

ANNIE KILBURN.

BY WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS.

I.

AFTER the death of Judge Kilburn his daughter came back to America. They had been eleven winters in Rome, always meaning to return, but staying on from year to year, as people do who have nothing definite to call them home. Toward the last Miss Kilburn tacitly gave up the expectation of getting her father away, though they both continued to say that they were going to take passage as soon as the weather was settled in the spring. At the date they had talked of for sailing he was lying in the Protestant cemetery, and she was trying to gather herself together, and adjust her life to his loss. This would have been easier with a younger person, for she had been her father's pet so long, and then had taken care of his helplessness with a devotion which was finally so motherly, that it was like losing at once a parent and a child when he died, and she remained with the habit of giving herself when there was no longer any one to receive the self-sacrifice. He had married late, and in her thirty-first year he was eighty-three; but the disparity of their ages, increasing toward the end through his infirmities, had not loosened for her the ties of custom and affection that bound them; she had seen him grow more and more fitfully cognizant of what they had been to each other since her mother's death, while she grew the more tender and fond with him. People who came to condole with her seemed not to understand this, or else they thought it would help her to bear up if they treated her bereavement as a relief from hopeless anxiety. They were all surprised when she told them she still meant to go home.

"Why, my dear," said one old lady, who had been away from America twenty years, "*this* is home! You've lived in this apartment longer now than the oldest inhabitant has lived in most American towns. What are you talking about? Do you mean that you are going back to Washington?"

"Oh no. We were merely staying on in Washington from force of habit, after father gave up practice. I think we shall go back to the old homestead, where we've

always spent our summers, ever since I can remember."

"And where is that?" the old lady asked, with the sharpness which people believe must somehow be good for a broken spirit.

"It's in the interior of Massachusetts—you wouldn't know it: a place called Hatboro'."

"No, I certainly shouldn't," said the old lady, with superiority. "Why Hatboro', of all the ridiculous reasons?"

"It was one of the first places where they began to make straw hats; it was a nickname at first, and then they adopted it. The old name was Dorchester Farms. Father fought the change, but it was of no use; the people wouldn't have it Farms after the place began to grow; and by that time they had got used to Hatboro'. Besides, I don't see how it's any worse than Hatfield, in England."

"It's very American."

"Oh, it's American. We have Boxboro' too, you know, in Massachusetts."

"And you are going from Rome to Hatboro', Mass.," said the old lady, trying to present the idea in the strongest light by abbreviating the name of the State.

"Yes," said Miss Kilburn. "It will be a change, but not so much of a change as you would think. I was always very happy there, and—it was father's wish to go back."

"Ah, my dear!" cried the old lady. "You're letting that weigh with you, I see. Don't do it! If it wasn't wise, don't you suppose that the last thing he could wish you to do would be to sacrifice yourself to a sick whim of his?"

The kindness and interest expressed in the words touched Annie Kilburn. She had a certain beauty of feature; she was near-sighted; but her eyes were brown and soft, her lips red and full; her dark hair grew low, and played in little wisps and rings on her temples, where her complexion was clearest; the bold contour of her face, with its decided chin and the rather large salient nose, was like her father's; it was this, probably, that gave an impression of strength, with a wistful qualification. She was at that time rather thin, and it could have been seen that she would be handsomer when her frame had

rounded out in fulfilment of its generous design. She opened her lips to speak, but shut them again in an effort at self-control before she said:

"But I really wish to do it. At this moment I would rather be in Hatboro' than in Rome."

"Oh, very well," said the old lady, gathering herself up as one does from throwing away one's sympathy upon an unworthy object; "if you really *wish* it—"

"I know that it must seem preposterous and—and almost ungrateful that I should think of going back, when I might just as well stay. Why, I've a great many more friends here than I have there; I suppose I shall be almost a stranger when I get there, and there's no comparison in sympathy and congeniality; and yet I feel that I must go back. I can't tell you why. But I have a longing; I feel that I must try to be of some use in the world—try to do some good—and in Hatboro' I think I shall know how." She put on her glasses, and looked at the old lady as if she might attempt an explanation, but, as if a clearer vision of the veteran worldling discouraged her, she did not make the effort.

"*Oh!*" said the old lady. "If you want to be of use, and do good—" She stopped, as if then there were no more to be said by a sensible person. "And shall you be going soon?" she asked. The idea seemed to suggest her own departure, and she rose after speaking.

"Just as soon as possible," answered Miss Kilburn. Words take on a color of something more than their explicit meaning, from the mood in which they are spoken: Miss Kilburn had a sense of hurrying her visitor away, and the old lady had a sense of being turned out-of-doors, that the preparations for the homeward voyage might begin instantly.

II.

Many times after the preparations began, and many times after they were ended, Miss Kilburn faltered in doubt of her decision; and if there had been any will stronger than her own to oppose it, she might have reversed it, and staid in Rome. All the way home there was a strain of misgiving in her satisfaction at doing what she believed to be for the best, and the first sight of her native land gave her a shock of emotion which was not unmixed joy. She felt forlorn among

people who were coming home with all sorts of high expectations, while she only had high intentions.

