with unwonted discretion she asked no questions. Affairs of state, it seemed to her, were the more mysterious and important the less she knew about them; and it pleased her to feel that the fate of commonwealths, perchance, was carried secretly within the ruffled cambric of her debonair and brown-eyed uncle. From Second Westings they journeyed by coach to New Haven, and from that city voyaged by packet down the Sound to New York. Arrived in New York, they went straight into lodgings which Glenowen had already engaged, in an old, high-stooped Dutch house on State Street.

From the moment of her landing on the wharf, Barbara was in a state of high exhilaration. The thronging wharves, the high, black, far-travelled hulls, the foreign-smelling freights, all thrilled her imagination, and made her feel that now at last unexpected things might happen to her and story-books come true. Then the busy, bustling streets, where men jostled each other abstractedly, intent each on his own affairs, how different from Second Westings, where three passers-by and a man on horseback would serve to bring faces to the windows, and where the grass on each side of the street was an item of no small consequence to the village cows! And then the houses—huddled together, as if there was not space a-plenty in the world for houses! It was all very stirring. She felt that it was what she wanted, at the moment,—a piquant sauce to the plain wholesomeness of her past. But she felt, too, that it would never be able to hold her long from the woods and fields and wild waters.

Of her arrival Barbara sent no word to Robert, though she knew by

somewhat careful calculation that his office was but a stone's throw away from her lodging. She looked forward to some kind of a dramatic meeting, and would not let her impatience—which she scarcely acknowledged—risk the marring of a picturesque adventure. When Glenowen, the morning after their arrival, gave her the superfluous information that Robert's office was close by, right among the fashionable houses of Bowling Green, and proposed that they should begin their exploration of the city by strolling past his window, Barbara demurred with emphasis.

"Well," said Glenowen, thinking he understood what no man ever has a right to think he understands, "just as you like, mistress mine. I'll drop in on him myself, and let him know where we are, so he can call with all due and fitting ceremony!"

"Oh, Uncle Bob!" she cried, laughing at his density, "don't you know yet how little *I* care for ceremony? 'Tis not that—by any manner of means. But I want to surprise Robert,—I want to meet him at some fine function, in all my fine feathers, and see if he'll know me! You know, it is five years, nearly, since we saw him. Have I changed much, Uncle Bob?"

"Precious little have you changed, sweet minx!" answered Glenowen. "You're just the same small, peppery, saucy, unmanageable, thin brown witch that you were then, only a *little* taller, a *little* more good-looking, a little—a very little—more dignified. No fear but he'd know you, though he saw you not for a score of years. 'Twere as easy perhaps for a man to hate you as love you, my Barbe! But forget you! Oh, no!"

So it was that in the walks which they took about the point of Manhattan Island, during the first three or four days after their coming, they avoided Bowling Green, save in the dim hours of twilight; and Glenowen, prone to humour Barbara in everything, had a care to shun the resorts which Robert Gault affected. He learned, by no means to his surprise, that Robert was

uncompromisingly committed to the Tory party, but this he did not feel called upon to tell Barbara.

"Time enough! Time enough!" said he to himself, half whimsical, half sorrowful. "Let the child have her little play with all the mirth that's in it! Let hearts not bleed until they must! She won't forgive him,—and he won't yield,—or I'm not Bob Glenowen!"

In New York, where most of his life had been spent, Glenowen knew everybody; and he was *persona grata* to almost everybody of consequence. His standing was so impregnable, his antecedents so unimpeachable, his social talents so in demand, that even the most arrogant of the old Tory aristocrats—the Delanceys, the Philipses, the Beverley Robinsons—were not disposed to let their hostility to his views hamper their hospitality to his person.

It followed, therefore, as a matter of course, that almost before she had gathered her wits after the excitement of the journey and the changed surroundings, Barbara found herself afloat upon the whirl of New York gaieties. Every night, in the solitude of her bedroom in the old Dutch house, in the discreet confidence of her pillow, she was homesick, very homesick, and a child again. She would sob for Aunt Hitty, and Doctor John, and Doctor Jim,—and for big, round-faced, furry "Mr. Grim," whom she had so tearfully left behind,—and for Black Prince, who, she felt sure, would let no one else ride him in her absence,—and for dear old Debby in her lonely cabin. She would think very tenderly of Amos,—and then, with a very passion of tenderness, of her own little room over the porch, now silent and deserted. With great surges of pathos she would picture Mistress Mehitable going into the little room every day, and dusting it a bit, and then sitting down by the bed and wishing Barbara would come back. In such a melting mood Barbara would resolve not to be horrid any more, but to send for Robert the first thing in the morning, and tell him just how glad she was to see him.

But when morning came, she would be no more the homesick child, but a very gay, petulant, spoiled, and sparkling young woman, her head full of excitements and conquests to come.

CHAPTER XXV.

To her first ball Barbara went in a chair, just five days after her arrival in New York. The method of locomotion appealed greatly to her mood; and as the bearers jogged her gently along, she kept her piquant face at the window and felt as if she were playing one of the pictures of court ladies on their way to St. James's,—ladies such as she had often dreamed over in the London prints. For this ball, given at the Van Griff house, just a few blocks from her own lodgings, she was dressed in the very height of the mode, as to all save her hair. She was obstinate in her aversion to the high, elaborate coiffure,—in her adherence to the simple fashion and the single massive curl which she had decided upon, after many experiments, as best becoming her face. She liked her hair, accounting it her only beauty, and rather than disguise it she would let the mode go hang. For the rest, her attire met the severest demands of Uncle Bob, who was even won, at the last, to approve what he called her eccentricity in the matter of hair. He decided that her very precise modishness in other respects would prove her title to independence in the one respect; and it was with unqualified satisfaction that he contemplated the effect she would produce on the New York fashionables.

"Are you sure I look fit to be seen with you, Uncle Bob?" she had inquired, anxiously, the last thing before they set out. "You are such a beau, you dear; and so distinguished-looking!"

"I shall take no discredit by reason of you, I think!" answered Glenowen, dryly. "Unless, indeed, by reason of the slayings of your eyes! But slay the gallants, slay them, sweetheart! They be king's men, mostly,—and there'll be so many the less to fight, by and by, for the king!"

"I'll do what such a homely little brown thing can!" laughed Barbara, blithely, an excited thrill in her voice. But even at the moment her heart misgave her, at the thought that, more than likely, Robert was one of these same "king's men!"

This first ball, at the Van Griffs', was to Barbara a whirl of lights, and colours, and flowers, and bowing, promenading, pirouetting forms. The spacious rooms and shining floors and smiling faces and stirring music intoxicated her. The variety and brightness of the costumes astonished her, the women's dresses being fairly outshone by the strong colours of the uniforms worn by the English officers, and by the even more dazzling garb affected by the civilians. Yet if all this bewildered her heart, outwardly she was at ease, composed, and ready; and Glenowen, across the room, watching her the centre of a group of eager gallants,—fop, officer, and functionary alike clamouring for her hand in the dance,—wondered if this could be the headlong, hard-riding little hussy whom he had brought from the wilds of Second Westings. The stately belles of Manhattan, beauties serene or beauties gay, sisters to the lily or sisters to the poppy and the tulip, eyed with critical half-disfavour this wilding rose from the backwoods, agreed that she was queer-looking if not ugly, and resented her independence in wearing her hair so as to display its beauties to full advantage. That she was well gowned and danced well, they were in general fair enough to acknowledge; but they could not see why so many men found her interesting to talk to. In a word, she was a success from the start. She went home at last, very wide-eyed, tired, triumphant, excited—and disappointed. She had not seen Robert. She had just once heard his name, spoken casually, as that of one whose absence seemed a thing unusual, whose presence seemed a thing to be desired. She knew that she had made an

impression. She knew, even, that she had made herself popular, at least with the men. With her accustomed candour she had proclaimed herself a rebel, in response to some jest at the expense of Boston, and had settled the score thrice over by her witty jibes at King George. But even in that royalist circle her audacity had done her no harm. The English officers themselves, carried away by her brilliance and amused by her daring, were loudest in their applause. They not unreasonably agreed in their hearts that it could do the king no harm, while it undoubtedly would be a great satisfaction to themselves, if they could win some favour in the eyes of this most bewildering and provocative little rebel. Perceiving this, Barbara had not spared her shafts; and the most deeply wounded of her victims had been the most assiduous of her admirers. But of all the men who had been presented to her, danced with her, paid court to her, of all the women whom she had met, favoured, or in clash of glances subtly defied, she retained but a bright jumble of unassorted names and faces. One only had gained a foothold in her remembrance. A certain young officer in the colonial militia, one Cary Patten by name, had been presented to her by her uncle with particular commendation, as being altogether of his own way of thought; and him, for his laughing blue eyes, his frank mouth, his broad shoulders, and his boyish swagger, she had liked so well that he stood out among her impressions, and she felt it would be pleasant to meet him again. In fact, to his open and immense elation, she had told him so.

"Well, mistress mine, how did you like it?" asked Glenowen, as, candle in one hand and skirts in the other, she held up her face to be kissed good-night.

"Oh, I loved it, Uncle Bob!" she answered, with conviction.

"Well, it loved you!" said Uncle Bob.

But as he turned away to his own room, he wondered if Barbara was really quite as satisfied as she professed, or whether her failure to meet Robert, and include him among the numbers of her slain, had clouded at all the splendour of

her triumph.

Two evenings later there was another ball, an altogether bigger and more imposing function, at the house of the Surveyor-General half a mile out of town. At this, as she was told, every one would be present, and therefore, she agreed, Robert would certainly appear. With a view to circumstances which might conceivably arise in the event of Robert's appearance, she had with great difficulty kept a number of dances free, when her admiring cavaliers at the Van Griffs' were striving to fill her cards in advance. If he should fail to come,—well, she had reason to think that she would not be left to languish unattended.

Meanwhile, however, she little knew how violently her pretty scheme was being brought to nought, she little knew how emphatically Robert was being enlightened as to her presence in New York. She should, indeed, have thought that the story of her triumphs at the Van Griffs' would reach his ears, for on the day following that event, her maid, a garrulous West Indian mulatto whom Glenowen had engaged immediately on their arrival, had told her over her toilet that her name was already the toast of the finest gentlemen in town. But somehow it never occurred to her that Robert would hear anything. She thought of him only as riding, or paddling a canoe, or sitting at his desk, or going to balls and wandering about alone, thinking of her, gravely smiling now and then, courteous, and silent. As a vital factor in this glittering life he had never presented himself to her imagination,—or it is possible she might have written to him from Second Westings more often than twice or thrice in the year!

The house of the Surveyor-General stood behind its trees far back from the road, on a series of terraces set with walks, parterres, trimmed hedges, statuary, and secret arbours. The house was a blaze of light. The terraces were lighted with a gay discretion, here shining, there enshadowed. As she drove up with her uncle in the coach, a little late, and heard the music and the musical babble of voices, Barbara thrilled deliciously, with a prescience that this was to be an eventful night. She was no longer dazzled,—only strung to the highest

tension. She realised that all this was her birthright, to be used, played with, thrown aside when tired of, but meanwhile enjoyed to the topmost pitch of relish,—hers just as much as the buttercup fields, the thrush-sweet orchards, the ancient woods of Connecticut. She felt herself mistress of the situation.

"Oh, Uncle Bob," she whispered, drawing a quick breath of anticipation, as she gave him her hand and stepped daintily from the coach, her high-buckled, high-heeled white satin slippers and little white silken ankles glimmering for an instant to the ensnaring of the favoured eye,—"oh, Uncle Bob, isn't it lovely?"

"You are, my Barbe!" he answered, peering down with high content upon the small disastrous face half-hidden in the hood of her scarlet cardinal.

"Let me tell you, Uncle Bob, you look extremely nice yourself!" she responded, squeezing his hand hard. "I didn't see one other man at Mr. Van Griff's so handsome and distinguished-looking as you!"

"Dear me!" retorted Glenowen, musingly, "what is the baggage going to ask me for to-morrow? Whatever it be, she must have it!"

Barbara reached her hostess with difficulty, and was given small time for her greetings. All through her first dance she was so absorbed in looking for Robert that she paid scant attention to her partner's compliments, though she realised that they contained imcomprehensible veiled reference to something which she was supposed to know all about. To her partner, one Jerry Waite by name, her ignorance seemed assumed, and vastly well assumed; and presently with his growing admiration for her cleverness came a dread lest he should transgress, so he diplomatically shifted to new ground. But had she not been quite absorbed in her quest, Barbara's most lively curiosity would have been awakened by his meaning words.

At last she sat down by a curtained doorway and sent Mr. Waite to get her fan, that she might make up her mind as to the advisability of inquiring frankly

about Robert. Her scheme was working too slowly for her impatient spirit; and, moreover, it was beginning to dawn upon her that Robert might not unnaturally feel aggrieved, and perhaps even prove difficult and exasperating, if she did not see him soon. She had about concluded to invoke the aid of Uncle Bob,—with whom she was by and by to dance the minuet,—when a word behind the curtain caught her ear.

"La! Mr. Gault!" cried a pretty, affected, high-pitched voice. "Who thought we should be so favoured as to see you here to-night! Not dancing, surely! But 'twere less cruel to us poor maids to stay away entirely, than to come and let us look and pine in vain. But you are very white,—sit down by me and tell me all about it. La, there's nothing I so love!"

It was Robert's voice that answered,—Robert's voice, but grown deeper, stronger, more assured, than as Barbara thought she remembered it.

"It was nothing at all, dear Miss Betty,—a mere scratch!" he answered. "'Tis but the loss of a little blood makes me paler than ordinary, I suppose. But the doctor said there was no reason in the world I should not look in on the gaieties for a minute or two,—and see what new wonder of a gown Miss Betty was wearing,—provided I gave my word not to dance."

Barbara was conscious of the rustle of Miss Betty's flirtatious fan.

"La, sir!" cried the pretty, high voice again, "you make light, of it; but they tell me it was very handsome done. And is it true that poor Carberry is in a bad way? Fie upon you, Mr. Gault, to spit an officer of the king and so strengthen the hands of the enemy."

Barbara's heart was beating very fast. So Robert had been fighting a duel, had he! And been wounded,—but slightly! And the quarrel with an officer of the king! This looked as if her anxieties were unfounded. But on the other hand, this loquacious girl—whom Barbara despised instantly and honestly—seemed

to claim him as belonging to the king's party. Barbara trembled with excitement, and with fear lest her absent escort should come back too soon. He did come back, at that moment; but with a ravishing look that turned his brain she sent off again for an ice and a glass of punch. Meanwhile her alert ears had heard Robert replying cheerfully to Miss Betty.

"Oh, Carberry will be all right in a week or two," said he. "'Twould much hasten his recovery were one to send him word of Miss Betty's solicitude. A three weeks at most will take him off my conscience and the doctor's hands!"

Here another voice intervened.

"Traitress!" it exclaimed, "I have been seeking you this half-hour!"

