Ririro
READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Pansies

Louise M. Alcott

They are never alone that are accompanied with noble thoughts.—SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

“I'VE finished my book, and now what CAN I do till this tiresome rain is over?” exclaimed Carrie, as she lay back on the couch with a yawn of weariness.

“Take another and a better book; the house is full of them, and this is a rare chance for a feast on the best,” answered Alice, looking over the pile of volumes in her lap, as she sat on the floor before one of the tall book-cases that lined the room.

“Not being a book-worm like you, I can't read forever, and you needn't sniff at 'Wanda,' for it's perfectly thrilling!” cried Carrie, regretfully turning the crumpled leaves of the Seaside Library copy of that interminable and impossible tale.

“We should read to improve our minds, and that rubbish is only a waste of time,” began Alice, in a warning tone, as she looked up from “Romola,” over which she had been poring with the delight one feels in meeting an old friend.

“I don't WISH to improve my mind, thank you: I read for amusement in vacation time, and don't want to see any moral works till next autumn. I get enough of them in school. This isn't 'rubbish'! It's full of fine descriptions of scenery—”

“Which you skip by the page, I've seen you do it,” said Eva, the third young girl in the library, as she shut up the stout book on her knee and began to knit as if this sudden outburst of chat disturbed her enjoyment of “The Dove in the Eagle's Nest.”

“I do at first, being carried away by my interest in the people, but I almost always go back and read them afterward,” protested Carrie. “You know YOU like to hear about nice clothes, Eva, and Wanda's were simply gorgeous; white velvet and a rope of pearls is one costume; gray velvet and a silver girdle another; and Idalia was all a 'shower of perfumed laces,' and scarlet and gold satin mask dresses, or primrose silk with violets, so lovely! I do revel in 'em!”

Both girls laughed as Carrie reeled off this list of elegances, with the relish of a French modiste.

“Well, I'm poor and can't have as many pretty things as I want, so it IS delightful

to read about women who wear white quilted satin dressing-gowns and olive velvet trains with Mechlin lace sweepers to them. Diamonds as large as nuts, and rivers of opals and sapphires, and rubies and pearls, are great fun to read of, if you never even get a look at real ones. I don't believe the love part does me a bit of harm, for we never see such languid swells in America, nor such lovely, naughty ladies; and Ouida scolds them all, so of course she doesn't approve of them, and that's moral, I'm sure."

But Alice shook her head again, as Carrie paused out of breath, and said in her serious way: "That's the harm of it all. False and foolish things are made interesting, and we read for that, not for any lesson there may be hidden under the velvet and jewels and fine words of your splendid men and women. Now, THIS book is a wonderful picture of Florence in old times, and the famous people who really lived are painted in it, and it has a true and clean moral that we can all see, and one feels wiser and better for reading it. I do wish you'd leave those trashy things and try something really good."

"I hate George Eliot,—so awfully wise and preachy and dismal! I really couldn't wade through 'Daniel Deronda,' though 'The Mill on the Floss' wasn't bad," answered Carrie, with another yawn, as she recalled the Jew Mordecai's long speeches, and Daniel's meditations.

"I know you'd like this," said Eva, patting her book with an air of calm content; for she was a modest, common-sense little body, full of innocent fancies and the mildest sort of romance. "I love dear Miss Yonge, with her nice, large families, and their trials, and their pious ways, and pleasant homes full of brothers and sisters, and good fathers and mothers. I'm never tired of them, and have read 'Daisy Chain' nine times at least."

"I used to like them, and still think them good for young girls, with our own 'Queechy' and 'Wide, Wide World,' and books of that kind. Now I'm eighteen I prefer stronger novels, and books by great men and women, because these are always talked about by cultivated people, and when I go into society next winter I wish to be able to listen intelligently, and know what to admire."

"That's all very well for you, Alice; you were always poking over books, and I dare say you will write them some day, or be a blue-stocking. But I've got another year to study and fuss over my education, and I'm going to enjoy myself all I can, and leave the wise books till I come out."

"But, Carrie, there won't be any time to read them; you'll be so busy with parties, and beaux, and travelling, and such things. I WOULD take Alice's advice and read up a little now; it's so nice to know useful things, and be able to find help and comfort in good books when trouble comes, as Ellen Montgomery and Fleda did, and Ethel, and the other girls in Miss Yonge's stories," said Eva,

earnestly, remembering how much the efforts of those natural little heroines had helped her in her own struggles tor self-control and the cheerful bearing of the burdens which come to all.