These dated back a good many years; in fact, they dated back to the time when the first flush of her unthinking girlhood was over, and she began to question herself as to the life she was living. It was a very pleasant life, ostensibly. Her father had been elected from the bench to Congress, and had kept his title and his repute as a lawyer through several terms in the House before he settled down to the practice of his profession in the courts at Washington, where he made a good deal of money. They passed from boarding to house-keeping, in the easy Washington way, after their impermanent Congressional years, and divided their time between a comfortable little place in Nevada Circle and the old homestead in Hatboro'. He was fond of Washington, and robustly content with the world as he found it there and elsewhere. If his daughter's compunctions came to her through him, it must have been from some remoter ancestry; he was not apparently characterized by their transmission, and probably she derived them from her mother, who died when she was a little girl, and of whom she had no recollection. Till he began to break, after they went abroad, he had his own way in everything; but as men grow old or infirm they fall into subjection to their women-kind; their rude wills yield in the suppler insistence of the feminine purpose; they take the color of the feminine moods and emotions; the cycle of life completes itself where it began, in helpless dependence upon the sex; and Rufus Kilburn did not escape the common lot. He was often complaining and unlovely, as aged and ailing men must be; perhaps he was usually so; but he had moments when he recognized the beauty of his daughter's aspiration with a spiritual sympathy, which showed that he must always have had an intellectual perception of it. He expressed with rhetorical largeness and looseness the longing which was not very definite in her own heart, and mingled with it a strain of homesickness poignantly simple and direct for the places, the scenes, the persons, the things, of his early days. As he failed more and more, his homesickness was for natural aspects which had wholly ceased to exist through modern changes and improve-

ments, and for people long since dead, whom he could find only in an illusion of that environment in some other world. In the pathos of this situation it was easy for his daughter to keep him ignorant of the passionate rebellion against her own ideals in which she sometimes surprised herself. When he died, all counter-currents were lost in the tidal revulsion of feeling which swept her to the fulfilment of what she hoped was deepest and strongest in her nature, with shame for what she hoped was shallowest, till that moment of repulsion in which she saw the thickly roofed and many-towered hills of Boston grow up out of the western waves.

She had always regarded her soul as the battle-field of two opposite principles, the good and the bad, the high and the low. God made her, she thought, and He alone; He made everything that she was; but she would not have said that He made the evil in her. Yet her belief did not admit the existence of Creative Evil; and so she said to herself that she herself was that evil, and she must struggle against herself; she must question whatever she strongly wished because she strongly wished it. It was not logical; she did not push her postulates to their obvious conclusions; there was apt to be the same kind of break between her conclusions and her actions as between her reasons and her conclusions. She acted impulsively, and from a force which she could not analyze. She indulged reveries so vivid that they seemed to weaken and exhaust her for the grapple with realities; the recollection of them abashed her in the presence of facts.

With all this, it must not be supposed that she was morbidly introspective, that her life had been ascetic. It had been apparently a life of cheerful acquiescence in worldly conditions; it had been, in some measure, a life of fashion, or at least of society. It had not been without the interests of other girls' lives, by any means; she had sometimes had fancies, flirtations, but she did not think she had been really in love, and she had refused some offers of marriage for that reason.

III.

The industry of making straw hats began at Hatboro', as many other industries have begun in New England, with no great local advantages, but simply because

its founder happened to live there, and to believe that it would pay. There was a railroad, and labor of the sort he wanted was cheap and abundant in the village and the outlying farms. In time the work came to be done more and more by machinery, and to be gathered into large shops. The buildings increased in size and number; the single line of the railroad was multiplied into four, and in the region of the tracks several large, ugly, windowy wooden bulks grew up for shoe shops; a stocking factory followed; yet this business activity did not warp the old village from its picturesqueness or quiet. The railroad tracks crossed its main street; but the shops were all on one side of them, with the work-people's cottages and boarding-houses, and on the other were the simple, square, roomy old houses, with their white paint and their green blinds, varied by the modern color and carpentry of French-roofed villas. The old houses stood quite close to the street, with a strip of narrow door-yard before them; the new mansions affected a certain depth of lawn, over which their owners personally pushed a clucking hand-mower every summer evening after tea. The fences had been taken away from the new houses, in the taste of some of the Boston suburbs; they generally remained before the old ones, whose inmates resented the ragged effect that their absence gave the street. The irregularity had hitherto been of an orderly and harmonious kind, such as naturally follows the growth of a country road into a village thoroughfare. The dwellings were placed nearer or farther from the sidewalk as their builders fancied, and the elms that met in a low arch above the street had an illusive symmetry in the perspective; they were really set at uneven intervals, and in a line that wavered capriciously in and out. The street itself lounged and curved along, widening and contracting like a river, and then suddenly lost itself over the brow of an upland which formed a natural boundary of the village. Beyond this was South Hatboro', a group of cottages built by city people who had lately come in—idlers and invalids, the former for the cool summer, and the latter for the dry winter. At chance intervals in the old village new side streets branched from the thoroughfare to the right and the left, and here and there a Queen Anne cottage

showed its chimneys and gables on them. The roadway under the elms that kept it dark and cool with their hovering shade, and swept the wagon-tops with their pendulous boughs at places, was unpaved; but the sidewalks were asphalted to the last dwelling in every direction, and they were promptly broken out in winter by the public snow-plough.

Miss Kilburn saw them in the spring, when their usefulness was least apparent, and she did not know whether to praise the spirit of progress which showed itself in them as well as in other things at Hatboro'. She had come prepared to have misgivings, but she had promised herself to be just; she thought she could bear the old ugliness, if not the new. Some of the new things, however, were not so ugly; the young station-master was handsome in his railroad uniform, and pleasanter to the eye than the veteran baggage-master, incongruous in his stiff silk cap and his shirt sleeves and spectacles. The station itself, one of Richardson's, massive and low, with red-tiled, spreading veranda roofs, impressed her with its fitness, and strengthened her for her encounter with the business architecture of Hatboro', which was of the florid, ambitious New York type, prevalent with every American town in the early stages of its prosperity. The buildings were of pink brick, faced with granite, and supported in the first story by columns of painted iron; flat-roofed blocks looked down over the low wooden structures of earlier Hatboro', and a large hotel had pushed back the old-time tavern, and planted itself flush upon the sidewalk. But the stores seemed very good, as she glanced at them from her carriage, and their show-windows were tastefully arranged; the apothecary's had an interior of glittering neatness unsurpassed by an Italian apothecary's; and the provision-man's, besides its symmetrical array of pendent sides and quarters indoors, had banks of fruit and vegetables without, and a large aquarium with a spraying fountain in its window.