"Let me talk to Mr. Gault one moment more, Jack!" pleaded Miss Betty. "He was just going to tell me all about it,—weren't you, Mr. Gault?"

"Not if I know Bob Gault," retorted the voice. "Nay, nay, dear lady, I will yield you not one minute more to Gault, on any pretext. Shall I court disaster by leaving the most fickle as the fairest of her sex to the wiles of this pale hero, this wounded champion of dames!"

"You're right, Jack!" cried Miss Betty. "I see he's dying with impatience to go and find her, and claim a champion's reward! She's here, Mr. Gault. I saw her but a moment back. Go wherever you see the men a-crowding fiercest!"

So Robert had fought for some woman, had he? He had a tie, then! Barbara felt a tightening about her heart, an impulse to rush from the room. Then she said to herself, "What more natural? What are we but the best of friends? And have I ever been really nice to him?" Promptly anger took the place of the unreasonable hurt; and the anger made her cool upon the surface, so that she had herself well gathered in hand when the curtain was pushed aside, and Robert came through—just at the same moment that her partner came up with

the punch.

Robert sprang forward with face transfigured. But to Barbara's chagrin he did not seem at all surprised.

"I am glad to see you, Robert!" she said, gravely, holding out her hand.

Robert bent over it and kissed it in silence, unable, for the moment, to find his voice.

"Are you not glad to see me—to see an old friend out of the old days?" asked Barbara.

"I have no words to tell you how glad I am, my dear lady!" he answered, in a low voice, wishing that Jerry Waite would have sense enough to go away, instead of standing there in that idiotic fashion with the punch.

"But aren't you *surprised* to see me, Robert?" Barbara went on, forgetful of Mr. Waite and the punch.

"I suppose I ought to be surprised, my lady," answered Robert, with some bitterness in his tone, "surprised that you have condescended to see me at all, in view of the length of time you have been here without letting me know! I learned yesterday of your coming—after every one in town apparently knew of it!"

To Jerry Waite the scene was utterly incomprehensible. Oblivious to all good manners, he was staring open-mouthed. Barbara saw the astonishment in his face, quite naturally misunderstood it, and flushed angrily. The pain and wrath which she had by such an effort of will crushed down in her heart crept up again stealthily, and began to mingle unrecognised with this superficial annoyance.

"I had thought to surprise you,—a harmless little play, Robert, to see if you would recognise an old, old friend grown up!" she said, in a cool voice. "But since you are so dissatisfied, we had better not talk about it. You may call and see me some day soon, if you like. I am just around the corner, on State Street. Uncle Bob will give you the address. Will you take me back to my seat, Mr. Waite? Thank you so much for the punch."

Robert could not believe his ears. Was he dismissed for the evening? The blood began to beat fiercely in his head.

"But, Barbara," he exclaimed, "aren't you going to give me at least *one* dance?— Hold on, Waite, just a minute, will you!— You can't be engaged for all so early in the evening. I came at the very first, in hopes of catching you and getting several."

Barbara paused. By this time the thought of that other woman, for whom he had fought,—for whom he was wounded,—for whom he carried now this pallor,—for whom he had been too impatient to talk to Miss Betty behind the curtain,—the thought of that other woman was gnawing at her brain in a way to confuse her judgment. She was not exactly in love with Robert, but she was intensely interested, and in the course of the years a sense of proprietorship had grown up. The idea of another woman, with a prior claim, outraged her pride at the same time that it wrenched her heart with a sense of irremediable loss.

"You are not dancing, I understand, Robert," she said, looking coldly into his eyes.

Robert's heart gave an exultant leap. She knew about the duel, then!

"I had thought, my lady," said he, softly, "that you might, under the circumstances, consent to forego a dance or two, and talk with me about old times."

The circumstances, indeed! Barbara's eyes blazed in spite of all her efforts at self-control. This was insolence. Yet she could in no way show she recognised it. For a second or two she held her tongue.

"I hear you have been greatly distinguishing yourself, Robert," she answered, in a voice of somewhat artificial sweetness, "and have taken some hurt in the affair, and really should not be here at all!" She looked at her tablets with hypocritical care. "You should have found me earlier. I shall not be free to give you a dance for *hours* yet,—not till quite near the last. You will probably not be able to stay so long!"

Robert grew tenfold whiter than before, and his mouth set itself like iron. She knew,—it was clear she knew,—and yet she could act in this hopelessly light, cruel, merciless way. It was inhuman. Had she no spark of womanly tenderness? He would trouble her no more.

"No, I shall not stay," he said, quietly. "Good-night, Mistress Ladd! Good-night, Waite!" He took her outstretched hand so lightly that she saw rather than felt that he had taken it; bowed over it, so low that he seemed to kiss it, yet did not actually touch it with his lips; then nodded civilly to Waite, strode off down the side of the room, through the door, and was gone. Barbara little guessed the many eyes that had watched and wondered at the episode. She imagined that all were quite engrossed in the dancing.

"Now please take me to the other room, Mr. Waite!" she commanded. "I fear I was engaged for this very dance, and my partner will think me rude!"

Waite was in hopeless bewilderment. He particularly liked and admired Robert Gault. He was silent for a few moments, and then exclaimed with seeming irrelevance: "Women do beat me!"

Barbara looked up at him quickly, as she took her seat.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I beg your pardon, most fair and inexplicable Mistress Ladd," replied Waite, who had been puzzled almost out of his manners, "but,—if you will permit me to say it,—if this be the fate of your friends, what, oh, what must be the fate of your enemies!"

"I don't understand you!" said Barbara, haughtily. "Pray explain yourself!" But just then a young scarlet-coated officer, Nevil Paget, came up, claiming the hand of Mistress Ladd; and Jerry Waite, who had begun to realise that he was in deep water, hailed the rescue gladly.

"I shall have the honour to claim you again, gracious mistress," said he, "and I shall explain myself then, if you bid me. Meanwhile, I make way for those more fortunate than I."

And now, in her bitterness and disappointment, Barbara flung herself heart and soul into the folly. When the young Englishman started to speak of a duel, she shut him up so mercilessly that for five minutes he durst not open his mouth. But she proceeded to flirt and bedazzle him, half flouting, half flattering, till in five minutes more he was nigh ready to fling all the pedigree of all the Pagets at her small, light-dancing feet and beg her to dance upon it her whole life long. She danced everything, and between the dances held a court more crowded and more devoted than that which had paid her homage at the Van Griffs'. She was deaf to all attempts to lure her out upon the fairy terraces, because when she first saw them she had decided that Robert should take her out there to tell her what a wonderful surprise she had given him. But the men whom she refused were not driven away by her denial. She mixed bitter and sweet for them all so cunningly that none could tell in which of the twain lay the magic that held them thrall. And all the while her heart smouldered in her breast like a hot coal in the ash.

At length came her minuet with Glenowen; and after it her uncle, who

thought he detected something feverish in her gaiety, and felt moved to cool it a little if he might without damage, asked her if she had seen Robert.

"For a moment or two," she answered, with an indifference beyond reason.

Glenowen had heard all the story of the duel, and wondered what had gone wrong.

"Why did he go home, sweetheart, so soon after our coming?" he inquired.

"Did he go home?" she queried, casually. "You know he was hardly fit to be out. Even heroes can't stand the loss of blood!"

"What did you do to him, child?" persisted Glenowen.

This questioning chafed on Barbara's raw and bleeding nerves.

"Robert made himself very disagreeable," she replied, crisply. "I showed that I was disappointed in him, and he seems to have got angry and gone home!"

"Disappointed in him!" exclaimed Glenowen. Then he hesitated, and went on: "Really, Barbara, are you quite human? Forgive me if I—"

Barbara faced him squarely, and he felt, though he could not see, the flood of tears pent up behind her shining eyes.

"Uncle Bob!" she whispered, in a tense voice, "if you are going to criticise, take me home *right away*. I can't stand one thing more!"

Glenowen knew her better than any one else ever could, and his displeasure melted as he caught signal of a distress which he did not understand. Yet he knew better than to be too sympathetic, having more than once experienced the perilous relaxing powers of sympathy.

"Well, well, sweetheart," he laughed, lightly, "forgive me. I've no doubt it would seem all right if I knew. And what does it matter to me about Bobby Gault, anyhow, so long as my little girl is happy?"

"She isn't happy, Uncle Bob! But that isn't *your* fault, you dear, not ever in the world!"

As they moved apart from the promenading throng, and paused at an open window overlooking the terraces, Barbara's ears, acute as those of the furtive kindred in Westings forest, again caught a word that was not intended for them. She saw two painted and tower-headed dames, sitting not far from the window, point her out to another who had just taken a seat beside them; and she heard the newcomer remark, behind her fan:

"That ugly little rebel! Insult an officer of the king's troops for her!"

Barbara's face flushed scarlet, and she looked at her uncle. But he had heard nothing,—and she remembered that her ears were keener than those of other people. The remark, however, puzzled her, and started a vague, troublesome misgiving. Thereafter she found it difficult to resume the spontaneous fervour of her gaiety. Fits of abstraction would take her unawares; but her courtiers thought them merely another touch of art, effective as they were unexpected. She was now looking forward to the dance with Jerry Waite, and the explanation which he had so rashly promised. She had intended to snub him severely, but when he came for her at last he found her altogether gracious.

"Would you mind very much if we sat somewhere and talked, instead of dancing?" she asked. And Waite, nothing loth, led her to a seat just beyond the long windows,—nearer to the terrace than any other man had succeeded in getting her to go. This filled him with elation, and he was glad, rather than otherwise, that she had refused to go out among the walks and arbours. Here his triumph was visible every moment to his disappointed rivals. He was, of course, like the rest, half infatuated with Barbara; but being a sane youth, with a

sense of humour, he knew the difference between infatuation and half infatuation. He imagined there was more between Barbara and Robert than there really was; and he did not hold himself any match for Robert in a race for hearts. Therefore, he was capable of thinking of his own prestige. And to heighten that he had an inspiration. When, after waiting till she could wait no longer, for him to bring up the subject, Barbara asked him to give her the promised explanation of his remark, he fenced cleverly till the time was close at hand when he knew she would be claimed by another partner. He saw this prospective partner, Cary Patten, eyeing her hungrily, ready to swoop down and take possession at the first permissible moment. Then he said: "In very truth, fair mistress, the explanation necessitates a long story. To tell you a little would leave me in a worse light than I could endure you to behold me in. The story comes first,—and then the explanation follows with ease!"

"When will you explain? My curiosity has been most artistically aroused!" said Barbara, maintaining with an effort her tone of sprightly merriment.

"If I might have the honour of waiting upon you to-morrow, I am bold to hope I might succeed in interesting you!" suggested Waite.

"You may come in the morning," answered Barbara, promptly. "Say about eleven o'clock."

The delighted Jerry was ceremoniously bowing his gratitude for this command, conscious that it would make him the envied of all the gallants of Manhattan, when Cary Patten came up and carried Barbara off with rather more eagerness than ceremony. He had been most hard hit of all her victims at the Van Griffs' ball, and had experienced deep dejection over the rumour which had that day associated her name with Robert Gault's. Robert's early departure from the ball had somewhat cheered him, however; and now, with that simplicity, not unlike Barbara's own, born of secure family position and careless disregard of convention, he determined to find out if the field were open. He

saw that Barbara was distinctly friendly to him,—whether for his own sake or for what Glenowen had told her of his sympathies,—and he trusted to his directness to disarm her possible resentment of his questioning.

"If you will pardon me, gracious lady," he began, after the customary interchange of compliment, "I am going to ask you something about our friend Gault. Carberry was accounted till to-day the best sword in the colony. Now he stands second best! It took uncommon high courage or uncommon deep interest in the quarrel, to cross swords with such a master,—but, of course—"

Barbara's face changed, and she interrupted him crisply. His first phrases had been interesting enough, but at the words "uncommon deep interest in the quarrel," the vision of that unknown woman floated up and laughed in her face.

"I am weary of the subject, Captain Patten. It seems to me it should be possible to talk of something else. If not, let us listen to the music, please!"

Never before had Cary Patten been so snubbed. The experience was novel to him, and he did not like it. But he found more than ample compensation in the thought that Barbara's words showed no impassioned interest in Robert Gault! If such a fight, and in such a cause, left her indifferent, then surely he need have no great fear of Robert as a rival. To be sure, he thought Barbara's indifference a little cruel, a little heartless,—but so much the greater the reward if he could awaken heart in this flashing, audacious, irresistible little witch. Cary Patten had small knowledge of the feminine heart, being much absorbed in his boyish ambitions, his dreams of splendid daring; and he had a healthy, well-founded faith in his own powers. His bright, handsome face looked glum for a moment or two; then he laughed frankly and cried:

"Served me just right, for being so bold, sweet mistress. I implore you forgive me, and be friends! On bended knee I sue—to speak figuratively. I dare not do it in fact, you know, else all the men in the room would be on their knees about you, which would look singular!"

Yes, he was a nice boy, and Barbara not only forgave him, but tried to resume her old gaiety for his pleasure. So far as his pleasure was concerned,

she succeeded; though older and keener eyes than Cary Patten's would have seen that her mirth was forced. He left her feeling that he had made no small progress; and he trod on air in his elation because she had promised him no less than three dances at the very next ball at which they should meet. His succeeding partners found him tender but absent-minded,—a combination which they interpreted to their advantage or otherwise, according to their knowledge of men's hearts.

But as for Barbara's heart, it was now yielding to the strain, and she felt that she could keep up the play no longer. Her anger had given out before the need of it, as a stimulant to flirtation, was past. Only pain, humiliation, disappointment, remained to her, and she felt that if she did not get away at once something would happen. With all the obstinate force of her will she kept a hold upon her imperious vivacity, and would hear no appeals when her next partner was bidden to fetch her uncle and call her coach.

"Take me home, *please*, Uncle Bob!" she pleaded; and he, after a glance into her eyes, yielded comprehendingly. Her reason for going, indeed, he did not comprehend; but her need of going he comprehended instantly. Till the very last moment she kept herself at pitch, laughing, sweetly jibing, taunting, provoking, inviting, so that the men who insisted on helping Glenowen escort her to her coach felt that the glitter had gone from the dance with her departure. But once safe inside the coach, and beyond the lights, she flung herself upon Uncle Bob's neck and broke into a storm of sobbing. She vouchsafed no explanation, and the sagacious Glenowen asked no questions; and she wept, intermittently, all the way to the high-stooped old Dutch house on State Street. To such a bitter end had come the evening, the wondrous evening, of which she had hoped, expected, claimed so much!

CHAPTER XXVI.

Barbara slept little, but lay late, and Glenowen was away about business ere she appeared. By the time her caller arrived she was fairly herself, only subdued in spirit, sorrowful, and homesick. She had taken pains, however, that her morning toilet should be becoming; and Jerry Waite thought her pallor, the shadows about her great grave eyes, the wistfulness of her scarlet mouth, even more enchanting than her radiance and sparkle of the night before.