“I don't want to be a priggish Ellen, or a moral Fleda, and I do detest bothering about self-improvement all the time. I know I ought, but I'd rather wait another year or two, and enjoy my vanities in peace just a LITTLE longer.” And Carrie tucked Wanda under the sofa pillow, as if a trifle ashamed of her society, with Eva's innocent eyes upon her own, and Alice sadly regarding her over the rampart of wise books, which kept growing higher as the eager girl found more and more treasures in this richly stored library.

A little silence followed, broken only by the patter of the rain without, the crackle of the wood fire within, and the scratch of a busy pen from a curtained recess at the end of the long room. In the sudden hush the girls heard it and remembered that they were not alone.

“She must have heard every word we said!” and Carrie sat up with a dismayed face as she spoke in a whisper.

Eva laughed, but Alice shrugged her shoulders, and said tranquilly, “I don't mind. She wouldn't expect much wisdom from school-girls.”

This was cold comfort to Carrie, who was painfully conscious of having been a particularly silly school-girl just then. So she gave a groan and lay down again, wishing she had not expressed her views quite so freely, and had kept Wanda for the privacy of her own room.

The three girls were the guests of a delightful old lady, who had known their mothers and was fond of renewing her acquaintance with them through their daughters. She loved young people, and each summer invited parties of them to enjoy the delights of her beautiful country house, where she lived alone now, being the childless widow of a somewhat celebrated man. She made it very pleasant for her guests, leaving them free to employ a part of the day as they liked, providing the best of company at dinner, gay revels in the evening, and a large house full of curious and interesting things to examine at their leisure.

The rain had spoiled a pleasant plan, and business letters had made it necessary for Mrs. Warburton to leave the three to their own devices after lunch. They had read quietly for several hours, and their hostess was just finishing her last letter when fragments of the conversation reached her ear. She listened with amusement, unconscious that they had forgotten her presence, finding the different views very characteristic, and easily explained by the difference of the homes out of which the three friends came.

Alice was the only daughter of a scholarly man and a brilliant woman; therefore

her love of books and desire to cultivate her mind was very natural, but the danger in her case would be in the neglect of other things equally important, too varied reading, and a superficial knowledge of many authors rather than a true appreciation of a few of the best and greatest. Eva was one of many children in a happy home, with a busy father, a pious mother, and many domestic cares, as well as joys, already falling to the dutiful girl's lot. Her instincts were sweet and unspoiled, and she only needed to be shown where to find new and better helpers for the real trials of life, when the childish heroines she loved could no longer serve her in the years to come.

Carrie was one of the ambitious yet commonplace girls who wish to shine, without knowing the difference between the glitter of a candle which attracts moths, and the serene light of a star, or the cheery glow of a fire round which all love to gather. Her mother's aims were not high, and the two pretty daughters knew that she desired good matches for them, educated them for that end, and expected them to do their parts when the time came. The elder sister was now at a watering-place with her mother, and Carrie hoped that a letter would soon come telling her that Mary was settled. During her stay with Mrs. Warburton she had learned a good deal, and was unconsciously contrasting the life here with the frivolous one at home, made up of public show and private sacrifice of comfort, dignity, and peace. Here were people who dressed simply, enjoyed conversation, kept up their accomplishments even when old, and were so busy, lovable, and charming, that poor Carrie often felt vulgar, ignorant, and mortified among them, in spite of their fine breeding and kindliness. The society Mrs. Warburton drew about her was the best, and old and young, rich and poor, wise and simple, all seemed genuine,—-glad to give or receive, enjoy and rest, and then go out to their work refreshed by the influences of the place and the sweet old lady who made it what it was. The girls would soon begin life for themselves, and it was well that they had this little glimpse of really good society before they left the shelter of home to choose friends, pleasures, and pursuits for themselves, as all young women do when once launched.

The sudden silence and then the whispers suggested to the listener that she had perhaps heard something not meant for her ears; so she presently emerged with her letters, and said, as she came smiling toward the group about the fire,—

“How are you getting through this long, dull afternoon, my dears? Quiet as mice till just now. What woke you up? A battle of the books? Alice looks as if she had laid in plenty of ammunition, and you were preparing to besiege her.”

The girls laughed, and all rose, for Madam Warburton was a stately old lady, and people involuntarily treated her with great respect, even in this mannerless age.