Bolton, the farmer who had always taken care of the Kilburn place, came to meet her at the station and drive her home. Miss Kilburn had bidden him drive slowly, so that she could take in all the changes, and she noticed the new town-hall, with which she could find no fault; the Baptist and Methodist churches were the same as of old; the Unitarian

church seemed to have shrunk, as if the architecture had sympathized with its dwindling body of worshippers; just beyond it was the village green, with the soldiers' monument, and the tall white-painted flag-pole, and the four small brass cannon threatening the points of the compass at its base.

"Stop a moment, Mr. Bolton," said Miss Kilburn; and she put her head quite out of the carriage, and stared at the figure on the monument.

It was strange that the first misgiving she could really make sure of concerning Hatboro' should relate to this figure, which she herself was mainly responsible for placing there. When the money was subscribed and voted for the statue, the committee wrote out to her at Rome as one who would naturally feel an interest in getting something fit and economical for them. She accepted the trust with zeal and pleasure; but she overruled their simple notion of an American volunteer at rest, with his hands folded on the muzzle of his gun, as intolerably hackneyed and commonplace. Her conscience, she said, would not let her add another recruit to the regiment of stone soldiers standing about in that posture on the tops of pedestals all over the country; and so, instead of going to an Italian statuary with her fellow-townsmen's letter, and getting him to make the figure they wanted, she doubled the money and gave the commission to a young girl from Kansas, who had come out to develop at Rome the genius recognized at Topeka. They decided together that it would be best to have something ideal, and the sculptor promptly imagined and rapidly executed a design for a winged Victory, poising on the summit of a white marble shaft, and clasping its hands under its chin, in expression of the grief that mingled with the popular exultation. Miss Kilburn had her doubts while the work went on, but she silenced them with the theory that when the figure was in position it would be all right.

Now that she saw it in position she wished to ask Mr. Bolton what was thought of it, but she could not nerve herself to the question. He remained silent, and she felt that he was sorry for her. "Oh, may I be very humble; may I be helped to be very humble!" she prayed under her breath. It seemed as if she could not take her eyes from the figure; it was

such a modern, such an American shape, so youthfully inadequate, so simple, so sophisticated, so like a young lady in society indecorously exposed for a *tableau vivant*. She wondered if the people in Hatboro' felt all this about it; if they realized how its involuntary frivolity insulted the solemn memory of the slain.

"Drive on, please," she said, gently.

Bolton pulled the reins, and as the horses started he pointed with his whip to a church at the other side of the green. "That's the new Orthodox church," he explained.

"Oh, is it?" asked Miss Kilburn. "It's very handsome, I'm sure." She was not sensible of admiring the large Romanesque pile very much, though it was certainly not bad, but she remembered that Bolton was a member of the Orthodox church, and she was grateful to him for not saying anything about the soldiers' monument.

"We sold the old buildin' to the Catholics, and they moved it down ont' the side street."

Miss Kilburn caught the glimmer of a cross where he beckoned, through the flutter of the foliage.

"They had to raze the steeple some to git their cross on," he added; and then he showed her the high-school building as they passed, and the Episcopal chapel, of blameless church-warden's Gothic, half hidden by its Japanese ivy, under a branching elm, on another side street.

"Yes," she said, "that was built before we went abroad."

"I disremember," he said, absently. He let the horses walk on the soft, darkly shaded road, where the wheels made a pleasant grinding sound, and set himself sidewise on his front seat, so as to talk to Miss Kilburn more at his ease.

"I d' know," he began, after clearing his throat, with a conscious air, "as you know we'd got a new minister to our church."

"No, I hadn't heard of it," said Miss Kilburn, with her mind full of the monument still. "But I might have heard and forgotten it," she added. "I was very much taken up toward the last before I left Rome."

"Well, come to think," said Bolton; "I don't know's you'd had time to heard. He hain't been here a great while."

"Is he—satisfactory?" asked Miss Kilburn, feeling how far from satisfactory

the Victory was, and formulating an explanatory apology to the committee in her mind.

"Oh yes, he's satisfactory enough, as far forth as that goes. He's talented, and he's right up with the times. Yes, he's progressive. I guess they got pretty tired of Mr. Rogers, even before he died; and they kept the supply a-goin' till—all was blue, before they could settle on anybody. In fact they couldn't seem to agree on anybody till Mr. Peck come."

Miss Kilburn had got as far, in her tacit interview with the committee, as to have offered to replace at her own expense the Victory with a Volunteer, and she seemed to be listening to Bolton with rapt attention.

"Well, it's like this," continued the farmer. "He's progressive in his idees, 'n' at the same time he's spiritual-minded; and so I guess he suits pretty well all round. Of course you can't suit everybody. There's always got to be a dog in the manger, it don't matter where you go. But if anybody was to ask me, I should say Mr. Peck suited. Yes, I don't know but what I should."

Miss Kilburn instantaneously closed her transaction with the committee, removed the Victory, and had the Volunteer unveiled with appropriate ceremonies, opened with prayer by the Rev. Mr. Peck.

"Peck?" she said. "Did you tell me his name was Peck?"

"Yes, ma'am; Rev. Julius W. Peck. He's from down Penobscotport way, in Maine. I guess he's all right."