"This is most gracious of you, fair lady, to let me come so soon!" he murmured ecstatically, over the rosy brown tips of her slim fingers. "Did the other men but know of it, I should have feared for my life to come without a guard!"

Barbara smiled faintly, willing to appreciate his flatteries, but in no mood for badinage and quip.

"Nay, sir!" she answered, "do not lay it to my graciousness, which is scant to even so charming a gentleman as Mr. Waite, but to my curiosity, which I acknowledge to be great and insistent. Tell me this wonderful thing you promised to tell me!"

Jerry Waite assumed an air of mock supplication.

"I implore you, dear lady, suffer me for one moment to delude myself with the ravishing dream that 'twas for my company, no less than for my story, that you permitted me to come.— What, no, not for one moment the sweet delusion?"

Barbara shook her head resolutely.

"No, first deserve favour, before you presume to claim it, sir!" she retorted. "Earn my grace by a story as interesting as you have led me to expect. Then, perhaps, I may like you well enough to let you stay awhile, for the sake of your company!"

"So be it, if so the queen decrees!" said Waite. "My little story is about a duel, of which, as I gathered last night, the fairest but—pardon me—not always the most gracious of her sex knows a little, but not the most interesting details!"

"I have heard too much already of this duel!" interrupted Barbara. "I do not understand how it concerns me!"

"Oh, lady, this impatience of yours!" said Waite, watching her keenly. "How can you expect to understand the manner in which it concerns you, if you will not let any one tell you the story? I stand pledged to make the story interesting on pain of forfeiting your good will!"

"Well," agreed Barbara, with seeming reluctance. In very truth she was trembling with eagerness for him to go on. "But, I pray you, be as brief as is consistent with justice to your claim as a narrator!"

"I will be most brief!" said Waite. "For the merit lies in the story itself, not in the fashion of the telling. Yesterday, a little after the noon hour, some half-score gentlemen were gathered by chance in Pym's Ordinary, where many of us frequent for the latest bit of gossip. There was talk of this, that, and the other, but most of the charms of a lady whom we know and reverence—"

"Who was she?" asked Barbara.

But Waite, intent upon his story, paid no heed.

"The praises, the compliments, the eulogiums," he went on, "that were heaped upon this magical name seemed to show that every man was at her feet.

All but Carberry. Captain Carberry is a chill-souled, carping, sarcastical fellow, and arrogant withal, by reason of the unmatched agility of his blade. It had pleased him to be displeased by certain sweet, if a trifle pungent, sprightlinesses of the lady in question; and now his comments ran sharply counter to those of the rest of the company. He did not admire her at all,—which was, of course, within his undoubted rights, however it discredited his taste. But presently his criticisms became a trifle harsher than was fitting; and there was a moment of uneasy silence. Then, clear upon the silence, Gault spoke,—Gault, who had hitherto been listening without a word.

"'Carberry,' said he, quietly, 'you have said just enough. One word more will be too much!'

"Every one held his breath. There was an ugly look about Gault's mouth, and we trembled for him. He is liked, you know; while Carberry, a man ten years older, is feared. Carberry looked Bob over, with a supercilious smile, which meant mischief, as we knew, and then drawled slowly:

"'I shall say whatever it may please me to say about that damned little—' But no one was to hear the sentence finished. We can never have our curiosity certainly satisfied as to that word, which just then got smashed beyond recognition behind Carberry's teeth. It was probably not so very bad a word, if the truth were known. Bob was taking no risks on that score. His blow was straight as a bullet; and Carberry went sprawling over two chairs and a table.

"When he picked himself up he was quite cool,—collected and businesslike. That we knew to be his deadly way, and we trembled for Bob. Bob, however, seemed as easy in his mind as Carberry. The two of them, indeed, were so deuced civil you might have thought they were arranging to marry each other's sisters. There was no time lost, you may be sure. Seconds were chosen, terms agreed upon, a doctor sent for, and we promptly made up a little pleasure party to the woods.

"As for the fight, dear lady, I spare your gentle soul the details. It lacked just one element of interest to the connoisseur,—both combatants fought in one fashion. There was no contrast, such as one might have expected between a boy of twenty-three and a veteran of thirty-six. At the very first Carberry had attacked with fury,—but when he felt the quality of Bob's wrist he saw it was not a case for bluster, and settled down to business. Both fought smiling, alike cool, wary, dangerous, sure of the result. Where and when Bob learned it, we none of us knew. He is a queer, reticent chap in some ways. But learned it he had,—and I, who like to study faces, saw the tinge of surprise in Carberry's face pass to admiration. His rage was forgotten in the exhilaration of his favourite game. I never again expect to see two blades so nicely matched. The excitement to us watchers grew intense, till our knees felt weak. But they two seemed as fresh as when they started.

"At last—'a touch!" said Carberry,—and then, by the slight hissing of the words between his teeth I realised the strain.

'"Not at all!' answered Robert,—and his words, too, came hissingly, for all the easy smile upon his lips. Then both grew white. And for a few minutes there was no change. And it seemed to us that our eyes could follow the blades no longer. And then—for the life of me I could not see how it happened—a red stain came on the shoulder of Bob's shirt; and in the next second Carberry, letting his sword fall, dropped in a heap.

"Before we could recover our astonishment, Robert and the doctor together were bending over the wounded man, and had his shirt ripped open. 'I've got it, eh?' said Carberry, faintly. 'A fair, clean thrust, an' served me damn well right!' And he held out his hand to Bob,—who grasped it with both his, and looked now, all of a sudden, like a boy ready to cry.

'"Stuff and nonsense, Captain!' exclaimed the doctor. 'You've not got your quietus with *this* bare bodkin. You'll be all right, sound as ever, in a month, a

fortnight maybe!'

'"Thank God!' cried Robert.

'"My sentiments exactly!' said Carberry, his voice stronger with the knowledge that he was not dying. 'Gault, my compliments, with my best apologies! Great sword, my boy, great—' and with that he swooned from the pain and loss of blood. And we, very happy that all had ended so happily, got him to the coach, and so home. And the rest, dear Mistress Ladd, you know!"

"A mighty interesting story, I admit!" said Barbara. "But still I ask, of what especial, immediate interest to me?"

Waite looked at her curiously. Was it possible she could be so blind? But her wide eyes were innocent of all comprehension. It suddenly occurred to him that, new come to town as she was, she found it impossible to imagine *her* name the theme of tongues. He began to understand.

"You know the lady," said he, and paused.

"Well, sir, 'tis possible. I have met many in the few days that I have been in New York. What is her name—since you seem to hold it an important matter."

"Her name, dear lady—her name is one that stirs a thrill of admiring homage in all our hearts. It is—*Mistress Barbara Ladd*!"

Barbara caught her breath, and her eyes dilated.

"What?" she cried, though she had heard quite clearly.

"Her name is Mistress Barbara Ladd!" repeated Jerry Waite.

"Oh, Mr. Waite. No! No! Don't tell me it was on my account that Robert fought. Impossible! He might have been killed! And I thought—" but she

stopped herself in time, without saying what it was she had thought.

Jerry Waite became serious.

"It seems to me, dear lady, that your thought, whatever it was, did Gault an injustice," said he, gently. "And that is my explanation. Am I forgiven?"

Barbara conquered her distress. This was the easier—after the first pang of remorse—because the fact that Robert had not failed her soon overtopped in her mind the fact that she had failed Robert. That unknown woman—the hateful vision vanished in a burst of light. The ache of loss was healed in her heart. She was reinstated, too, in her self-esteem. New York grew bright again. Her conquests were once more worth while. Robert should behold them all,—and be one of them,—the most subjugated of them all. At last her face grew radiant,—her eyes dancing, her teeth flashing, her mouth the reddest rose, her clear brown cheeks softly aflush.

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Waite," she cried, holding out her hand. "It is a beautiful story, and wins you a very high place in my regard. You may stay and talk to me till dinner-time, if you like; and then my uncle will be glad to have you dine with us!"

The first part of the invitation Waite accepted with alacrity, and cursed himself bitterly that he had an engagement to prevent him staying for dinner. In the conversation that followed Barbara gained him and chained him fast, not as a mad, intoxicated lover, but as one of the best and most loyal of her friends. But the moment he was gone she rushed to her scrutoir and in fierce haste scribbled a note. It ran:

"DEAR ROBERT:—I did not understand at all. I thought something quite different from the truth. I have just found out about things. Please come and talk

to me till dinner-time, if you like; and then let me tell you how perfectly horrid I think myself.

"BARBARA."

This she sealed with a care that contrasted curiously with the haste with which she had written it. Then she called her maid and sent it around to the stately-doorwayed office on Bowling Green.

The answer that came was merely a bunch of dark red roses, with never a written word; but Barbara found it quite satisfactory. To Robert it would have seemed superfluous to have said he would come. Barbara made her toilet with especial care, selecting everything with a view to making herself look as nearly as possible like the Barbara of the old Second Westings days. As she surveyed herself in the glass, she was astonished at the result. Had she really put the hands of time back five years? As she remembered, she had looked just so on the afternoon when Robert came, and found her in the apple-tree reading "Clarissa." It was three o'clock already,—and Robert had been waiting already half an hour in the drawing-room below,—but she took yet a few minutes more for a finishing touch. She basted up a deep tuck in her petticoat,—about half an inch off for each year blotted from her calendar,—and then, with flaming eyes and mouth wreathed in laughter, she ran down to receive her guest. It was the direct obverse of the meeting she had planned.

"Did you ride over, Robert? Or did you come in the canoe?" she asked, as if she had but that moment jumped down out of the apple-tree.

"Barbara!" he cried, and seized and kissed both hands.

"I was beginning to fear that you had forgotten the way to Second Westings!" she went on, in gay reproach. "Why, it is *weeks* since you were

over; and the young catbirds in the currant bush have grown their wings and flown; and the goldenrod's in flower; and the 'Early Harvests' are beginning to turn red on the old apple-tree over by the gate; and how will you explain your long absence, sir, to Aunt Hitty, and Doctor John, and Doctor Jim, I'd like to know!"

Robert was devouring her with his eyes as she spoke. "Oh, you do indeed look just as you did that day I found you in the apple-tree!" he cried, at last. "So weary long ago,—yet now, sweet lady, it seems but now!"

"Let us play it is but now," laughed Barbara.

"Yes," said Robert,—"but *please* don't send me right away to Doctor Jim, as you did that morning! I will try not to incur your displeasure. And don't be in such a hurry to get back to 'Clarissa' as you were then!"

So all the afternoon they talked the language and the themes of Second Westings, with the difference that Barbara was all graciousness, instead of her old mixture of acid and sweet. And when Glenowen came in to supper he was admitted to the game, and played it with a relish. And when, after supper, the three went riding, they took what they swore to be the Westings Landing Road, —though certain of the landmarks, as they could not but agree, looked unfamiliar. Almost they persuaded themselves that on their return they might entreat Mistress Mehitable to brew them a sack posset.

It was not till three days later, when Robert was begging more than his share of dances for a ball to be given that night at Government House, that Barbara explained—lightly and laughingly, but in a way that suffered Robert to understand—her quite inadequate reasons for having treated him so cavalierly on the evening after his duel.

CHAPTER XXVII.

For the next few weeks Barbara enjoyed herself without stint, and found New York quite all that she had painted it. To Robert she now vouchsafed sufficient favour to keep him fairly happy and good company,—or, at least, to enable him to make himself good company by an effort of will. Yet she held him on the chilly side of that frontier which separates the lover from the comrade. He was her favoured escort, but not so favoured that other admirers could fancy themselves warned from the field. And he was kept restless, tormented, jealous. He was made to feel—as others were allowed to think—that his primacy in privilege was based solely upon old friendship and familiar memories. But the moment he attempted to crowd aside the new friends,—among whom Cary Patten, Jerry Waite, and young Paget caused him especial worry,—Barbara would seem to forget all their intimacy and relegate him to a position somewhat more remote than that of the merest acquaintance. The utmost that he durst claim at any time was a certain slight precedence in her train of devoted cavaliers. She danced, rode, flirted, with something so near approaching impartiality that she let no moth quite feel itself a fool in scorching its wings at her eyes. Yet no one could presume upon her graciousness; and no one but Cary Patten had the temerity to push his suit to the point where she was put on the defensive. Cary Patten was promptly dismissed. But when he as promptly came back on the very first occasion, she had forgotten the matter, and remembered only how she liked his honest boyishness, his sanguine boldness. Cary, applying one of those general rules which were apt to be so inapplicable in the special case of Barbara, decided that not one, nor indeed a dozen, refusals need reduce him to despair! And Barbara, when afterward she came to think of it, liked Cary Patten the better because he had not sulked over his defeat.

Meanwhile Barbara was exercising a restraint upon one point, which was in flat contradiction to her wonted directness. She was carefully avoiding, in Robert's presence, a discussion of those political questions with which the whole country, from Maine to Georgia, was then seething. This was easier than it would have been even a few weeks before, for the reason that as the differences grew more deadly society grew more cautious about letting them intrude themselves among its smooth observances. Barbara, in fact, had come to fear the inevitable discussion with Robert. She knew he was identified with the Tory party, but she did not know how far. And she feared her own heat of partisanship not less than his resolution—which she called obstinacy. So, by tacit consent, she and Robert gave wide berth to the perilous theme; till at length their avoidance of it, when it was thrilling on the very air they breathed, made it begin to loom all the larger and darker between them. Presently the apprehension that it was an impending peril to their relation drove Robert to speak, precipitately, on the subject that was bursting his heart night and day.

They had just come in from an afternoon ride, and were alone in the drawing-room. Barbara was in high good humour; and Robert seized the moment to ask leave to return that same evening.

"I'm sorry, Robert! I'd love to have you come," she replied. "But I've promised the evening to Cary Patten. He wants to bring his fiddle and try over some new music with me."

Robert's face darkened.

"Cary Patten seems to be here all the time!" he exclaimed, with natural exaggeration.

"What nonsense! You know that's not true, Robert. He's not here *half* as much as you are. But if he were, what of it? He's very good-looking, and Uncle Bob and I both like him, and, indeed, he's *much* more *entertaining* than you,

Robert!"

Robert walked quickly across the room and back, then seized both her slim brown wrists in a grip whose severity she rather liked. She felt that something disturbing was at hand, however, and she braced her wits to manage it.

"Barbara,—my lady,—my lady,—I love you!" he said, very quietly.

"Of course, Robert! I know that," she answered, with composure, smiling up at him, and making no effort to free her wrists. Yet in some way her smile checked him, as he was about to crush her in his arms. His breast ached fiercely so to crush her, yet it was impossible.

"With all my heart and soul, my lady," he went on, his voice on the dead level of intense emotion, "with every drop of blood in my body, I love you, I have loved you, ever since the old child days in Second Westings!"