“We were only talking about books,” began Carrie, deeply grateful that Wanda was safely out of sight.

“And we couldn't agree,” added Eva, running to ring the bell for the man to take the letters, for she was used to these little offices at home, and loved to wait on Madam.

“Thanks, my love. Now let us talk a little, if you are tired of reading, and if you like to let me share the discussion. Comparing tastes in literature is always a pleasure, and I used to enjoy talking over books with my girl friends more than anything else.”

As she spoke, Mrs. Warburton sat down in the chair which Alice rolled up, drew Eva to the cushion at her feet, and nodded to the others as they settled again, with interested faces, one at the table where the pile of chosen volumes now lay, the other erect upon the couch where she had been practising the poses “full of languid grace,” so much affected by her favorite heroines.

“Carrie was laughing at me for liking wise books and wanting to improve my mind. Is it foolish and a waste of time?” asked Alice, eager to convince her friend and secure so powerful an ally.

“No, my dear, it is a very sensible desire, and I wish more girls had it. Only don't be greedy, and read too much; cramming and smattering is as bad as promiscuous novel-reading, or no reading at all. Choose carefully, read intelligently, and digest thoroughly each book, and then you make it your own,” answered Mrs. Warburton, quite in her element now, for she loved to give advice, as most old ladies do.

“But how can we know WHAT to read if we mayn't follow our tastes?” said Carrie, trying to be interested and “intelligent” in spite of her fear that a “school-marmy” lecture was in store for her.

“Ask advice, and so cultivate a true and refined taste. I always judge people's characters a good deal by the books they like, as well as by the company they keep; so one should be careful, for this is a pretty good test. Another is, be sure that whatever will not bear reading aloud is not fit to read to one's self. Many young girls ignorantly or curiously take up books quite worthless, and really harmful, because under the fine writing and brilliant color lurks immorality or the false sentiment which gives wrong ideas of life and things which should be sacred. They think, perhaps, that no one knows this taste of theirs; but they are mistaken, for it shows itself in many ways, and betrays them. Attitudes, looks, careless words, and a morbid or foolishly romantic view of certain things, show plainly that the maidenly instincts are blunted, and harm done that perhaps can never be repaired.”

Mrs. Warburton kept her eyes fixed upon the tall andirons as if gravely reproving them, which was a great relief to Carrie, whose cheeks glowed as she stirred uneasily and took up a screen as if to guard them from the fire. But conscience

pricked her sharply, and memory, like a traitor, recalled many a passage or scene in her favorite books which she could not have read aloud even to that old lady, though she enjoyed them in private. Nothing very bad, but false and foolish, poor food for a lively fancy and young mind to feed on, as the weariness or excitement which always followed plainly proved, since one should feel refreshed, not cloyed, with an intellectual feast.

Alice, with both elbows on the table, listened with wide-awake eyes, and Eva watched the raindrops trickle clown the pane with an intent expression, as if asking herself if she had ever done this naughty thing.

“Then there is another fault,” continued Mrs. Warburton, well knowing that her first shot had hit its mark, and anxious to be just. “Some book-loving lassies have a mania for trying to read everything, and dip into works far beyond their powers, or try too many different kinds of self-improvement at once. So they get a muddle of useless things into their heads, instead of well-assorted ideas and real knowledge. They must learn to wait and select; for each age has its proper class of books, and what is Greek to us at eighteen may be just what we need at thirty. One can get mental dyspepsia on meat and wine as well as on ice-cream and frosted cake, you know.”

Alice smiled, and pushed away four of the eight books she had selected, as if afraid she had been greedy, and now felt that it was best to wait a little.

Eva looked up with some anxiety in her frank eyes as she said, “Now it is my turn. Must I give up my dear homely books, and take to Ruskin, Kant, or Plato?”



Mrs. Warburton laughed, as she stroked the pretty brown head at her knee.

“Not yet, my love, perhaps never, for those are not the masters you need, I fancy. Since you like stories about every-day people, try some of the fine biographies of real men and women about whom you should know something. You will find their lives full of stirring, helpful, and lovely experiences, and in reading of these you will get courage and hope and faith to bear your own trials as they come. True stories suit you, and are the best, for there we get real tragedy and comedy, and the lessons all must learn.”

“Thank you! I will begin at once if you will kindly give me a list of such as would be good for me,” cried Eva, with the sweet docility of one eager to be all that is lovable and wise in woman.