Miss Kilburn did not reply. Her mind had been taken off the monument for the moment by her dislike for the name of the new minister, and the Victory had seized the opportunity to get back.

Bolton sighed deeply, and continued in a diffusive strain, which at last became perceptible to Miss Kilburn through her own humiliation. "There's some in every community that's bound to complain, I don't care what you do to accommodate 'em; and what I done, I done as much to stop their clack as anything, and give him the right sort of a start off, an' I guess I did. But Mis' Bolton she didn't know but what you'd look at it in the light of a libbutty, and I didn't know but what you *would* think I no business to done it."

He seemed to be addressing a question to her, but she only replied with a dazed frown, and Bolton was obliged to go on.

"I didn't let him room in your part of the house; that is to say, not sleep there; but I thought, as you was comin' home, and I'd better be airin' it up some, anyway, I might as well let him set in the old Judge's room. If you think it was more than I had a right to do, I'm willin' to pay for it. Git up!" Bolton turned fully round toward his horses, to hide the workings of emotion in his face, and shook the reins like a desperate man.

"What are you talking about, Mr. Bolton?" cried Miss Kilburn. "Whom are you talking about?"

Bolton answered, with a kind of violence, "Mr. Peck; I took him to board, first off."

"You took him to board?"

"Yes. I know it wa'n't just accordin' to the letter o' the law, and the old Judge was always pooty p'tic'lah. But I've took care of the place goin' on twenty years now, and I hain't never had a chick nor a child in it before. The child," he continued, partly turning his face round again, and beginning to look Miss Kilburn in the eye, "wa'n't one to touch anything, anyway, and we kep' her in our part all the time; Mis' Bolton she couldn't seem to let her out of her sight, she got so fond of her, and she used to follow me round among the hosses like a kitten. I declare, I miss her; and we all do."

Bolton's face, the color of one of the lean ploughed fields of Hatboro', and deeply furrowed, lighted up with real feeling, which he tried to make go as far in the work of reconciling Miss Kilburn as if it had been factitious.

"But I don't understand," she said. "What child are you talking about?"

"Mr. Peck's."

"Was he married?" she asked, with displeasure, she did not know why.

"Well, yes, he *had* been," answered Bolton. "But she'd be'n in the asylum ever since the child was born."

"Oh," said Miss Kilburn, with relief; and she fell back upon the seat from which she had started forward.

Bolton might easily have taken her tone for that of disgust. He faced round upon her once more. "It was kind of queer, his havin' the child with him, an' takin' most the care of her himself; and so, as I say, Mis' Bolton and me we took him in, as much to stop folks' mouths as anything, till they got kinder used to it. But we didn't take him into your part,

as I say; and as I say, I'm willin' to pay you whatever you say for the use of the old Judge's study. I presume that part of it *was* a libbutter."

"It was all perfectly right, Mr. Bolton," said Miss Kilburn.

"His wife died anyway, more than a year ago," said Bolton, as if the fact completed his atonement to Miss Kilburn. "Git ep! I told him from the start that it had got to be a temporary thing, an' 't I only took him till he could git settled somehow. I guess he means to go to house-keepin', if he can git the right kind of a house-keeper; he wants an old one. If it was a young one, I guess he wouldn't have any great trouble, if he went about it the right way." Bolton's sarcasm was merely a race sarcasm. He was a very mild man, and his thick-growing eyelashes softened and shadowed his gray eyes, and gave his lean face pathos.

"You could have let him stay till he had found a suitable place," said Miss Kilburn.

"Oh, I wa'n't goin' to do *that*," said Bolton. "But I'm 'bliged to you just the same."

They came up in sight of the old square house, standing back a good distance from the road, with a broad sweep of grass sloping down before it into a little valley, and rising again to the wall fencing the grounds from the street. The wall was overhung there by a company of magnificent elms, which turned and formed one side of the avenue leading to the house. Their tops met and mixed somewhat incongruously with those of the stiff dark maples which more densely shaded the other side of the lane.

Bolton drove into their gloom, and then out into the wide sunny space at the side of the house where Miss Kilburn had alighted so often with her father. Bolton's dog, grown now so very old as to be weak-minded, barked crazily at his master, and then, recognizing him, broke into an imbecile whimper, and went back and coiled his rheumatism up in the sun on a warm stone before the door. Mrs. Bolton had to step over him as she came out, formally supporting her right elbow with her left hand as she offered the other in greeting to Miss Kilburn, with a look of question at her husband.

Miss Kilburn intercepted the look, and began to laugh.

All was unchanged, and all so strange;

it seemed as if her father must both get down with her from the carriage and come to meet her from the house. Her glance involuntarily took in the familiar masses and details; the patches of short tough grass mixed with decaying chips and small weeds underfoot, and the spacious June sky overhead; the fine network and blisters of the cracking and warping white paint on the clapboarding, and the hills beyond the bulks of the village houses and trees; the wood-shed stretching with its low board arches to the barn, and the milk-pans tilted to sun against the underpinning of the L, and Mrs. Bolton's pot plants in the kitchen window.

"Did you think I could be hard about such a thing as that? It was perfectly right. Oh, Mrs. Bolton!" She stopped laughing and began to cry; she put away Mrs. Bolton's carefully offered hand, she threw herself upon the bony structure of her bosom, and buried her face sobbing in the leathery folds of her neck.

Mrs. Bolton suffered her embrace above the old dog, who fled with a cry of rheumatic apprehension from the sweep of Miss Kilburn's skirts, and then came back and snuffed at them in a vain effort to recall her.

"Well, go in and lay down by the stove," said Mrs. Bolton, with a divided interest, while she beat Miss Kilburn's back with her bony palm in sign of sympathy. But the dog went off up the lane, and stood there by the pasture bars, barking abstractedly at intervals.