"That is very dear of you, Robert," she responded, her voice and eyes showing nothing but frank pleasure at his words. "But, of course, I have always known that," which was not quite true, though it seemed true to her at the moment.

He could not tell what there was in this answer to hold him back, or if it was the frankness of her eyes that daunted him, but he began to feel that, so far from clasping her to his heart and satisfying his lips upon her eyes, her hair, her mouth, he had no right even to be holding her wrists as he was. He flung them from him, drew back a step, and searched her face with a desperate look.

"And you—you do not love me at all!"

Barbara looked thoughtful, regretful.

"No, Robert, I don't *love* you—not in the way you mean. I'm not in love

with you, you know. But I do care a lot for you, more than for *almost* any one else!"

They had both forgotten—for it was weeks away—how Barbara had felt about the imaginary unknown lady.

That "almost" was, to Robert, the end of all things. He thought at once of Cary Patten. Pain and jealous madness struggled together in his breast, strangling him.

"Good-bye!" he said at last, finding his voice, and turning to the door. "I shall leave to-night!"

"Robert!" cried Barbara, sharply. "Come back at once!"

He paused near the door, half turned, as if compelled by mere civility, but showed no sign of obeying.

"Come back to me!" she commanded. And he, being a courteous gentleman, obeyed.

"What is it, lady?"

"What on earth do you mean by being so crazy?" she demanded.

No answer occurred to him as necessary. He looked at her inquiringly, his face very white, his eyes deep sunken, his lips straight and hard. Barbara began to regret that she had not managed in some other way. She certainly could not let him go. Yet she certainly did not love him enough to give up her freedom for him,—to sacrifice all the enchanting experience of which she had not yet begun to tire, to dismiss all the interesting men, whose homage was so sweet to her young, unsatiated vanity.

"Don't you know, Robert," she went on, beguilingly, "that I *couldn't*

possibly get along without you? I don't love you, but I do love you to love me, you know. I couldn't bear to have you go away and forget me, and love some other woman,—some kind, sweet, beautiful woman who could love you and make you happy. I need you to love me. Though I know there is no earthly reason why you should, and I think you are a crazy goose to do it, and I believe you only think you do, anyhow!"

Robert stood motionless. The storm raging up and down within him turned him to steel on the surface. From a dry throat he tried to speak clearly and with moderation.

"You said—'almost!' Who is it—you care more for?—Cary Patten?"

Barbara broke into a clear peal of laughter, and clapped her hands with a fine assumption of glee.

"Oh, you silly, silly child!" she exclaimed. "It was Uncle Bob, of course, that I was thinking of when I said that. I love Uncle Bob better than any one else in the world,—*far* better than I love you, Robert, I can tell you that. But I care for you almost as much as for Aunt Hitty. Cary Patten! Why, he and these other nice men who are making things so pleasant for me, they are just *new* friends. I *like* them, that's all. You are altogether different, you know. But I'm just not in love with you,—and so you talk of going away and spoiling everything for me. I don't call that loving me, Robert,—not as *I* would love a girl if I were a man. But it's not my fault if I'm not in love myself, is it? I'm sorry,—but I don't believe I *can* love, really, the way you mean! Cary Patten, indeed! Why, he's just a boy,—a nice, good-looking, saucy, conceited boy!"

"Can't you try to love me, Barbara?" pleaded Robert, his wrath all gone. He flung himself down at her feet, and wildly kissed them. All this she permitted smilingly, but the request seemed to her, as it was, a very foolish one.

"No, I can't!" she answered, with decision. "Trying wouldn't make me. And

I don't think I want to, anyhow. I want to enjoy myself here while I can. And I want you to be nice, and help me enjoy myself, and not bother me. Love me just as much as you like, Robert, but don't tell me so—too often! And don't ask me to love you. And *don't* go and be lovely to the other girls, and make believe you are not in love with me, for that would displease me very much, though I should know it was making believe because you were cross at me. So, don't be horrid!"

This seemed to Robert a somewhat one-sided arrangement. He knew he would accept it, yet his honesty compelled him to express his sense of its injustice.

"I certainly would be lovely to the other girls if I wanted to, my lady," said he, doggedly. "The trouble is, I *don't* want to. And I sha'n't bore myself just for the sake of trying to make you think I don't care. I love you, that's all—better than anything else in heaven or earth. And I shall make you love me, my lady!"

This threat amused Barbara, but did not displease her.

"Very well, Robert," she answered, with a teasing, alluring look that made his heart jump. "I sha'n't try to prevent you. I'll even like you a little better now, at once, if you will go right away this minute and let me dress."

"Dress for Cary Patten!" muttered Robert, kissing her hand without enthusiasm, and retiring with sombre brow. That he should go in this temper did not please her ladyship at all.

"And, Robert!" she cried, when he had just reached the door.

"Yes, my lady!" and he came back once more.

"You said good-bye as if you were still in a nasty, black temper!" She held out her hand to him again. This time he kissed it with what she considered a

more fitting warmth.

"And, Robert, don't forget that I am *very, very* good to you, far more so than you deserve. I don't think of telling Cary Patten, or any of the others, not to flirt with the other girls. Cary Patten may be as lovely to them as he likes, and I sha'n't mind one bit, so long as it does not interfere with his being as attentive as he ought to be to me! Now, it is a great honour I do you, Robert, in not letting you flirt."

"I appreciate it, my lady," he answered, permitting himself to smile. "A great honour, indeed,—though a superfluous one!"

"I have no objection to that word, 'superfluous,' in that connection," said Barbara, thoughtfully, to herself, as Robert disappeared.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

After this Robert was careful, and so was permitted to be fairly happy when he could keep the fires of jealousy banked down in his heart. Once in awhile they would begin to get the better of him; and then, after letting Barbara see just a glimpse of the flame, that she might not forget it was there, he would leave before she could find him troublesome and work it under by hours of furious riding. He skilfully avoided giving her any further excuse for discipline; and was even so cunning, at times, as to pique her by his show of self-control. In this way he scored continually over the too confident Cary Patten, who, after a week or two of almost daily calls at the old Dutch house on State Street, would disappear and not be seen near Barbara for days. At such times Robert

concluded that Cary had been tempting Providence and suffering the usual disaster of those who so presume. As for Jerry Waite, and young Paget, and the rest of the infatuated train, Robert thought that Barbara was quite too infernally nice to them all, and cursed them all hotly in his heart; but he could not refrain from admiring the neat manner in which she held them all in hand.

Early in the autumn, however, it became still more difficult for Barbara and Robert to keep silent on the great questions which they so dreaded to discuss. The First Continental Congress was in session at Philadelphia, and its deliberations formed a theme to blister men's tongues. Made up of Tories, Radical Patriots or potential rebels, and Moderates, in fairly even proportion, it satisfied neither Barbara nor Robert. The latter, in spite of the fact that its New York delegates were of his own party, viewed it with singularly clear eyes, and saw in it not merely an instrument for the constitutional redress of just grievances,—wherein it had his sympathy,—but a forerunner of revolt,—wherein it called forth his passionate reprobation. To Barbara, on the other hand, this Continental Congress, of which she had hoped so much, seemed a mean-spirited, paltering, blear-eyed thing, incapable of seeing what destiny had written large across the continent, or too timorous to acknowledge what it saw. The strain was further increased by matters which touched them both personally. With the news that Connecticut, stirred up by false rumours of a struggle with the royal troops in Boston, had thousands of her militia under arms, came a letter from Mistress Mehitable, saying that Doctor John was among them, in command of a regiment, and that Doctor Jim was looking after his patients. At this tidings Barbara's heart swelled with mingled pride and anxiety. She pictured the heroic figure Doctor John would make, in his uniform, about to fight for the cause which she held so splendid and so righteous. At the same time she saw him already in the fight, waving his sword amid the smoke and slaughter, and she shook with terror for him. Both Robert and Glenowen were with her when the letter came, and as she read it out her voice broke and the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Good for John Pigeon!" cried Glenowen, his eyes aglow.

Then there was a heavy stillness on the air, such as that which sometimes portends an earthquake, and neither looked at Robert. Robert's face was very grave, but inspiration came to him, and he said exactly the right thing.

"How lonely Doctor Jim and Mistress Mehitable must be! Second Westings must be perfectly desolate!"

The danger was averted. He had dwelt, not upon the point of difference, but the point of sympathy; and the difference sank again out of sight.

"Oh," murmured Barbara, "I almost feel as if I ought to go back to Aunt Hitty!"

"I know! But you can't, very well, sweetheart! For which I am most thankful!" said Glenowen, promptly.

"And Mistress Mehitable has Doctor Jim," said Robert. "We need you more than she does, dearest lady!"

With all the country seething as it was, nowhere else, perhaps, save in New York, would it have been possible to keep up so long the pretence of harmony between opposing factions. New York was full of "Moderates," men no less determined to resist the tyranny of Parliament than to retain the supremacy of the Crown. Extremes were thus held in check; and men met in apparent social harmony whose opinions, once put in practice, would have hurled them at one another's throats. But to the little company resorting at the old Dutch house on State Street there entered now a new element of disruption.

At a dance Barbara had met a slender, dark youth, a student at King's College, who had made himself prominent by his radical eloquence at a great mass-meeting of the Continental party. His scholarly breadth of thought,

combined with almost fanatical zeal, delighted her. And he had the uncommon merit of expressing unforgettably the very views she herself had long maintained. They became too interested in conversation to dance; and from that evening Mr. Alexander Hamilton came often to Glenowen's lodgings. He was a mere boy in years, but Glenowen felt his power at once,—and even Robert, who was not unnaturally prejudiced, was too honest not to admit that Barbara's young Mr. Hamilton was a very remarkable and accomplished youth.

Understanding the sharp divergence of opinion in the little circle, Hamilton kept a curb upon his tongue save at convenient seasons. But to his eager and convicted spirit this soon became too difficult. One evening, when there were none to hear him but Barbara, Robert, and Glenowen, the torrent of his boyish ardour overflowed. He depicted the momentous changes toward which each fateful hour was hurrying them. He declared it was no more than a matter of days ere all America would be in the throes of a righteous revolution. He prophesied the birth of a great republic, that should establish Liberty in her New World home, and scourge kings, thrones, and tyrannies into the sea. Glenowen had looked at him warningly, but in vain. Barbara, troubled at first, grew suddenly hot and resentful at the thought that Robert should be blind to the splendid dream. She applauded aggressively.

Robert's brows were knit, but he had no emotion save distress.

"I pray you pardon me, dear lady, and you, Mr. Glenowen, if I take my departure at once," said he, at the first pause. "Knowing my sentiments as you both do, fully, you will understand that I could not in honour stay and listen to such doctrines as these of Mr. Hamilton's and not oppose them with all my force."

He bent over Barbara's hand, but she petulantly snatched it away without letting him kiss it. Then, having shaken hands heartily with Glenowen, and bowed stiffly to Hamilton, he withdrew in great trouble of mind, feeling that

now, in truth, had come to an end the truce between his honour and his love. He walked the streets half the night, and in the morning, white and dejected, but determined to know the worst at once, he went around to State Street at the earliest moment permissible after breakfast. Barbara received him coldly. But he made haste to face the issue.

"Surely, dearest lady, you see that I had no alternative but to go!" he pleaded. "I could not quarrel with him, seeing that he was your guest. Yet I could not sit and listen to his treason!"

"I think the same treason as he uttered, if treason it be! And utter it, too, when I see fit!" said Barbara.

"That's different!" said Robert, and paused.

It was on Barbara's lips to ask, "How?—Why?" but she refrained, lest she should complicate the discussion.

"That's different," he repeated, "because you are a woman, and because I love you. But indeed, my lady, I intended no discourtesy to Mr. Hamilton. If discourtesy there were, surely it was his. I would not have attacked what he holds sacred. Yet my sentiments are not less well known than his. He knew that I was pledged to the king's side."

Barbara bit her lips hard. This was just what she had taken such pains not to know. Her heart was bitter enough against him for his views themselves; it was still more bitter against him now for forcing her to confess knowledge of those views.

"A little discourtesy, one way or the other, what would that matter?" she asked, scornfully. "There's just one thing that matters to me now, Robert. War is coming. Have you chosen your side?"

"My side has chosen me, dear lady!" he answered, sorrowfully.

"Listen, Robert," she went on, "I have tried not to know that you hold opinions which I hate, and loathe, and despise. It means everything to me, when I say I love my country and hate the enemies of my country. I believe in patriotism."

"And I believe, also, in honour and loyalty, oh, my dearest lady!"

"Your own stupid ideas of honour and loyalty!" cried Barbara, with fierce impatience. "I tell you, Robert, the enemy of my country cannot be my friend."

"But if I am the enemy of your country, so is Doctor Jim!" protested Robert.

Barbara flushed with annoyance. She did not like an unanswerable argument.

"I love Doctor Jim!" she shot back at him, with cruel implication.

"And I love you, Barbara!" answered Robert, also with meaning. She tossed her head scornfully.

"A fig for such love!" she cried. "Years ago, when you were just a boy, and could not have your opinions fixed" ("About the age of your Mr. Hamilton!" he interjected, rashly), "I remember asking you, for my sake, to teach yourself the right things, Robert, and join our side, and be faithful to your own country. What do you do? It's not as if it were a mere difference of opinion,—but *I* am *right*! I am with all the great and wise of old, who have taught that patriotism is a man's highest duty. Yet what have you done, Robert? You vow you love me! Indeed! And you prefer a stupid, far-off, half-crazy tyrant, whom you call your king, and whom you have never seen, to your country, which has borne and cherished you—and to me!"

"Oh, Barbara!" cried Robert, desperately. "What are king or country, what are heaven and earth, to me, compared with you? But what would my love be worth to you if, for the sake of my own happiness, I could be a rebel and a traitor? Should I be worthy to love you, despising myself? What would you think of me, if I could sell my honour at your bidding!"

"I think our ideas of honour are different, Robert!" retorted Barbara. "But I am not going to quarrel with you now. I am disappointed in you, that's all. And you need not expect that after this we are going to be such friends as we have been. Remember that. But—you may come and see us sometimes, of course; and I will dance with you sometimes, of course—if you ask me! Only—it is all so different!" and she could not choke down a little weary sigh.

Robert was on his knees in an instant, kissing her hands; but she repulsed him resolutely.

"No, you have chosen for yourself," she said, not unkindly. "It hurts me, truly. But I mean what I say! Now, you must go, for I have much to do before dinner. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

Barbara was as good as her word. From this time forward through that portentous fall and disastrous winter, she never let Robert forget that the old footing of familiar friendship was no longer his. She began to make a difference, too,—slight but appreciable,—toward all the declared Tories among her followers. She was bound to show some consistency toward Robert. And

moreover, her fiery and dissatisfied heart was growing restless for the breach that all saw coming but all strove to postpone. Oh, she thought, let the cruel line be drawn,—let the make-believe end,—let us know our friends and enemies apart,—let the suspense be done, be done! And—let me get back home to Second Westings!