“Give us a list, and we will try to improve in the best way. You know what we need, and love to help foolish girls, or you wouldn't be so kind and patient with us,” said Alice, going to sit beside Carrie, hoping for much discussion of this, to her, very interesting subject.

“I will, with pleasure; but I read few modern novels, so I may not be a good judge there. Most of them seem very poor stuff, and I cannot waste time even to skim them as some people do. I still like the old-fashioned ones I read as a girl, though you would laugh at them. Did any of you ever read 'Thaddeus of Warsaw'?”

“I have, and thought it very funny; so were 'Evelina' and 'Cecilia.' I wanted to try Smollett and Fielding, after reading some fine essays about them, but Papa told me I must wait,” said Alice.

“Ah, my dears, in my day, Thaddeus was our hero, and we thought the scene where he and Miss Beaufort are in the Park a most thrilling one. Two fops ask Thaddeus where he got his boots, and he replies, with withering dignity, 'Where I got my sword, gentlemen.' I treasured the picture of that episode for a long time. Thaddeus wears a hat as full of black plumes as a hearse, Hessian boots with tassels, and leans over Mary, who languishes on the seat in a short-waisted gown, limp scarf, poke bonnet, and large bag,—the height of elegance then, but very funny now. Then William Wallace in 'Scottish Chiefs.' Bless me! we cried over him as much as you do over your 'Heir of Clifton,' or whatever the boy's name is. You wouldn't get through it, I fancy; and as for poor, dear, prosy Richardson, his letter-writing heroines would bore you to death. Just imagine a lover saying to a friend, 'I begged my angel to stay and sip one dish of tea. She sipped one dish and flew.'”

“Now, I'm sure that's sillier than anything the Duchess ever wrote with her five-o'clock teas and flirtations over plum-cake on lawns,” cried Carrie, as they all laughed at the immortal Lovelace.

“I never read Richardson, but he couldn't be duller than Henry James, with his everlasting stories, full of people who talk a great deal and amount to nothing. I like the older novels best, and enjoy some of Scott's and Miss Edgeworth's better than Howells's, or any of the modern realistic writers, with their elevators, and paint-pots, and every-day people,” said Alice, who wasted little time on light literature.

“I'm glad to hear you say so, for I have an old-fashioned fancy that I'd rather read about people as they were, for that is history, or as they might and should be, for that helps us in our own efforts; not as they are, for that we know, and are all sufficiently commonplace ourselves, to be the better for a nobler and wider view of life and men than any we are apt to get, so busy are we earning daily bread, or running after fortune, honor or some other bubble. But I mustn't

lecture, or I shall bore you, and forget that I am your hostess, whose duty it is to amuse.”

As Mrs. Warburton paused, Carrie, anxious to change the subject, said, with her eyes on a curious jewel which the old lady wore, “I also like true stories, and you promised to tell us about that lovely pin some day. This is just the time for it,—please do.”

“With pleasure, for the little romance is quite apropos to our present chat. It is a very simple tale, and rather sad, but it had a great influence on my life, and this brooch is very dear to me.”

As Mrs. Warburton sat silent a moment, the girls all looked with interest at the quaint pin which clasped the soft folds of muslin over the black silk dress which was as becoming to the still handsome woman as the cap on her white hair and the winter roses in her cheeks. The ornament was in the shape of a pansy; its purple leaves were of amethyst, the yellow of topaz, and in the middle lay a diamond drop of dew. Several letters were delicately cut on its golden stem, and a guard pin showed how much its wearer valued it.

“My sister Lucretia was a good deal older than I, for the three boys came between,” began Mrs. Warburton, still gazing at the fire, as if from its ashes the past rose up bright and warm again. “She was a very lovely and superior girl, and I looked up to her with wonder as well as adoration. Others did the same, and at eighteen she was engaged to a charming man, who would have made his mark had he lived. She was too young to marry then, and Frank Lyman had a fine opening to practise his profession at the South. So they parted for two years, and it was then that he gave her the brooch, saying to her, as she whispered how lonely she should be without him, 'This PENSEE is a happy, faithful THOUGHT of me. Wear it, dearest girl, and don't pine while we are separated. Read and study, write much to me, and remember, “They never are alone that are accompanied with noble thoughts."'”

“Wasn't that sweet?” cried Eva, pleased with the beginning of the tale.