IV.

Miss Kilburn found that the house had been well aired for her coming, but an old earthy and mouldy smell, which it took days and nights of open doors and windows to drive out, stole back again with the first turn of rainy weather. She had fires built on the hearths and in the stoves, and after opening her trunks and scattering her dresses on beds and chairs, she spent most of the first week outside of the house, wandering about the fields and orchards to adjust herself anew to the estranged features of the place. The house she found lower-ceiled and smaller than she remembered it. The Boltons had kept it up very well, and in spite of the earthy and mouldy smell, it was conscientiously clean. There was not a speck of dust anywhere; the old yellowish-white

paint was spotless; the windows shone. But there was a sort of frigidity in the perfect order and repair which repelled her, and she left her things tossed about, as if to break the ice of this propriety. In several places, within and without, she found marks of the faithful hand of Bolton in economical patches of the wood-work; but she was not sure that they had not been there eleven years before; and there were darnings in the carpets and curtains, which affected her with the same mixture of novelty and familiarity. Certain stale smells about the place (minor smells as compared with the prevalent odor) confused her; she could not decide whether she remembered them of old, or was reminded of the odors she used to catch in passing the pantry on the steamer.

Her father had never been sure that he would not return any next year or month, and the house had always been ready to receive them. In his study everything was as he left it. His daughter looked for signs of Mr. Peck's occupation, but there were none; Mrs. Bolton explained that she had put him in a table from her own sitting-room to write at. The Judge's desk was untouched, and his heavy wooden arm-chair stood pulled up to it as if he were in it. The ranks of law-books, in their yellow sheep-skin, with their red titles above and their black titles below, were in the order he had taught Mrs. Bolton to replace them in after dusting; the stuffed owl on a shelf above the mantel looked down with a clear solemnity in its gum-copal eyes, and Mrs. Bolton took it from its perch to show Miss Kilburn that there was not a moth on it, nor the sign of a moth.

Miss Kilburn experienced here that refusal of the old associations to take the form of welcome which she had already felt in the earth and sky and air outside; in everything there was a sense of impassable separation. Her dead father was no nearer in his wonted place than the trees of the orchard, or the outline of the well-known hills, or the pink of the familiar sunsets. In her rummaging about the house she pulled open a chest of drawers which used to stand in the room where she slept when a child. It was full of her own childish clothing, a little girl's linen and muslin; and she thought with a throe of despair that she could as well hope to get back into these outgrown garments, which the helpless piety of Mrs. Bolton

had kept from the rag-bag, as to think of re-entering the relations of the life so long left off.

It surprised her to find how cold the Boltons were; she had remembered them as always very kind and willing; but she was so used now to the ways of the Italians and their showy affection, it was hard for her to realize that people could be both kind and cold. The Boltons seemed ashamed of their feelings and hid them; it was the same in some degree with all the villagers when she began to meet them, and the fact slowly worked back into her consciousness, wounding its way in. People did not come to see her at once. They waited, as they told her, till she got settled, before they called, and then they did not appear very glad to have her back.

But this was not altogether the effect of their temperament. The Kilburns had made a long summer always in Hatboro', and they had always talked of it as home; but they had never passed a whole year there since Judge Kilburn first went to Congress, and they were not regarded as full neighbors or permanent citizens. Miss Kilburn, however, kept up her childhood friendships, and she and some of the ladies called one another by their Christian names, but they believed that she met people in Washington whom she liked better; the winters she spent there certainly weakened the ties between them, and when it came to those eleven years in Rome, the letters they exchanged grew rarer and rarer, till they stopped altogether. Some of the girls went away; some died; others became dead and absent to her in their marriages and household cares.

After waiting for one another, three of them came together to see her one day. They all kissed her, after a questioning glance at her face and dress, as if they wanted to see whether she had grown proud or too fashionable. But they were themselves apparently much better dressed, and certainly more richly dressed. In a place like Hatboro', where there is no dinner-giving, and evening parties are few, the best dress is a street costume, which may be worn for calls and shopping, and for church and all public entertainments. The well-to-do ladies make an effect of out-door fashion, in which the poorest shop hand has her part; and in their turn they share her in-door simpli-

city. These old friends of Annie's wore bonnets and frocks of the latest style and costly material.

They let her make the advances, receiving them with blank passivity, or repelling them with irony, according to the several needs of their self-respect, and talking to one another across her. One of them asked her when her hair had begun to turn, and they each told her how thin she was, but promised her that Hatboro' air would bring her up. At the same time they feigned humility in regard to everything about Hatboro' but the air; they laughed when she said she intended now to make it her home the whole year round, and said they guessed she would be tired of it long before winter; there were plenty of summer folks that passed the winter as long as the June weather lasted.

As they grew more secure of themselves, or less afraid of one another in her presence, their voices rose; they laughed loudly at nothing, and they yelled in a nervous chorus at times, each trying to make herself heard above the others. They showed that they were just the same gay, unaffected village girls that she used to know. Two of them were really women of very good minds; the other was a simpleton; but in these moments of demonstration they were all alike, and collectively they were inferior in mind and manners to the worst of their number.

She asked them about the social life in the village, and they told her that a good many new people had really settled there, but they did not know whether she would like them; they were not the old Hatboro' style. Annie showed them some of the things she had brought home, especially Roman views, and they said now she ought to give an evening in the church parlor with them.

"You'll have to come to our church, Annie," said Mrs. Putney. "The Unitarian doesn't have preaching once in a month, and Mr. Peck is *very* liberal."