Meanwhile the half-mad king went on fashioning the hooks that were to rend the race in twain,—and an insensate Parliament lent power to his fatal hands,—and men like Chatham and Burke, Shelburne and Rockingham, poured out impassioned eloquence in vain, pleading for justice to the colonies. By mid-winter (the winter of 1775) it was plain to every one that the king meant war, if that were the only way to bring the colonies to their knees. Ten thousand troops were ordered to Boston, and plans were laid for organising the Indians on the frontiers. In the colonies, though few dared say it, all were making ready for the struggle. On every hand there was drilling of militia and gathering of the munitions of war. Only in New York, as it seemed, things moved as usual, and the royal government remained in full force. As a matter of fact, there were practically two governments going on side by side; for the various "committees of safety" went about their ominous preparations, and the governor well knew it would be unsafe to interfere. The air became so tense with impending storm that people seemed to hold their breath, and when they met their eyes questioned, "Has it come?"

Then it came! And those who had longest and most preparedly waited were most shocked. The bolt that fell was the news of Lexington and Concord, of the king's troops,—disciplined, war-toughened, the bravest in the world,—driven in wild rout before the sharp-shooting colonial farmers. For five days of amazement men waited, expecting the bloody vengeance that would come. But, instead of vengeance, came the word that Boston was beleaguered, that Gage with his veteran regiments was shut up tight in the city by ill-armed and unorganised countryside militia. Straightway men drew breath again; and the undecided chose their side; and masks were thrown away. Even New York,

the prudent, the divided, the long politic, proclaimed herself at last, threw off the last empty forms of royal authority, and seized all military supplies within her borders.

The glittering life, which had been to Barbara so gay an intoxication all these months, now burst like a bubble, leaving her to realise how hollow it had been. She had no regret for it, save as a help to forgetting regrets. She was dissatisfied, and wanted Second Westings. When, therefore, her uncle came to her, a few days after the news of Bunker Hill, with word that he had accepted a commission under General Washington, the newly appointed commander-in-chief of the Continental forces, she was not greatly surprised or shocked. She had known all along that Glenowen would be at the front. She had faced all the fear of it, and taught herself to think only of the honour. Now, she turned very pale, tried to smile encouragement, but sobbed instead, ran to him and held him and kissed him.

"Of course, Uncle Bob! You must, I know. I will be brave about it, I promise I will, and not worry you with any silliness!" she murmured at last, finding her voice. "I wish *I* were a man, so I could go with you!"

"And a fiery little fighter you would make, sweetheart!" said Glenowen, cheerfully. "But the immediate point is, since you can't go a-soldiering with your old uncle, what shall we do with you? I leave within a week for the general's headquarters at Cambridge."

"You will take me with you, and leave me at Second Westings, Uncle Bob, with Aunt Hitty and Doctor Jim to keep me cheered up while you are fighting!"

"That's the best plan, decidedly, Barbe, for more reasons than one," he answered, suddenly grave. "But I don't think you can depend on Doctor Jim for very long!"

"Why, where is he going?" queried Barbara, anxiously.

"Well, you know, he'll *choose* to go wherever the Royalist volunteers may be organising their forces; but if he did not choose, he'd probably have no choice. Our Connecticut folk left many dead on Breed's Hill, dear, and the Royalists are beginning to find their homes too hot for them. I'm afraid Doctor Jim will be in peril of rough handling, with his hot temper and his fearless tongue!"

"No one in Second Westings would *dare* to be rude to Doctor Jim!" cried Barbara, indignantly.

"You don't know what they will do, sweetheart, when they are stirred out of their accustomed frame of mind. Besides, even if the Second Westings lads should be mindful of their manners, there are the rougher sort from the neighbouring villages to be thought of. *They* owe no allegiance to a Pigeon, or a Ladd either! It may be you will find yourself a very necessary shield to Mistress Mehitable, even!"

"I should like to see them try to interfere with Aunt Hitty!" flamed Barbara, setting her white teeth and flushing. "I'd shoot them, if they *are* patriots!"

Glenowen nodded approval, but counselled caution.

"You may need to be firm, girlie, but you'll need to be careful and tactful too, or you may find yourself fighting on the wrong side!" he laughed.

"Do you really mean to say that our people are beginning to attack the Tories, just because they think they ought to stick to old King George?" queried Barbara, her thought turning to Robert, whom she had not seen or heard of for more than a week.

"That's inevitable," said Glenowen. "If we are to fight England, we fight the Tories,—and the Tories with the more bitterness because we feel that they

ought to be with us. I've heard ugly talk already of tar and feathers for some of our important men here. And they have heard it themselves, and found that business called them urgently elsewhere! Other of our Tory friends are getting up volunteer companies,—a sort of counterblast to our militia battalions. I hear talk, too, of forcibly disarming all our Tories,—especially on Long Island, where they are as thick as hornets!"

"I suppose that's what Robert is doing—getting up a company to fight against us! We've not seen him for a week!" said Barbara, with a bitterness which her affected indifference failed to disguise.

"Exactly that! He is one of our most dangerous antagonists here!" answered Glenowen, sadly. "He would have been seized days ago, to prevent him doing more mischief, but he's so liked, and respected for his fairness, by all of our party, that no one cares to take the necessary action. He's the sort of man we want on our side!"

"He's as pig-headed as King George himself!" cried Barbara, hotly.

"No, he's true to his colours!" said Glenowen. "Only he can't see that he has nailed them to the mast of the wrong ship!"

"I have no patience with him!" muttered Barbara, bitterly, after a moment's silence.

"Did you ever have, dearie?" inquired Glenowen.

"What do you mean, Uncle Bob?"

"Forgive me, Barbe, if I speak plainly, these being times for plain speaking!" said Glenowen. "Truly, I can't understand a man who loves you being other than wax in your hands, you witch,—if you took the trouble to manage him. That may sound cynical, but I hope not. It's true. You owe Robert to our

cause! We want him!"

Barbara looked down, her face scarlet and her lips quivering. Then she faced her uncle bravely.

"I begin to fear I want him for myself, as much as for the cause, Uncle Bob!" she confessed.

"It's not Cary Patten, then?" asked Glenowen.

Barbara smiled enigmatically. "Cary Patten is extremely charming!" she answered. "But do you know, Uncle Bob, if Robert is still in town?"

"I think," said Glenowen, "I can say with confidence that he will get away from the city to-morrow or next day,—for friends who love him, in our party, will let him know the danger of remaining! One must make such compromises sometimes, if one is a red-blooded human being and not a bloodless saint!"

"Uncle Bob, I'm afraid you will never be a Lucius Junius Brutus!" said Barbara.

"No, thank God!" cried Glenowen, with conviction.

"I'm so glad!" said Barbara, who was very human when she was not all woman. "Brutus was right, I think! But I've always hated him!"

Then she turned to her scrutoir and wrote a cool little note to Robert, asking him to come in and speak to her a moment the next morning.

At an hour almost unseemly Robert came, of course. And Barbara was gracious to him. As if there had been no estrangement, she talked frankly of Second Westings matters,—of Doctor John's service in the siege of Boston, of Doctor Jim's danger because of his opinions, of Mistress Mehitable's need of her presence at Westings House,—just as if they were Robert's concern as well

as hers. The gladness came back to Robert's dark face, and for a moment he was forgetting the barrier between them.

"And what are you doing, Robert? Is it not becoming a little dangerous for you in New York now?" she asked, with gentle frankness.

"I am going away to-morrow, dearest lady," he answered, "lest your fiery Continentals tie me up!"

"And I go back to Second Westings next week! And you were going away without seeing me for good-bye?" asked Barbara, reproachfully. "Is this the Robert that used to say he loved me a little?"

Robert looked at her in silence. "I adore the very ground that your foot treads upon!" he said, presently, in a quiet voice.

"You love me just as much as you used to?" she inquired, almost wistfully.

"As much!" he exclaimed, with scorn. "More and more, every day I breathe. These months that you have treated me so cruelly have been hell on earth. I don't see how I have lived through them."

"I, too, have not been very happy, Robert!" she acknowledged, softly. "I believe I have needed you more than I thought. Do you know, I almost think I might learn to care a great deal—perhaps all that a woman can—if only, if *only*, dear Robert, there were not this dreadful barrier between us? Oh, if you knew how I long to have you in sympathy with the cause that all my heart is given to, —to talk it all over with you, to hope and plan and look forward with you, in comradeship and understanding! If you knew—but there, I see by your obstinate mouth it is no use. I might as well pour out my heart against a stone wall. *Nothing* will soften you! *Nothing* will convince you! Love me? *You* love me? You have no heart at all in your breast! Nothing but a priggish theory!"

She burst into passionate, disappointed tears, flung herself down on the sofa, and buried her face in the cushions.

Robert was in an anguish. His mouth was drawn and white. Why should *he* be called upon to face so hideous an alternative? Why must *he* pay so appalling a price for loyalty, for fidelity, for honour? What was this bourgeois tyrant in England, that the price of loyalty to him should be the love of the woman who was dearer than heaven? Robert felt a fierce hatred of the man George of England, who was so unworthy of his kingship! He was mad to throw himself at Barbara's feet, and tell her all his life was hers to do as she would with, to offer his faith, loyalty, honour, a living sacrifice to her love, and bid her send him to fight under whatever flag she called hers! But—he held the madness in leash. The tough fibre of his will gave a little, but would not break. The drops stood out on his forehead. But all he said was:

"Beloved, beloved, I worship you. You are all I can dream of womanhood. You are all of life, all of love, all of wonder and beauty that the world can show. There is nothing my soul can ever desire but you, you, you, wonderful one!" And he tried to take her hands from under her wet face.

Through her sobs, Barbara had listened eagerly for one word that might show a yielding. But there was no such word,—no sign that he even realised that she had been offering her love as the incalculable price that should purchase him to the service of his country. This infinitely precious price,—he spurned it, then! Angry mortification surged over her, mixed with a pain that clutched at her heart. The humiliation of it—and the loss! She sat up suddenly.

"Go, go, go!" she cried, pointing to the door. "I don't want to ever see you again. I hate you. I hate you. Go—at *once*!"

And then, as Robert made no move, and strove to plead once more, she sprang to her feet, darted from the room, and fled up-stairs. He heard her door close sharply,—like the cutting off of life, it seemed to him. And he went away,

walking rather blindly, and fumbling for some moments at the hall door before he could find the latch. That same evening he left New York.

It was hours before Barbara was herself again, so Glenowen had to dine alone. Late in the afternoon, after having bathed her face back to presentability, she dressed to go out for a sharp walk. When her toilet was almost complete, word came up that Cary Patten was in the drawing-room.

Now it was at least six weeks since Cary had last attempted to make love to her, and in the meantime he had been altogether charming,—attentive, deferential, full of enthusiastic ambition, and vastly interesting in his large forecasts of what the thirteen colonies would do with independence when they got it. Barbara, therefore, had practically forgotten that he was ever in disgrace, and was unwilling to refuse him admittance, little though it suited her mood to see him. She went down at once and received him cordially.

Cary was in a mood of triumphant excitement, dashed with romantic melancholy. He looked even straighter, taller, more broad-shouldered and high-mettled than usual. His goldy-brown short hair had a crisper curl, his candid blue eyes sparkled with joy and importance.

"Oh, I know! You needn't tell me!" cried Barbara, with hearty sympathy. "Only one thing in the world could make your face shine as it does now, Cary! You are ordered to the front!"

"You've guessed it, sweet mistress!" he cried, in a voice whose boyish exultation would not be kept down. "My company is one of those chosen by the Committee of Safety to go north. We march *to-morrow*! In a few days we will be in the field—we shall be in the thick of it!"

"Oh, you are so fortunate, Cary!" responded Barbara. "Think what it must be to be just a woman, and have to stay at home gnawing one's heart, while others have the glorious joy of fighting for freedom!"

"Only one thing I need to make me happy as I go, sweet lady!" said he, his voice tender, passionate, caressing. "It is bitter to leave you. But I should go thrilling with happiness, to win fame that would make you proud, or to die willingly for my country,—if I might go wearing your favour, if I might go as—" but here he paused. Barbara's face was cold and discouraging.

There was a moment of strained silence. Barbara felt a harsh resentment at his persistence, and an added anger that it should be thrust upon her on this day when her heart was so bitter sore. "Yet," she was arguing with herself, "the poor boy does love me. And, unlike some others, he is going to fight on the right side, to shed his blood, perhaps, for the land of his birth. Why should I not be a little kind to him,—if he does not ask too much!" On a sudden generous and pitying, if misleading, impulse, she took a ribbon from her throat and gave it to him.

"There, boy," she said, gently, "take that, and don't ever say I was not good to you! May it be a charm to ward off the bullet and the steel!"

A glad light flashed into the lad's face. He went down on one knee and kissed the hem of her skirt, crying something inarticulately. Then he sprang up and seized her in his arms, and would have kissed her but that she wrenched herself free with some violence.

"How dare you!" she cried, stamping her foot.

Cary looked crestfallen and bewildered.

"But, Barbara," he protested, blundering in his confusion, "don't you love me? I thought—why—this dear ribbon—" and he held it out to her appealingly.

Barbara's anger faded on the instant. She saw that in desiring to be kind she had misled him. She held out her hand to him, and smiled, as she said:

"Oh, truly, I'm sorry if I seemed rude, Cary. Forgive me. But, you know, I *had* to be rather hasty, or you would have kissed me. And I couldn't let you kiss me, Cary, even though you are going to the war!"

"Why not, dear heart?" persisted he. "Am I not going as your chosen cavalier? Have you not given me your favour?"

"Why, no—at least, not exactly that—" she stammered. "I thought you *knew*, Cary, that I don't love you one bit! I've told you so over and over again; and I've sent you away over and over again for bothering me about it when I had told you not to! But I do like you, ever so much. And I shall think of you, away fighting bravely—as I know you will—for our sacred cause. And so, I gave you the ribbon—because—because—you said it would make you a little happier if you had something of the sort to take with you! Oh, please do try to understand, Cary!" And she twisted her hands in distress.

Cary Patten was too much of a boy not to show all the bitterness of his overthrow. He had been lifted up to the crest of triumph, and hurled down disastrously. He had believed, when Barbara gave him her token, that the victory, which his confident spirit had never doubted would be his at last, had come at this high moment of his career. He was not only desperately hurt, but sorely humbled. His mind worked rapidly, seeking explanations. One passion after another chased itself over his transparent face; till at length Barbara saw his features grow harder and more mature than she had ever before seen them, and the poor little ribbon was crumpled ruthlessly in his grip.

"I understand!" he exclaimed, fiercely, a strident tone in his voice which was quite new to her. "It is that runaway Tory hound, that traitor Gault, that—" and here he choked. "If he has not already run away I shall settle the scoundrel to-night. I shall—"

"Silence, sir!" cut in Barbara. The tone, the look in her face, brought the mad

boy to his senses like a drenching in cold water. He could have bitten off his tongue for the outburst.