“So romantic!” added Carrie, recalling the “amber amulet” one of her pet heroes wore for years, and died kissing, after he had killed some fifty Arabs in the desert.

“Did she read and study?” asked Alice, with a soft color in her cheek, and eager eyes, for a budding romance was folded away in the depths of her maidenly heart, and she liked a love story.

“I'll tell you what she did, for it was rather remarkable at that day, when girls had little schooling, and picked up accomplishments as they could. The first winter she read and studied at home, and wrote much to Mr. Lyman. I have their

letters now, and very fine ones they are, though they would seem old-fashioned to you young things. Curious love letters,—full of advice, the discussion of books, report of progress, glad praise, modest gratitude, happy plans and a faithful affection that never wavered, though Lucretia was beautiful and much admired, and the dear fellow a great favorite among the brilliant Southern women.

“The second spring, Lucretia, anxious to waste no time, and ambitious to surprise Lyman, decided to go and study with old Dr. Gardener at Portland. He fitted young men for college, was a friend of our father's, and had a daughter who was a very wise and accomplished woman. That was a very happy summer, and Lu got on so well that she begged to stay all winter. It was a rare chance, for there were no colleges for girls then, and very few advantages to be had, and the dear creature burned to improve every faculty, that she might be more worthy of her lover. She fitted herself for college with the youths there, and did wonders; for love sharpened her wits, and the thought of that happy meeting spurred her on to untiring exertion. Lyman was expected in May, and the wedding was to be in June; but, alas for the poor girl! the yellow-fever came, and he was one of the first victims. They never met again, and nothing was left her of all that happy time but his letters, his library, and the pansy.”

Mrs. Warburton paused to wipe a few quiet tears from her eyes, while the girls sat in sympathetic silence.

“We thought it would kill her, that sudden change from love, hope, and happiness to sorrow, death, and solitude. But hearts don't break, my dears, if they know where to go for strength. Lucretia did, and after the first shock was over found comfort in her books, saying, with a brave, bright look, and the sweetest resignation, 'I must go on trying to be more worthy of him, for we shall meet again in God's good time and he shall see that I do not forget.'

“That was better than tears and lamentation, and the long years that followed were beautiful and busy ones, full of dutiful care for us at home after our mother died, of interest in all the good works of her time, and a steady, quiet effort to improve every faculty of her fine mind, till she was felt to be one of the noblest women in our city. Her influence was wide-spread; all the intelligent people sought her, and when she travelled she was welcome everywhere, for cultivated persons have a free-masonry of their own, and are recognized at once.”

“Did she ever marry?” asked Carrie, feeling that no life could be quite successful without that great event.

“Never. She felt herself a widow, and wore black to the day of her death. Many men asked her hand, but she refused them all, and was the sweetest 'old maid' ever seen,—cheerful and serene to the very last, for she was ill a long time, and found her solace and stay still in the beloved books. Even when she could no

longer read them, her memory supplied her with the mental food that kept her soul strong while her body failed. It was wonderful to see and hear her repeating fine lines, heroic sayings, and comforting psalms through the weary nights when no sleep would come, making friends and helpers of the poets, philosophers, and saints whom she knew and loved so well. It made death beautiful, and taught me how victorious an immortal soul can be over the ills that vex our mortal flesh.

“She died at dawn on Easter Sunday, after a quiet night, when she had given me her little legacy of letters, books, and the one jewel she had always worn, repeating her lover's words to comfort me. I had read the Commendatory Prayer, and as I finished she whispered, with a look of perfect peace, 'Shut the book, dear, I need study no more; I have hoped and believed, now I shall know;' and so went happily away to meet her lover after patient waiting.”

The sigh of the wind was the only sound that broke the silence till the quiet voice went on again, as if it loved to tell the story, for the thought of soon seeing the beloved sister took the sadness from the memory of the past.

“I also found my solace in books, for I was very lonely when she was gone, my father being dead, the brothers married, and home desolate. I took to study and reading as a congenial employment, feeling no inclination to marry, and for many years was quite contented among my books. But in trying to follow in dear Lucretia's footsteps, I unconsciously fitted myself for the great honor and happiness of my life, and curiously enough I owed it to a book.”

Mrs. Warburton smiled as she took up a shabby little volume from the table where Alice had laid it, and, quick to divine another romance, Eva said, like a story-loving child, “Do tell about it! The other was so sad.”