"He's 'most *too* liberal for some," said Emmeline Gerrish. Of the three she had grown the stoutest, and from being a slight, light-minded girl, she had become a heavy matron, habitually censorious in her speech. She did not mean any more by it, however, than she did by her girlish frivolity, and if she was not supported in her severity, she was apt to break down

and disown it with a giggle, as she now did.

"Well, I don't know about his being *too liberal*," said Mrs. Wilmington, a large red-haired blonde, with a lazy laugh. "He makes you feel that you're a pretty miserable sinner." She made a grimace of humorous disgust.

"Mr. Gerrish says that's just the trouble," Mrs. Gerrish broke in. "Mr. Peck don't put stress enough on the promises. That's what Mr. Gerrish says. You must have been surprised, Annie," she added, "to find that he'd been staying in your house."

"I was glad Mrs. Bolton invited him," answered Annie, sincerely, but not instantly.

The ladies waited, with an exchange of glances, for her reply, as if they had talked the matter over beforehand, and had agreed to find out just how Annie Kilburn felt about it.

"Oh, I guess he paid his board," said Mrs. Wilmington, jocosely, rejecting the euphuistic implication that he had been the guest of the Boltons.

"I don't see what he expects to do with that little girl of his, without any mother, that way," said Mrs. Gerrish. "He ought to get married."

"Perhaps he will, when he's waited a proper time," suggested Mrs. Putney, demurely.

"Well, his wife's been the same as dead ever since the child was born. I don't know what you call a proper time, Ellen," argued Mrs. Gerrish.

"I presume a minister feels differently about such things," Mrs. Wilmington remarked, indolently.

"I don't see why a minister should feel any different from anybody else," said Mrs. Gerrish. "It's his duty to do it on his child's account. I don't see why he don't have the remains brought to Hatboro' anyway."

They debated this point at some length, and they seemed to forget Annie. She listened with more interest than her concern in the last resting-place of the minister's dead wife really inspired. These old child friends of hers seemed to have lost the sensitiveness of their girlhood without having gained tenderness in its place. They treated the affair with a nakedness that shocked her. In the country and in small towns people come face to face with life, especially women. It

means marrying, child-bearing, household cares and burdens, neighborhood gossip, sickness, death, burial, and whether the corpse appeared natural. But ever so much kindness goes with their disillusion; they are blunted, but not embittered.

They ended by recalling Annie to mind, and Mrs. Putney said: "I suppose you haven't been to the cemetery yet? They've got it all fixed up since you went away—drives laid out, and paths cut through, and everything. A good many have put up family tombs, and they've taken away the old iron fences round the lots, and put granite curbing. They mow the grass all the time. It's a perfect garden." Mrs. Putney was a small woman, already beginning to wrinkle, and she had been rather an odd girl. She had married a man whom Annie remembered as a mischievous little boy, with a sharp tongue and a nervous temperament; her father had always liked him when he came about the house, but Annie had lost sight of him in the years that make small boys and girls large ones, and he was at college when she went abroad. She had an impression of something unhappy in her friend's marriage.

"I think it's *too* much fixed up myself," said Mrs. Gerrish. She turned suddenly to Annie: "You going to have your father fetched home?"

The other ladies started a little at the question and looked at Annie; it was not that they were shocked, but they wanted to see whether she would not be so.

"No," she said, briefly. She added, helplessly, "It wasn't his wish."

"I should have thought he would have liked to be buried alongside of your mother," said Mrs. Gerrish. "But the Judge always *was* a little peculiar. I presume you can have the name and the date put on the monument just the same."

Annie flushed at this intimate comment and suggestion from a woman whom as a girl she had never admitted to familiarity with her, but had tolerated because she was such a harmless simpleton, and hung upon other girls whom she liked better. The word "monument" cowed her, however. She was afraid they would begin to talk about the soldiers' monument. She answered hastily, and began to ask them about their families.

Mrs. Wilmington, who had no children, and Mrs. Putney, who had one, spoke of Mrs. Gerrish's large family. She had four

children, and she refused the praises of her friends for them, though she celebrated them herself. "You ought to have seen the two little girls that Ellen lost, Annie," she said. "Ellen Putney, I don't see how you ever got over that. Those two lovely, healthy children gone, and poor little Winthrop left! I always did say it was too hard."

She had married a clerk in the principal dry-goods store, who had prospered rapidly, and was now one of the first business men of the place, and had an ambition to be a leading citizen. She believed in his fitness to deal with the questions of religion and education which he took part in, and was always quoting Mr. Gerrish. She called him Mr. Gerrish so much that other people began to call him so too. But Mrs. Putney's husband held out against it, and had the habit of returning the little man's ceremonious salutations with an easy, "Hello, Billy," "Good-morning, Billy." It was his theory that this was good for Gerrish, who might otherwise have forgotten when everybody called him Billy. He was one of the old Putneys; and he was a lawyer by profession.

Mrs. Wilmington's husband had come to Hatboro' since Annie's long absence began; he had capital, and he had started a stocking-mill in Hatboro'. He was much older than his wife, whom he had married after a protracted widowerhood. She had one of the best houses and the most richly furnished in Hatboro'. She had more mind than either of the others, and she and Mrs. Putney saw Mrs. Gerrish at rare intervals, and in observance of some notable fact of their girlish friendship like the present.

In pursuance of the subject of children, Mrs. Gerrish said that she sometimes had a notion to offer to take Mr. Peck's little girl herself till he could get fixed somehow, but Mr. Gerrish would not let her. Mr. Gerrish said Mr. Peck had better get married himself if he wanted a step-mother for his little girl. Mr. Gerrish was peculiar about keeping a family to itself.

"Well, you'll think *we've* come to board with you *too*," said Mrs. Putney, in reference to Mr. Peck.