"Mr. Gault *was* my friend, and his name is entitled to respect in my presence!" she went on. "And he *is* a *gentleman*! Of you I should have said the same thing—a few moments ago! Give me back my ribbon—what you have left of it, Mr. Patten!"

"Oh, no! no! Forgive me!" Cary was crying, in abject penitence, even while she spoke, at the same time thrusting the ribbon into his breast, as if he feared that Barbara would take it by force. "I was crazy mad, dear heart. I didn't know what I was saying. I take it all back. It was not so. I know he is a gentleman and a brave man, if he *is* a traitor Tory. Surely you will forgive me, when you have broken my heart—Barbara."

While he was speaking Barbara had moved away to the other side of the table; but now, so dejected did he look, so humble, so repentant, and withal so wholesomely boyish, that her heart softened once more, and she came back.

"Yes, Cary, I will overlook it, and make allowance, because I see you are sorry. And I am still truly your friend, and will think about you when you are away. And I am sorry I did anything to make you misunderstand me, so you *must* give me back the poor little ribbon that did the mischief."

"No, you surely can't be so cruel as that!" he pleaded. "I feel it would be unlucky to give it back. Don't kill me, dear. Let me keep the dear ribbon!"

Barbara hesitated. She wanted the ribbon back. The giving had been spoiled for her. Her impulse was to insist. But events of late had softened her, had given her more comprehension of feelings other than her own,—had made her, indeed, a little less self-centred. She crushed down her vexation.

"Well, keep it then, Cary,—and my friendship with it," she said, gravely.

"And to the blessing with which I blessed it for you, I add many more,—that fame may come your way, and danger turn aside. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER XXX.

Barbara felt as if a strange great wind had blown upon New York, scattering and changing everything. Robert was gone,—when she was seeing little of him, and not desiring to see more, she had, nevertheless, had a satisfaction in knowing he was within reach. Now Cary Patten was gone, and Jerry Waite was gone, and young Paget was gone, and the student enthusiast, young Mr. Hamilton, came no more to the old Dutch house on State Street, being engrossed in matters of secrecy and import. And now she herself and Uncle Bob were going. She felt as if that separating wind would inexorably have lifted and borne her somewhere, even if the haven of Second Westings had not been open. Fate drove indifferently, but left her free to shape her course for Westings House and Aunt Hitty, and her own apple-tree down in the back garden.

A few days later she was at home. Glenowen, resting but an hour or two, had hastened on to his duties. Everything seemed to Barbara just as when she went away, save that Doctor Jim was graver than of old, seeming weighed down with care; and Doctor John's absence left a void that ached all the time. But her little room was just as she had left it,—fresh dusted, and with a few things lying about out of place, as she loved to have it. The dust upon the coverlet where "Mr. Grim" slept was there as of old. "He did not, in fact, sleep there once during all your absence, dear," declared Mistress Mehitable, "till the very night before your return, when he forsook me and stalked back to his old

place. Then I knew that you'd be here the next day, and we were very happy together; and I gave him clear cream for his breakfast, and made him very sick!"

Within three days the old life had taken Barbara back at every point, and she felt as if she had awakened from a brilliant but oppressive dream. Of course it was interesting telling it all—or not quite all—to every one; to every one the truth, yet not to each the same story. There was one emphasis for Aunt Hitty and Doctor Jim, one for the Reverend Jonathan Sawyer, one for Mercy Chapman, and one much more vivid and enlightening for old Debby. But even as she told it, it began to seem unreal to herself. And soon she grew unwilling to talk of it at all.

As the bright Connecticut summer slipped by, Barbara could not but notice a change of temper among the villagers of Second Westings. To herself they were as civil, as deferential as ever, but, she thought, with a little difference. Half a dozen families had representatives in the army besieging Boston, and two of the village homes were in mourning. When she was walking with Doctor Jim she noticed the sullenness with which his hearty, kindly greetings were returned, —a sullenness which Doctor Jim never allowed himself to observe. Then there was difficulty in getting extra help when special needs arose at Westings House. The people were unwilling to work for Mistress Mehitable. They positively refused to work with Amos, who had to give up his innocently convivial evenings at the tavern and remain sulking in the kitchen, abused and scorned by Abby because he was always in her way. In September, when Congress despatched the army of the north to conquer Canada, seven more men went from Second Westings, and enthusiasm grew. With news of the capture of Montreal came word also that two of the Second Westings men had fallen in the battle. Then feelings grew hot.

One morning, when Barbara was visiting Mercy Chapman's mother,—now a bedridden invalid,—she looked out of the window and saw Mistress

Mehitable coming down the street. As she passed his office, she was joined by Doctor Jim, and the two strolled together toward Squire Gillig's store. Suddenly she saw Doctor Jim leave Mistress Mehitable's side, and stride angrily toward the tavern. She ran out at once to see what was the matter. What she saw set her speeding after Doctor Jim in breathless indignation.

Amos, his arms tied behind him, was struggling and kicking in the hands of a dozen men and youths, several of whom had bloody noses to prove that Amos had stood to his colours. Now they were hurrying him to the cooper shop.—where they knew there was a barrel of pitch,—amid cries of "Ride the sneaking Tory on a rail," "Tar and feather him," "Duck him," "Hang him." All at once they were confronted by the tall bulk of Doctor Jim; and they stopped short. The old habit of deference was strong upon them, and several drew away, while others, though they doggedly maintained their grip on the furious and unterrified Amos, dropped their eyes and hung their heads when Doctor Jim's angry gaze fell upon them.

"Hands off! Drop that man! You cowardly bullies, a dozen against one! Drop him, do you hear?" And without waiting for the effect of his words he strode into the mob, flung the fringes of it to this side and that with no gentle hand, and reached those who had actual hold upon the prisoner.

When he found that they were standing their ground, daring to disobey his orders, his wrath was tremendous.

"You scoundrels! You dirty scum of the earth!" he roared. And with that he plucked the nearest fellow by the scruff of the neck and the seat of his breeches and flung him into the gutter. To the next he gave an open-handed buffet that sent him reeling from the mêlée. Ignoring the rest, he was proceeding to unpinion Amos, when the leader of the mob, a big blacksmith from Westings Centre, who was a famous demagogue, confronted him.

"Look a-here, Doctor Pigeon," he said, defiantly, "we're lettin' *you* be,

leastways for the present! You let us be, an' jest mind yer own business. Hands off yerself!"

Doctor Jim, apparently, never heard him.

The blacksmith therefore seized Amos by the waist and jerked him from Doctor Jim's grasp.

"Look a-here, you!" he shouted, squaring off. "You've got to fight me afore you untie that man!"

Fight him! Doctor Jim gave an inarticulate roar of scorn and fury at the idea. Then his great white hands shot out like lightning. One seized the champion's throat; the other laid terrible hold upon his waistband, with just so much of clothing and skin and flesh as those iron fingers could compass. One huge, dislocating shake and the champion had no more fight in him. Doctor Jim lifted his demoralised opponent bodily, carried him several paces, and dropped him over the horse trough into the dirty, deep-trodden mud. Then, seeing that Amos had got himself free, he strode back to where Mistress Mehitable was waiting, his heavy eyebrows still working with indignation.

Barbara, whom he had not seen, now had a word to say to the discomfited rabble, who one and all knew her views and admired her prodigiously. She eyed them for half a minute with slow, eviscerating scorn. Then she said: "*You* call yourselves patriots! You make me ashamed of the name. If all Americans were like you they'd deserve freedom, wouldn't they? And what is that ruffian doing here?" pointing to the bedraggled, discredited, foaming blacksmith. "Must you go to Westings Centre for a leader? You had better send him back where he belongs!"

"You'd better shet your mouth, miss," sputtered the champion, "or you may git—" but at this moment the men of Second Westings, recovering their manhood, fell upon him with great unanimity and completed the discipline which

Doctor Jim had left unfinished. And Barbara walked away with her head in the air.

After this Mistress Mehitable, who was herself, and for herself, absolutely fearless behind her quiet blue eyes, yielded to Doctor Jim's persuasions and let it be known that Barbara, being her heir, was partly in authority at Westings House. Whenever extra help was needed, therefore, Amos was sent down to Doctor Jim's and Barbara hired her helpers in her own name. To her employ the Second Westings men came willingly enough, and showed themselves humourously tolerant of Abby's caustic tongue, which was given full run whenever they entered the kitchen. And the village settled back gradually into a hollow imitation of its ancient somnolence.

In the winter, however, not long after Christmas, there was another stirring of the hot embers. Word came of Montgomery's death and Arnold's repulse before the walls of Quebec. There were men of Connecticut among those who fell that night in the northern snow. Those at home required an outlet for their feelings. What were the Tories for, if not to afford them a chance of evening matters up? A rabble of the worser elements from the up-river villages, led by some noisy fanatics, descended upon Gault House by night, and set it on fire.

Finding old Lady Gault ill in bed, they somewhat regretted their haste, and carried her, bed and all, with as much of her clothing as they could conveniently save, to the house of one of the tenants on the grounds. The leaders apologised to her, indeed, assuring her that, had they known it would so inconvenience her to have her house burnt down just then, they would have turned their avenging attention elsewhere for that night and awaited her recovery. The fiery and arrogant old lady was so overwhelmed with helpless rage, less at the destruction of the home of the Gaults with all its treasures than at the desecration she had suffered, that she was seized next morning with an apoplexy and died in an hour.

This news brought consternation to Westings House. Doctor Jim came up to talk it over. He was too much enraged to find relief in one of his customary large ebullitions. It reduced him to a black silence, which Barbara found much more impressive than his wrath.

"I feel that you ought to go away, Jim," said Mistress Mehitable, with a tenderness that made Barbara eye them both sharply, and think of Doctor John. "These townships are no place for a reckless partisan like you!"

"There is just one reason why you might urge me to go, sweet mistress!" said he. "Lest I be prisoned here, and so lose the chance to fight for the king! But my place is here till John comes back. You and Barbara cannot be left alone. And the sick folks,—I cannot desert them. But when John comes—"

"If it be not then too late! Oh, think, Jim! Every hour now that you stay here carries the menace of some ignominious violence! How can I stand it?"

"My place is here, at present, most dear lady!" answered Doctor Jim, with a positiveness that left no room for argument. "But I think the men of Second Westings would not quite fail Jim Pigeon, even though they do curse him behind his back for a Tory!"

The destruction of Gault House and the death of Lady Gault filled Barbara's heart with pity and tenderness toward Robert. It oppressed her with a feeling that he was left desolate, a homeless and wandering outcast. She wondered where and when the news would reach him,—being such evil news she felt sure it would journey fast. No word or rumour had she heard of him since that day of their harsh parting in the old Dutch house on State Street.

A few days later she heard from Glenowen, who was now in command of one of the regiments besieging Boston, that Cary Patten, after covering himself with glory by his wild daring and desperate exploits, had fallen with Montgomery before the walls of Quebec. This news sent Barbara to her room for the afternoon. Besides her many tears for the gallant boy, who had loved her gallantly and truly, she could not for the moment rid herself of a vague remorse. Had she been quite fair to him? Had she encouraged him even while repelling him? At first she called herself guilty. But after some hours of this self-

reproach she came to a clearer view, and saw that it was sentimental weakness to accuse herself. Her grief on his account, however, was deep and sincere. "Poor, beautiful, brave boy!" she sighed, at last. "How little good to him were my token and my blessings! I fear I am a curse, and not a blessing, to any one who greatly cares for me!" Then the thought flashed across her—"If it were Robert, instead of poor Cary! How do I know that Robert, too, has not been —" and at the thought her heart stood still. A sort of numbness came over her, and she found herself shaking violently. She had been lying with her face in the pillow, but now she sat up sharply, brushed the thick, dark locks back from her eyes, went over to the dressing-table, lit two candles, and looked at her white, frightened face in the glass.

"I didn't know I cared—like that!" she said to herself, at last.

CHAPTER XXXI.

In the spring, a little before the fall of Boston, Doctor John came home. Second Westings learned then for the first time what he had so studiously and considerately kept concealed,—the fact that he had been wounded in a skirmish two months before. As soon as he was well enough for the journey, he had been ordered home. He looked gaunt, and walked with some difficulty, but otherwise seemed fairly well; and he made haste to take back his old patients, with many expressions of amazement that they had not died off under Jim Pigeon's treatment.

His coming brought new cheer to Westings House; and to Barbara, reassured by his explicit accounts of her uncle's abounding health, it meant such

stimulus and diversion as was to be had of endless, sympathetic talks. The little group of four were as close to one another as of old,—yet with a difference. The love and trust were as of old, but the dividing of hopes and aims threw Barbara more and more with Doctor John, Mistress Mehitable more and more with Doctor Jim. This seemed perfectly natural,—yet it soon began to cause a certain heaviness on Doctor John's part, which made his whimsical sallies grow infrequent. It caused, at the same time, a certain uneasiness on the part of Doctor Jim; and Mistress Mehitable was seen more than once with tears in her eyes, when, as it seemed to Barbara, there was no very definite reason for the phenomenon. And all these symptoms troubled Barbara. She grew more than commonly tender of Doctor John.

One day when she and Doctor John and Doctor Jim had strolled down to the tavern to see the Hartford coach come in, they found a knot of eager listeners gathered about two horsemen who were drinking a pot of ale. As the little party approached, its members were pointed out, and the horsemen turned to look at them with sharp interest. The two came from up the river, in the next county, and were on their way to join the Connecticut battalions under Putnam. They were bitter partisans, and one of them had lost a brother in the fighting at Quebec. To them it was of little account that Doctor John was a good rebel,—such, in their eyes, all good men were bound to be. And they did not appreciate the fact that he was an officer in the army they were about to join. What they saw was simply Doctor Jim, the declared Tory, shameless and unafraid. They eyed him with growing menace, uncertain, by reason of the fact that he was walking between Barbara and Doctor John, just what they wanted to do.

Presently Doctor Jim swung away by himself to speak to a lad whose mother he was treating. He was giving some little order, when the two horsemen, riding up to him, thrust him against the icy watering-trough so unexpectedly that he fell over it. Bewildered, and not understanding that he had been deliberately attacked, he was picking himself up in a sputter of vexation, when one of the riders, a fierce-eyed, burly fanatic, reached over the trough

and cut at him viciously with his riding-whip, exclaiming, "Take that, you damned Tory dog!"

The blow missed Doctor Jim's head, but fell smartly across his shoulders. The next moment a great hand seized the rider, tore him from his seat, jammed him furiously against his horse's rump, and dashed him down upon the dirty snow. Then Doctor John turned to deal likewise with the second culprit. But he had forgotten his wound. He grew white, reeled, and would have fallen, but that two of the Second Westings men sprang to his aid and held him up.