“This begins merrily, and has a wedding in it, as young girls think all tales should. Well, when I was about thirty-five, I was invited to join a party of friends on a trip to Canada, that being the favorite jaunt in my young days. I'd been studying hard for some years, and needed rest, so I was glad to go. As a good book for an excursion, I took this Wordsworth in my bag. It is full of fine passages, you know, and I loved it, for it was one of the books given to Lucretia by her lover. We had a charming time, and were on our way to Quebec when my little adventure happened. I was in raptures over the grand St. Lawrence as we steamed slowly from Montreal that lovely summer day. I could not read, but sat on the upper deck, feasting my eyes and dreaming dreams as even staid maiden ladies will when out on a holiday. Suddenly I caught the sound of voices in earnest discussion on the lower deck, and, glancing down, saw several gentlemen leaning against the rail as they talked over certain events of great public interest at that moment. I knew that a party of distinguished persons were on board, as my friend's husband, Dr. Tracy, knew some of them, and pointed out Mr. Warburton as one of the rising scientific men of the day. I remembered

that my sister had met him years ago, and much admired him both for his own gifts and because he had known Lyman. As other people were listening, I felt no delicacy about doing the same, for the conversation was an eloquent one, and well worth catching. So interested did I become that I forgot the great rafts floating by, the picturesque shores, the splendid river, and leaned nearer and nearer that no word might be lost, till my book slid out of my lap and fell straight down upon the head of one of the gentlemen, giving him a smart blow, and knocking his hat overboard."

"Oh, what DID you do?" cried the girls, much amused at this unromantic catastrophe.

Mrs. Warburton clasped her hands dramatically, as her eyes twinkled and a pretty color came into her cheeks at the memory of that exciting moment.

"My dears, I could have dropped with mortification! What COULD I do but dodge and peep as I waited to see the end of this most untoward accident? Fortunately I was alone on that side of the deck, so none of the ladies saw my mishap and, slipping along the seat to a distant corner, I hid my face behind a convenient newspaper, as I watched the little flurry of fishing up the hat by a man in a boat near by, and the merriment of the gentlemen over this assault of William Wordsworth upon Samuel Warburton. The poor book passed from hand to hand, and many jokes were made upon the 'fair Helen' whose name was written on the paper cover which projected it.

"'I knew a Miss Harper once,—a lovely woman, but her name was not Helen, and she is dead,—God bless her!' I heard Mr. Warburton say, as he flapped his straw hat to dry it, and rubbed his head, which fortunately was well covered with thick gray hair at that time.

"I longed to go down and tell him who I was, but I had not the courage to face all those men. It really was MOST embarrassing; so I waited for a more private moment to claim my book, as I knew we should not land till night, so there was no danger of losing it.

"'This is rather unusual stuff for a woman to be reading. Some literary lady doubtless. Better look her up, Warburton. You'll know her by the color of her stockings when she comes down to lunch,' said a jolly old gentlenoan, in a tone that made me 'rouge high,' as Evelina says.

"'I shall know her by her intelligent face and conversation, if this book belongs to a lady. It will be an honor and a pleasure to meet a woman who enjoys Wordsworth, for in my opinion he is one of our truest poets,' answered Mr. Warburton, putting the book in his pocket, with a look and a tone that were most respectful and comforting to me just then.

“I hoped he would examine the volume, for Lucretia's and Lyman's names were on the fly leaf, and that would be a delightful introduction for me. So I said nothing and bided my time, feeling rather foolish when we all filed in to lunch, and I saw the other party glancing at the ladies at the table. Mr. Warburton's eye paused a moment as it passed from Mrs. Tracy to me, and I fear I blushed like a girl, my dears, for Samuel had very fine eyes, and I remembered the stout gentleman's unseemly joke about the stockings. Mine were white as snow, for I had a neat foot, and was fond of nice hose and well-made shoes. I am so still, as you see.” Here the old lady displayed a small foot in a black silk stocking and delicate slipper, with the artless pride a woman feels, at any age, in one of her best points. The girls gratified her by a murmur of admiration, and, decorously readjusting the folds of her gown, she went on with the most romantic episode of her quiet life.