The ladies all rose, and having got upon their feet, began to shout and laugh again—like girls, they implied.

They staid and talked a long time after rising, with the same note of unsparing

personality in their talk. Where there are few public interests and few events, as in such places, there can be no small-talk, nothing of the careless touch-and-go of larger societies. Every one knows all the others, and knows the worst of them. People are not unkind; they are mutually and freely helpful; but they have only themselves to occupy their minds. Annie's friends had also to distinguish themselves to her from the rest of the villagers, and it was easiest to do this by an attitude of criticism mingled with large allowance. They ended a dissection of the community by saying that they believed there was no place like Hatboro', after all.

They went out on a tide of the most tolerant hilarity and exuberant local pride. Each felt that she had not made a good impression, but blamed the others for it, while she laughed and screamed to keep her spirits up. In the contagion of their perfunctory gayety Annie began to scream and laugh too, as she followed them to the door, and stood talking to them while they got into Mrs. Wilmington's extension-top carry-all. She answered with deafening promises, when they all put their bonnets out of the carry-all and called back to her to be sure to come soon to see them.

V.

Mrs. Bolton made no advances with Annie toward the discussion of her friends; but when Annie asked about their families, she answered with the incisive directness of a country-bred woman. She delivered her judgments as she went about her work, the morning after the ladies' visit, while Annie sat before the breakfast-table, which she had given her leave to clear. As she passed in and out from the dining-room to the kitchen she kept talking; she raised her voice in the further room, and lowered it when she drew near again. She wore a dismal calico wrapper, which made no compromise with the gauntness of her figure; her reddish-brown hair, which grew in a fringe below her crown, was plaited into small tags or tails, pulled up and tied across the top of her head, the bare surfaces of which were curiously mottled with the dye which she sometimes put on her hair. Behind, this was gathered up into a small knob pierced with a single hair-pin; the arrangement left Mrs. Bolton's visage to the unrestricted expression of character. She did not

let it express toward Annie any expectation of the confidential relations that are supposed to exist between people who have been a long time master and servant. She had never recognized her relations with the Kilburns in these terms. She was a mature Yankee single woman, of confirmed self-respect, when she first came as house-keeper to Judge Kilburn, twenty years ago, and she had not changed her nature in changing her condition by her marriage with Oliver Bolton; she was childless, unless his comparative youth conferred a sort of adoptive maternity upon her.

Annie went into her father's study, where she had lit the fire in the Franklin-stove on her way to breakfast. It had come on to rain during the night, after the fine yesterday which Mrs. Gerrish had denounced to its face as a weather-breeder. At first it rained silently, stealthily; but toward morning Annie heard the wind rising, and when she looked out of her window after daylight she found a fierce northeasterly storm drenching and chilling the landscape. Now across the flattened and tangled grass of the lawn the elms were writhing in the gale, and swinging their long lean boughs to and fro; from another window she saw the cuffed and hustled maples ruffling their stiff masses of foliage, and shuddering in the storm. She turned away, with a sigh of the luxurious melancholy which a northeaster inspires in people safely sheltered from it, and sat down before her fire. She recalled the three women who had visited her the day before, in the better-remembered figures of their childhood and young girlhood; and their present character did not seem a broken promise. Nothing was really disappointed in it but the animal joy, the hopeful riot of their young blood, which must fade and die with the happiest fate. She perceived that what they had come to was not unjust to what they had been; and as our own fate always appears to us unaccomplished, a thing for the distant future to fulfil, she began to ask herself what was to be the natural sequence of such a temperament, such mental and moral traits, as hers. Had her life been so noble in anything but vague aspirations that she could ever reasonably expect the destiny of grand usefulness which she had always unreasonably expected? The question came

home to her with such pain, in the light of what her old playmates had become, that she suddenly ceased to enjoy the misery of the storm out-of-doors, or the purring content of the fire on the hearth of the stove at her feet; the book she had taken down to read fell unopened into her lap, and she gave herself up to a half-hour of such piercing self-question as only a high-minded woman can endure when the flattering promises of youth have grown vague and few.

There is no condition of life that is wholly acceptable, but none that is not tolerable when once it establishes itself; and while Annie Kilburn had never consented to be an old maid, she had become one without great suffering. At thirty-one she could not call herself anything else; she often called herself an old maid, with the mental reservation that she was not one. She was merely unmarried; she might marry any time. Now, when she assured herself of this, as she had done many times before, she suddenly wondered if she should ever marry; she wondered if she had seemed to her friends yesterday like a person who would never marry. Did one carry such a thing in one's looks? Perhaps they idealized her; they had not seen her since she was twenty, and perhaps they still thought of her as a young girl. It now seemed to her as if she had left her youth in Rome, as in Rome it had seemed to her that she should find it again in Hatboro'. A pang of aimless, unlocalized homesickness passed through her; she realized that she was alone in the world. She rose to escape the pang, and went to the window of the parlor which looked toward the street, where she saw the figure of a young man draped in a long India-rubber gossamer coat fluttering in the wind that pushed him along as he tacked on a southerly course; he bowed and twisted his head to escape the lash of the rain. She watched him till he turned into the lane leading to the house, and then, at a discreeter distance, she watched him through the window at the other corner, making his way up to the front door in the teeth of the gale. He seemed to have a bundle under his arm, and as he stepped into the shelter of the portico, and freed his arm to ring, she discovered that it was a bundle of books. Whether Mrs. Bolton did not hear the bell, or whether she heard it and decided that it would be absurd to

leave her work for it, when Miss Kilburn, who was so much nearer, could answer it, she did not come, even at a second ring, and Annie was forced to go to the door herself, or leave the poor man dripping in the cold wind outside.