When the stroke of the whip fell on his shoulders, Doctor Jim had understood. With one of his wordless explosive roars he had sprung right over the trough to take Homeric vengeance. But when he saw Doctor John he forgot all about vengeance, he forgot all about the attack.

"What is it, John?" he cried, picking him up as if the huge frame were a feather, and carrying him to the settee outside the inn door.

"Nothing, Jim, nothing! The old wound, you know, and the heart not yet just right," muttered Doctor John, recovering quickly, but leaning on his brother's shoulder. Barbara, meanwhile, had run to fetch brandy, which she now brought, along with the landlord.

The two horsemen had had their wrath for the moment diverted by the sudden turn of events. But now—the fellow who had been so mauled in Doctor John's grip having remounted, bursting with rage—they thought it time to return to the attack, and made an effort to push through the little crowd. Failing in this, they cursed Doctor Jim with varied vigour, and told him what they intended to do when they could get at him. In their righteous wrath they failed to notice that they were not making themselves popular with the crowd. Neither Doctor Jim nor Barbara paid the slightest attention to their curses, not seeming to hear them; but Doctor John attended.

"Lads!" he said, lifting his head with difficulty. "Lads of Second Westings! Shall we let these insolent scoundrels talk to us that way?"

"No, sir! No, sir! No, sir!" shouted a dozen voices,—whereupon Barbara turned and beamed upon them unutterable favour. The landlord, with several other stout fellows, seized the strangers' bridles and forced the horses back toward the road.

"Ye'd better be gettin' on!" admonished mine host, grinning but decisive. "Ye don't rightly understand us here, I calculate! Better get on now, for convenience!"

The horsemen seemed to have forgotten their wrath in their astonishment.

"Are you all Tories, too?" they found voice to demand.

"We're as good patriots as ever you be!" rejoined mine host, crisply. "But if we've got any Tories among us they're our own, and we'll see about 'em ourselves, our own way. Now clear out!" And he hit the nigh horse a smart slap on the rump, making him bound forward.

By this time the leader and spokesman of the twain had recovered his full head of anger. He had no quixotic notion of undertaking to discipline Second Westings village. But he conceived a very clear purpose. Reining his excited horse down violently, he shook his fist at the crowd, and shouted:

"If you choose to harbour a dirty Tory, there be men and patriots in the other townships who'll come right soon an' teach you yer duty!"

"Oh, you clear out!" jeered the Second Westings men.

That evening, at Westings House, while the beginnings of a bleak March wind storm blustered and whimpered outside, Mistress Mehitable brewed a hot

posset of uncommonly cheering quality. The cheer was needed; for all felt that a crisis of some sort, or some grave change, was at hand. Doctor John, who had quite recovered, tried in vain to make his fooling sound spontaneous. The grave eyes of Destiny would persist in looking out through the jester's-mask. At length Doctor Jim exclaimed, abruptly:

"I must go, now! I must take Amos and slip away in the night, and go wherever men are gathering to fight for the king. I'm not needed here now, John, since you are back to take care of Mehitable and Barbara!"

It was what all had been waiting for, but it came with a shock—the shock of conviction, not of surprise—to all. Mistress Mehitable turned ghost pale, and unconsciously her hand went to her heart. Doctor John noticed the action, with sad eyes that belied the humour of his mouth. Barbara sprang up, rushed over to Doctor Jim, and flung her arms around his neck.

"*Please* don't go, Doctor Jim!" she pleaded. "This is the place for you. And here we all love you so we don't care *what* side you're on. And as for going to fight for your side,—of course, you want to, we all know that,—but you *never* can get through to the coast. You can never get through our people. No, you can't, Doctor Jim! You must stay here with us. Help me hold him, Aunt Hitty!"

"Jim," said Doctor John, his voice trembling with earnestness, "I appeal to you to stay. Don't break our hearts by going. Stay for our sakes. I know, brother, how you feel,—and believing as you do, I don't blame you,—I'll never blame you. But *Barbara is right*. *You can't get through*. You can stay with a clear conscience!"

Mistress Mehitable, since becoming assured of the attitude of the Second Westings men, had lost all her dread of having him stay, and gained a quivering fear of having him go. Forgetful of all else, she now laid her slim hand on his, looked at him with her whole soul in her eyes, and said:

"*Must* you? Oh, Jim, are you so sure you ought to go?"

A faint spasm passed over Doctor John's face—Barbara alone observing it—and seemed to leave it older and sterner. He opened his mouth to speak, but Doctor Jim was ahead of him.

"Yes, I know my duty. If a man sees it, he's got to do it,—eh, what, dearest lady in the world? I wish I didn't see it so plain. Then I might stay here with you all, you whom I love. But I see my duty, to fight for the king, just as plain as you saw yours, John, to fight for your damned old Congress!"

"I'm not going to fight any more!" interrupted Doctor John, speciously.

Doctor Jim laughed, tenderly derisive.

"No, but you're sending, and equipping, and supporting two able-bodied substitutes, aren't you? But another point is, my Barbara,—by staying I should bring disaster on you all. The good folk of Second Westings—and they *are* good folk, though rebels, alas!—will never stand by and see the Ladds and Pigeons, whatever their views, molested by an outside world. When your fiery patriots from up the river come to ride me on a rail, Second Westings will stand in the way and get its honest head broken. *You* wouldn't do it, John Pigeon! You'd cut off your head, before you'd let the poor souls get their heads broken for you in a cause that they believe all wrong. I'd be a coward to let them, John. Would you ask me to be a coward?"

"Wouldn't be much use asking," growled Doctor John. "But you're all wrong, as usual, Jim!" Then he turned suddenly to Mistress Mehitable, with a meaning look.

"You speak, Mehitable! You *make* him stay. Demand it of him—as your right! Keep him!"

Doctor Jim searched his brother's face, first with terrible question, then with the growing light of a great joy. Barbara watched breathless, forgetful of the fate of dynasties. Here, she felt, were problems that had held long lives in doubt, now working to instant solution. Mistress Mehitable turned scarlet, and she, too, questioned the sombre, tender eyes of Doctor John. But she said, quite simply:

"I'm afraid, John, if he thinks he ought to go he'll go. But I do ask you to stay, Jim."

"*Don't*, Mehitable!" groaned Doctor Jim.

"There, what did I tell you, John?" she said.

But now certain things, uncertain all his life till now, were quite clear to Doctor John. Slowly, as if it hurt him, he got up. He went over to where Mehitable was sitting, quite close to Doctor Jim. He laid a hand on each, caressingly,—and to Mehitable that touch, suddenly grown bold and firm, was a renunciation. He had never touched her that way before.

"It is all right, Jim! It is all right, Mehitable!" said he, in a very low but quite steady voice. "I never was sure till now,—but I ought to have understood,—for I see now it was always *yours*, Jim. Forgive me, brother. I ought not to have stood in the way."

"John!" cried Doctor Jim, catching the caressing hand in a fervent clasp. "God bless you! But—on my honour I have never said a word!"

"I know, Jim, I know. We've always played fair to each other. But now you can speak. And now,—you don't need to speak, either of you. Your faces speak plain enough, to the eyes of one who loves you both!"

"Is it true, Mehitable? After all these years that I've kept silence,—oh, is it

true?" asked Doctor Jim, scarcely above a whisper, reaching out his hands to her longingly.

For one instant she laid hers in his. Then she withdrew them quickly, seized Doctor John's hand in both of hers, laid her cheek against it, and burst into tears.

"Oh, John, dear John," she sobbed. "How can I bear that you should be unhappy?"

Doctor John blinked, and made a little noise in his throat. Then, with a brave levity, he exclaimed:

"Tut! Tut! Don't you worry about me, either of you, now. As for you, Jim Pigeon, you Tory scoundrel, I'm getting the best of you, after all. For I stay right here and take care of her, Lord knows how long, while you go off, Lord knows where, and get yourself poked full of holes for your old King George— Eh, what, baggage? as Jim would say!" And he turned unexpectedly toward Barbara, who had been standing by the window, and peering diligently out into the blackness for the past ten minutes,—and surreptitiously wiping her eyes as well as her nose.

"Yes, indeed you *do* get the best of the bargain," she cheerfully and mendaciously agreed.

Two days later, in the dark before moonrise, Doctor Jim and Amos slipped away on horseback by the road to Westings Landing. And Doctor John went with them as far as the Landing, to put them into trusty hands for their night voyage down the river.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A few days after Doctor Jim's going, came the news that Washington had entered Boston, the troops of the king having given up the defence and sailed away to Halifax. Soon afterward there was bustle in Second Westings, and camp talk, and military swagger; for a portion of the army was moving down to New York, and many men had leave to visit their homes in passing; and some, who had enlisted for a short service, had come home to get in the crops before reënlisting; and some, grudging souls, had come home to stay, saying that it was now the time for others to sweat and bleed for their country.

Amid all this excitement, which had some effect even upon Mistress Mehitable, antagonistic though she was to it, the palely brilliant Connecticut spring rushed over the land with promise. Never before, it seemed, did the vanguards of the song-sparrows and thrushes so crowd the blowing thickets with melody; never before the bright hordes of the dandelions so suddenly and so goldenly over-flood the meadows. But to Barbara the iridescent glory was somehow more sad than gloom. The fact that her cause was everywhere prospering, that success had fallen to the Continental arms beyond anything that she had dared to hope, brought her no elation. She felt the sorrow that had come into Doctor John's life in spite of the big, whimsical gaiety with which he kept it covered up. She felt the fierce tugging at Mistress Mehitable's heart-strings, though that thoroughbred little lady never revealed, save by the dark eye-shadows of sleepless nights, the pangs it cost her to be deprived in a day of the lover whom she had been half a lifetime in finding out. Barbara felt, too, the absence of Doctor Jim, who seemed to her so big and boyish and reckless and unfit to take care of himself that he could not fail to get into trouble if not kept at home and mothered by small women like herself and Aunt Hitty. And most of all she felt the crushing uncertainty as to Robert.

When summer was approaching high tide, Second Westings grew quiet again, the soldiers being all called back to their colours to make ready the defences of New York. Then, by hard-riding express messengers, the tidings flew over the country that Congress at Philadelphia, on the fourth day of July, had declared independence, and set up a republic to be known as the "United States of America." Second Westings went wild with enthusiasm, and that night there was a terrific consumption of old tar barrels and dry brush. And there was a select little dinner at Squire Gillig's, to which Barbara and Doctor John felt in duty bound to go,—and from which Mistress Mehitable, with an equal devotion to duty, stayed away. She had taken the news gracefully enough, however, merely suggesting to Barbara and Doctor John that possibly all the rejoicing might turn out to be a little premature.

Thereafter it seemed to Barbara that events moved furiously, one piece of vital news following close upon the heels of its predecessor. Early in August came word that a great English army for the capture of New York was landing at Staten Island. Then, the first tidings of Robert,—reaching Barbara in a letter from her uncle, whose regiment was holding Brooklyn. Glenowen wrote that from certain neutrals, country-folk of Long Island, who had no party but their cabbage-patch, he had learned of both Robert Gault and Doctor Jim. Doctor Jim, as representing one of the oldest and most distinguished families of Connecticut, and himself widely known, had been attached to the staff of the English general, Sir William Howe, while Robert Gault, with the rank of captain, was in command of a troop of irregular Loyalist Horse. With the unspeakable relief that these tidings brought her, Barbara regained for a few days her old vivacity, imperiousness, and daring. She tore about the country wildly as of old, on horseback,—no longer, as a rule, on Black Prince, who had grown too sedate to fully fall in with her caprices, but on a fiery young sorrel which she had bought for herself, choosing it partly for its own qualities, and partly for its resemblance to Robert's old Narragansett pacer. She resumed her canoeing on the lake. She sang again her old plantation songs, to Doctor John's accompaniment and Mistress Mehitable's diversion. She put a new and gayer

ribbon on the neck of the furry "Mr. Grim." She even remembered that the bergamot was in flower, and set herself with interest to the distilling of her half-forgotten "Water of Maryland Memories," laughing indulgently the while at the girlishly sentimental name of it. Meantime she was conscious of a curiously divided interest in the war,—conscious that her interest was divided in a fashion that would, a year ago, have seemed to her wicked and impossible. Just as passionately as ever was her heart set upon the triumph of her cause. But she felt an irrational desire that Robert and Doctor Jim should win each a splendid victory on his own account. She was full of pity that they should be on what she held the surely losing side, and she wanted some measure of glory to be theirs.

But the next news that came dashed her spirits. It told of the battle of Long Island, and the defeat of the Continentals by the ordered British lines. It told of the panic flight of patriot regiments. It told of General Washington's retreat from Long Island and entrenching of the army at New York. A few days later came a letter to Barbara from Glenowen,—whose regiment had stood firm and suffered heavily,—in which he said that he did not think it would be possible to hold New York with the troops at Washington's command, and that there would doubtless soon be a further retreat to some position beyond the Harlem. The letter made no mention of Doctor Jim,—which caused Barbara to remind Mistress Mehitable that no news was good news,—but it spoke with somewhat bitter praise of Robert Gault. It said that Robert's little squadron of mad Tories had gone through the Continental ranks like flame, irresistible and deadly, and had done more than anything else to cause the breaking of Putnam's lines. Robert had had his horse shot under him, and his hat shot off, but had himself, as report said, escaped without a scratch, though with a much diminished troop. As she was reading this out to Mistress Mehitable, all at once and to her deep mortification her scrupulously matter-of-fact voice thrilled and broke. Mistress Mehitable shot her a glance of swift understanding and sympathy, and then pretended that she had noticed nothing unusual. Barbara coughed, and went on. But her voice had become unmanageable. With an impatient gesture and a toss of her head she handed over the letter.

"You'll have to read it yourself, honey! It upsets me to hear of our poor fellows beaten like this!" she cried, hypocritically.

"Of course, dear, I quite understand!" replied Mistress Mehitable, keeping her eyes strictly upon the letter, that she might the more easily seem deceived.

A few days later, Glenowen's prediction was fulfilled, and the news that came to Second Westings was of Washington's hasty retreat from New York to the Harlem Heights, leaving his artillery and heavy baggage behind. Then for a month there was expectancy, and to Barbara in her quiet green land it seemed marvellous that the two armies could lie facing each other in this way, day after day, and not be stirred to decisive action. She wondered how their nerves could bear the strain of such waiting.