“I retired to my state-room after lunch to compose myself, and when I emerged, in the cool of the afternoon, my first glance showed me that the hour had come, for there on deck was Mr. Warburton, talking to Mrs. Tracy, with my book in his hand. I hesitated a moment, for in spite of my age I was rather shy, and really it was not an easy thing to apologize to a strange gentle-man for dropping books on his head and spoiling his hat. Men think so much of their hats you know. I was spared embarrassment, however, for he saw me and came to me at once, saying, in the most cordial manner, as he showed the names on the fly leaf of my Wordsworth, 'I am sure we need no other introduction but the names of these two dear friends of ours. I am very glad to find that Miss Helen Harper is the little girl I saw once or twice at your father's house some years ago, and to meet her so pleasantly again.'

“That made everything easy and delightful, and when I had apologized and been laughingly assured that he considered it rather an honor than otherwise to be assaulted by so great a man, we fell to talking of old times, and soon forgot that we were strangers. He was twenty years older than I, but a handsome man, and a most interesting and excellent one, as we all know. He had lost a young wife long ago, and had lived for science ever since, but it had not made him dry, or cold, or selfish. He was very young at heart for all his wisdom, and enjoyed that holiday like a boy out of school. So did I, and never dreamed that anything would come of it but a pleasant friendship founded on our love for those now dead and gone. Dear me! how strangely things turn out in this world of ours, and how the dropping of that book changed my life! Well, that was our introduction, and that first long conversation was followed by many more equally charming, during the three weeks our parties were much together, as both were taking the same trip, and Dr. Tracy was glad to meet his old friend.

“I need not tell you how delightful such society was to me, nor how surprised I was when, on the last day before we parted, Mr. Warburton, who had answered

many questions of mine during these long chats of ours, asked me a very serious one, and I found that I could answer it as he wished. It brought me great honor as well as happiness. I fear I was not worthy of it, but I tried to be, and felt a tender satisfaction in thinking that I owed it to dear Lucretia, in part at least; for my effort to imitate her made me fitter to become a wise man's wife, and thirty years of very sweet companionship was my reward."

As she spoke, Mrs. Warburton bowed her head before the portrait of a venerable old man which hung above the mantel-piece.

It was a pretty, old-fashioned expression of wifely pride and womanly tenderness in the fine old lady, who forgot her own gifts, and felt only humility and gratitude to the man who had found in her a comrade in intellectual pursuits, as well as a helpmeet at home and a gentle prop for his declining years.

The girls looked up with eyes full of something softer than mere curiosity, and felt in their young hearts how precious and honorable such a memory must be, how true and beautiful such a marriage was, and how sweet wisdom might become when it went hand in hand with love.

Alice spoke first, saying, as she touched the worn cover of the little book with a new sort of respect, "Thank you very much! Perhaps I ought not to have taken this from the corner shelves in your sanctum? I wanted to find the rest of the lines Mr. Thornton quoted last night, and didn't stop to ask leave."

"You are welcome, my love, for you know how to treat books. Yes, those in that little case are my precious relics. I keep them all, from my childish hymn-book to my great-grandfather's brass-bound Bible, for by and by when I sit 'Looking towards Sunset,' as dear Lydia Maria Child calls our last days, I shall lose my interest in other books, and take comfort in these. At the end as at the beginning of life we are all children again, and love the songs our mothers sung us, and find the one true Book our best teacher as we draw near to God."

As the reverent voice paused, a ray of sunshine broke through the parting clouds, and shone full on the serene old face turned to meet it, with a smile that welcomed the herald of a lovely sunset.

"The rain is over; there will be just time for a run in the garden before dinner, girls. I must go and change my cap, for literary ladies should not neglect to look well after the ways of their household and keep themseves tidy, no matter how old they may be." And with a nod Mrs. Warburton left them, wondering what the effect of the conversation would be on the minds of her young guests.

Alice went away to the garden, thinking of Lucretia and her lover, as she gathered flowers in the sunshine. Conscientious Eva took the Life of Mary Somerville to her room, and read diligently for half an hour, that no time might

be lost in her new course of study, Carrie sent Wanda and her finery up the chimney in a lively blaze, and, as she watched the book burn, decided to take her blue and gold volume of Tennyson with her on her next trip to Nahant, in case any eligible learned or literary man's head should offer itself as a shining mark. Since a good marriage was the end of life, why not follow Mrs. Warburton's example, and make a really excellent one?

When they all met at dinner-time the old lady was pleased to see a nosegay of fresh pansies in the bosoms of her three youngest guests, and to hear Alice whisper, with grateful eyes,—

“We wear your flower to show you that we don't mean to forget the lesson you so kindly gave us, and to fortify ourselves with 'noble thoughts,' as you and she did.”

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