The bright September dragged by in drowsy fashion, and October ran on in its blue and golden-brown; and then the word that came was of yet another retreat. The British had enlarged their narrow borders, and Washington had drawn back to the line of the Bronx, where he fortified himself strongly so as to hold the roads leading inland. Would he never stop retreating, questioned Barbara, anxiously, echoing the cry that went up all over the infant Union. "I think not, dear!" responded Mistress Mehitable, cheerfully. But Doctor John, who understood the conditions, declared that this Fabian policy was the only sound one, while the Continental troops were getting seasoned and learning the arts of war. Even while this teaching was being digested, came word of the fierce battle of White Plains, where the two armies, in numbers closely matched, long held each other by the throat without decisive advantage. When, two days later, the Continentals again withdrew, this time to hasty entrenchments at New Castle, Doctor John had hard work to convince Barbara that this long-drawn-out and bloody struggle was not an American defeat. For days thereafter word kept coming in, telling of the losses on both sides, and supplying vivid details; and the blinds of mourning were drawn down

in more than one modest Second Westings home. A brief message came from Glenowen, saying that he was safe and well. But of Doctor Jim no word; of Robert not a word. And Barbara and Mistress Mehitable durst not meet each other's eyes lest either should read therein, and cry aloud, the fear in the other's heart.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

With the coming in of this tumultuous November, there came to Second Westings a few days of Indian summer magic. The moveless air seemed a distillation of dreams. The faint azure haze hung everywhere, soft yet cool, with an elusive fragrance as of clean smoke and fading roses and fresh earth-mould and lofts of grain. And on one of these consecrated days Barbara set out early in the morning to paddle across the lake and see old Debby.

As on a morning long ago, but not so early, she ran down the back garden path, and behind the barn, and climbed the pasture bars. This time she called to Keep; and the big mastiff, who now slept later than of old, came somewhat stiffly gamboling from his manger bed in the horse stable. She tripped along the pasture path, between the hillocks. She trod rapidly the black earth of the old wood-road, where the shadows were lighter now, and no sound broke the stillness save the eerie sigh and footfall of the dropping leaves. She launched the canoe with easy vigour, motioned Keep to his place in the bow, and pushed out with strong, leisurely strokes across the enchanted mirror. That far-off morning of her flight came back to her with strange poignancy, and she wondered if the blue heron would be standing at the outlet to admonish her with his enigmatic gaze.

As she approached the outlet, the point was vacant. But suddenly a strange, dishevelled figure, hatless, and in a blood-stained British uniform, emerged from the trees near by, came down amid the tall yellow grasses, and stood staring across the lake. He stood thus with blank eyes for a moment, apparently not seeing the canoe, then pitched forward, and lay on his face close to the water's edge.

With one sharp cry of his name, Barbara surged upon the paddle and shot the canoe toward land, wasting no mare breath on words. She sprang ashore, turned the still form over, loosened the low vest and the throat of the shirt, and dashed water in the white, stained, deathlike face. At first she thought he was dead, and she felt things growing black before her eyes. Then she caught herself, and held herself steady for the need. If she could not be strong now, what right had she to call herself a woman, or to love a man. She felt at his heart and found that he was alive. She saw that he was sorely wounded. She told herself that he had swooned from loss of blood, weariness, hunger,—but that he had lived, would live, must live. Then she dragged him further back into the grass, where he was hidden.

Calling Keep from the canoe, she sat down for a moment with Robert's head in her lap, and planned what should be done. He must not be found in Second Westings, that she knew. For an English prisoner of war it would be all very well,—but for a Tory it might be different. She could take no risks. In a moment or two her mind was made up. She bent over, and kissed the unresponding mouth. Then she rose, and turned to Keep, who had stood sniffing at Robert's clothes with sympathetic interest. They were shocking clothes, but Keep dimly remembered the man within them. Barbara pointed to the helpless figure, saying:

"Lie down, Keep!"

And Keep lay down, with his muzzle on Robert's arm.

"Guard, sir!" commanded Barbara. And Keep rolled upon her a comprehending and obedient eye. Then she pushed off the canoe, and paddled hastily down the river to fetch old Debby.

During all these years since Barbara's interrupted flight, no one had really read her heart, or been the unacknowledged recipient of her confidences, so fully as Mrs. Debby Blue. Now, when Barbara arrived, breathless, with great, strained eyes, tears in her voice, but her red mouth sternly set, the old woman understood with few words. At another time, Barbara would have been amazed at this swift understanding. Now, she was only grateful for it. While she was explaining, Debby was rummaging on shelves and in boxes, looking for sundry simples of her cunning extraction. At last she said:

"Don't you be worried, my sweeting. If Mr. Robert kin be cured up, old Debby's the one that kin cure him up, well as any doctor in the land, not even exceptin' Doctor Jim. An' I've got the place where we kin hide him, too, an' keep him safe till he gits well. An' now, I'm after you, Miss Barby, sweetheart!"

"God bless your dear, true heart, Debby," cried Barbara, leading the way in hot haste to the canoe.

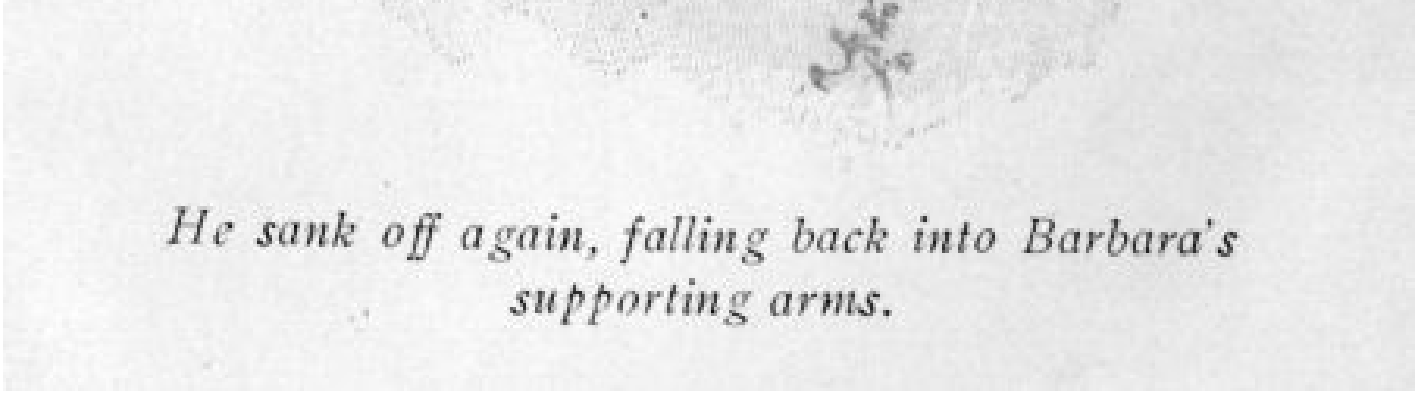
When they arrived at the point, Robert was just recovering consciousness, in a dazed fashion. They saw him make an effort to sit up; and they saw Keep, who was nothing if not literal in his interpretation of Barbara's commands, put his two huge fore paws on Robert's breast and firmly push him down again. The tears jumped to Barbara's eyes at this, and she gave a little hysterical laugh, exclaiming:

"Just look at that, Debby! Good *dear* old Keep! Even he knows that Robert must be kept hidden!"

When they got to him, he sat up determinedly, and recognised Barbara with

a look of utter content.

"You, my lady! I have come a very long way to look—" and then he sank off again, falling back into Barbara's supporting arms.



He sank off again, falling back into Barbara's supporting arms.

"Why, he's *starved*, that's what he is!" exclaimed Debby, examining him critically and feeling his pulse. "An' he's lost pretty nigh all the blood was ever in him. An' he's got two wounds here, either one enough to do for a man!"

She forced some fiery liquor down his throat, and then, as a faint colour came back to his lips, she gave him to drink from a bottle of milk. He drank eagerly, but automatically, without opening his eyes.

"He's been wounded at White Plains, poor dear!" murmured Barbara, leaning over him a face of brooding tenderness.

"An' he's wandered all the way up here, a-lookin' for you, Miss Barby!" responded the old woman.

"Do you really think so?" murmured Barbara.

"No manner of doubt!" said old Debby, positively, as she set about dressing and binding Robert's wounds.

In a little while Robert was able to sit up again; and then to be helped to his feet; and then to be half guided, half carried to the canoe. There he was placed on a bed of heaped armfuls of dry grass. Old Debby squatted precariously in the bow,—she was more at home in a punt than in a canoe,—and Barbara thrust out from shore, heading down the little river.

Robert was still too far gone in exhaustion to explain his strange appearance at Second Westings, or to ask any questions, or to care where he was going, so long as he was able to open his eyes every once in awhile and look at Barbara. When he did so, Barbara would smile back reassuringly, and lay a slim brown finger on her lips, as a sign that he was not to talk. And happily he would close his eyes again.

Barbara paddled down past Debby's landing, past the ducks and hens and turkeys, now too lazy to make more than casual comment. Keep, meanwhile, followed anxiously along the shore, close to the edge, and now and then splashing in belly deep.

"How far is it, Debby dear?" asked Barbara, presently.

"Jest a little mite furder," answered the old woman, who relished the situation immensely. "A matter of half a mile, maybe!"

And so they slipped noiselessly on, in that enchanted light, over that enchanted water with its reflections of amber and blue. Some crows, grown suddenly garrulous over private matters, cawed pleasantly in the pine-tops a little way off against the sky, and then subsided again into silence.

On both banks of the stream the trees held out their leaves, russet and gold, amethyst and bronze and scarlet, like so many little elfin hands attesting that all fair dreams come true at last for those who have the key to the inner mysteries.

Barbara was paddling in a dream herself, when suddenly old Debby said, "Turn in here, my sweeting! Here to your right!"

"But where?" asked Barbara, puzzled. "I don't see any place to turn in!"

"Straight through them dripping branches yonder by the water-logged stump!" directed the old woman. "Straight on through!"

As the prow of the canoe came up to what was seemingly the shore, old Debby parted the branches. As the canoe pushed onward, she continued this process,—and a few feet in from the main stream they entered a long, narrow deadwater, deep and clear, and perfectly hidden from the world. It was perhaps a hundred yards in length, slightly winding; and at its head, on a gentle rise, stood a little deserted log cabin.

"Oh, *Debby*!" cried Barbara. "How did you ever find such a place?"

"It's been empty this ten year!" answered Debby. "An' folks has forgotten, that ever knowed. An' I've been keepin' it to myself, when I wanted to get away from the ducks an' hens a mite. An' I've kep' it from fallin' to pieces. I'll nurse Master Robert here till he's able to get away, if it takes a year. An' I'll come back and forward in my punt. There's a bunk ready now, full of pine-needles; an' when we get him into it we'll go back to make it all right with Aunt Hitty. *Ain't* I got a head on my old shoulders, now, Miss Barby?"

Even as Debby had so swiftly and fully planned, it was done. Robert was still so far gone in exhaustion, and so wandering in his mind, that Barbara would not let him talk; and before they left him—with Keep an incorruptible sentry at the door—he had fallen into a deep sleep. When they returned a couple hours later, he was awake and quite clear, and so determined to talk that Barbara could not but let him. He sat up in the bunk, but Barbara, bending shining eyes down close to his, laid him back upon the pillow.

"Debby says you must not sit up at all, Robert!" she said.

"And what do you say, my lady?" he asked, devouring her radiant dark face with his eyes.

"I say so, too!" she answered, laughing softly.

"Why, my lady?" he persisted.

"Because it will hinder you getting well, Silly!" she replied, touching his hair with cool fingers.

"What matter about a 'damned Tory' getting well?" he began, being very weak and foolish. But the slim hand sweetly closed his mouth.

"How did you get here—to me?" Barbara asked, changing the subject.

He smiled up at her.

"We charged through the rebels!" he explained, frankly. "We cut them down, and scattered them, and chased them till we were within the enemy's lines. Then we could not get back. They surrounded us. They overwhelmed us. We were annihilated. I escaped, I shall never know how, hatless and horseless, as you found me, my lady, I tried to get back to my regiment. It was no use. Then, somehow, a spirit in my feet led me back here, to you. I just escaped capture a score of times. I had nothing to eat for days, save roots and leaves. I remember coming to the shore of the dear lake, and straining my eyes across it, to see the chimneys of the house where my love lay. Then I saw no more, knew no more, till I saw my love herself in very truth, leaning her face over mine. And I thought I was in heaven, my lady."

"You still love me, Robert, after the hideous way I treated you?" questioned Barbara, her voice a little tremulous.

He started again to sit up; but being again suppressed, was fain to content himself with clutching both her hands to his lips.

"There is nothing in the world but you, Barbara," he said. "There is nothing I want but you, wonderful one!"

"Then—you may take me, Robert, I think!" she whispered, dropping her

face, and brushing his lips with her hair.

"Me?" he cried, in a voice suddenly strong, glad, and incredulous. "Me? Sick near to death, hunted near to death, a beaten and fleeing enemy, a Tory? I may take you, my queen, my beloved?"

"Whatever you are, dear, I have found that you are my love," she answered. "I don't care much what you are, so long as you are mine. I find I am just a woman, Robert—and in my conceit I thought myself something more. I love my country, truly. But I love my lover more. I shall not ask you whether you bow to King or to Congress,—but only ask you to get well!"

He reached up both arms, and slowly pulled down her still averted face till it was close to his. Then she turned her face suddenly to him, and her lips met his. A moment later she untwined his arms, went to the door, and glanced unheeding down at old Debby, gathering wood. Then, her face and eyes still glowing, she came back, smoothed his hair, kissed him lightly on the forehead, and said, "Now you must be quiet, dear. Debby will scold me if I let you talk any more!"

But Robert was excited, drunk with new joy after long despair.

"Just one word, and I will obey, dear heart! Listen, my lady. I will draw sword no more in this quarrel. I have given my blood, my lands,—I have given, as I thought, my love,—for a cause already lost, for a cause that I felt to be wrong from the day of Lexington, But whichever side wins, I will stay in my own country, if my country, when it is all over, will let me stay. When I am well enough to go away—love, love, will you go with me, to return, when the fighting and the fury cease, to our own dear river and our own dear woods?"

"Yes, you know I will, Robert," answered Barbara, kneeling down and looking into his eyes. "You know that is what I am planning, dear one. Now go to sleep, and get well, and take me away when you will!" And holding her hand

against his neck he forthwith went to sleep, like a child, tired and contented.

Barbara knelt for a long time unmoving, her hand warm in his weak clasp, and was grateful to old Debby for staying so long away. As she knelt, the side of her face to the door, she heard a soft *thud, thud* on the threshold, and looked around out of the corners of her eyes without turning her head. She saw two wild rabbits, filled with curiosity at finding the cabin door open. They hopped in warily, and went bounding all about the room, sniffing with their sensitive, cleft nostrils; waving their ears back and forth at every faint whisper; and from time to time sitting up to ponder their discovery. One of them bounded over Barbara's little foot, turned to examine it, and nibbled tentatively at the heel of her shoe till she had to make the muscles tense to keep him from pulling it off. Then, standing up together for a moment, they seemed to take counsel and conclude that they had business elsewhere. As they hopped lazily away from the door, Barbara got up and followed to look after them. The wonderful day was drawing to its close; and long, straight beams of rosy gold, enmeshed with the haze, were streaming through the trees to her very feet. She laughed a little happy laugh under her breath. Those bright paths leading to the sun seemed a fair omen.

THE END.

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