She had made up her mind, at sight of the books, that he was a canvasser for some subscription book, such as used to come in her father's time, but when she opened to him he took off his hat with a great deal of manner, and said "Miss Kilburn?" with so much insinuation of gentle disinterestedness that it flashed upon her that it might be Mr. Peck.

"Yes," she said, with confusion, while the flash of conjecture faded away.

"Mr. Brandreth," said her visitor, whom she now saw to be much younger than Mr. Peck could be. He looked not much more than twenty-two or twenty-three; his damp hair waved and curled upon his temples and forehead, and his blue eyes lightened from a beardless and freshly shaven face. "I called this morning because I felt sure of finding you at home."

He smiled at his reference to the weather, and Annie smiled too as she again answered, "Yes?" She did not want his books, but she liked something that was cheerful and enthusiastic in him; she added, "Won't you step into the study?"

"Thanks, yes," said the young man, flinging off his gossamer, and hanging it up to drip into the pan of the hat rack. He gathered up his books from the chair where he had laid them, and held them at his waist with both hands, while he bowed her precedence beside the study door.

"I don't know," he began, "but I ought to apologize for coming on a day like this, when you were not expecting to be interrupted."

"Oh no; I'm not at all busy. But you must have had courage to brave a storm like this."

"No. The truth is, Miss Kilburn, I was very anxious to see you about a matter I have at heart—that I desire your help with."

"He wants me," Annie thought, "to give him the use of my name as a subscriber to his book"—there seemed really to be a half-dozen books in his bundle—"and he's come to me first."

"I had expected to come with Mrs. Munger—she's a great friend of mine; you haven't met her yet, but you'll like

her; she's the leading spirit in South Hatboro'—and we were coming together this morning; but she was unexpectedly called away yesterday, and so I ventured to call alone."

"I'm very glad to see you, Mr. Brandreth," Annie said. "Then Mrs. Munger has subscribed already, and I'm only second fiddle, after all," she thought.

"The truth is," said Mr. Brandreth, "I'm the factotum, or teetotum, of the South Hatboro' ladies' book club, and I've been deputed to come and see if you wouldn't like to join it."

"Oh!" said Annie, and with a thrill of dismay she asked herself how much she had let her manner betray that she had supposed he was a book agent. "I shall be very glad indeed, Mr. Brandreth."

"Mrs. Munger was sure you would," said Mr. Brandreth, joyously. "I've brought some of the books with me—the last," he said; and Annie had time to get into a new social attitude toward him during their discussion of the books. She chose one, and Mr. Brandreth took her subscription, and wrote her name in the club book.

"One of the reasons," he said, "why I would have preferred to come with Mrs. Munger is that she is so heart and soul with me in my little scheme. She could have put it before you in so much better light than I can. But she was called away so suddenly."

"I hope for no serious cause," said Annie.

"Oh no! It's just to Cambridge. Her son is one of the Freshman Nine, and he's been hit by a ball."

"Oh!" said Annie.

"Yes; it's a great pity for Mrs. Munger. But I come to you for advice as well as co-operation, Miss Kilburn. You must have met a great many English people in Rome, and heard some of them talk about it. We're thinking, some of the young people here, about getting up some out-door theatricals, like Lady Archibald Campbell's, don't you know. You know about them?" he added, at the blankness in her face.

"I read accounts of them in the English papers. They must have been very—original. But do you think that in a community like Hatboro'—Are there enough who could—enter into the spirit?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" cried Mr. Brandreth,

ardently. "You've no idea what a place Hatboro' has got to be. You've not been about much yet, Miss Kilburn?"

"No," said Annie; "I haven't really been off our own place since I came. The weather has been very changeable; and I've seen nobody but two or three old friends, and we naturally talked more about old times than anything else. But I hear that there are great changes."

"Yes," said Mr. Brandreth. "The social growth has been even greater than the business growth. You've no idea! People have come in for the winter as well as the summer. South Hatboro', where we live—you must see South Hatboro', Miss Kilburn!—is quite a famous health resort. A great many Boston doctors send their patients to us now, instead of Colorado or the Adirondacks. In fact, that's what brought us to Hatboro'. My mother couldn't have lived, if she had tried to stay in Melrose. One lung all gone, and the other seriously affected. And people have found out what a charming place it is for the summer. It's cool; and it's so near, you know; the gentlemen can run out every night—only an hour and a quarter from town, and expresses both ways. All very agreeable people, too; and cultivated. Mr. Fellows, the painter, makes a long summer; he bought an old farm-house, and built a studio; Miss Jennings, the flower-painter, has a little box there too; Mr. Chapley, the publisher, of New York, has built; the Misses Clevinger, Mrs. Valence, are all near us. There's one family from Chicago—quite nice—New England by birth, you know; and Mrs. Munger, of course; so that there's a very pleasant variety."

"I certainly had no idea of it," said Annie.

"I knew you couldn't have," said Mr. Brandreth, "or you wouldn't have felt any doubt about our having the material for the theatricals. You see, I want to interest all the nice people in it, and make it a whole-town affair. I think it's a great pity for some of the old village families and the summer folks, as they call us, not to mingle more than they do, and Mrs. Munger thinks so too; and we've been talking you over, Miss Kilburn, and we've decided that you could do more than anybody else to help on a scheme that's meant to bring them together."

"Because I'm neither summer folks nor old village families?" asked Annie.

"Because you're both," retorted Mr. Brandreth.

"I don't see that," said Annie; "but we'll suppose the case, for the sake of argument. What do you expect me to do in theatricals, in-doors or out? I never took part in anything of the kind; I can't see an inch beyond the end of my nose without glasses; I never could learn the simplest thing by heart; I'm clumsy and awkward; I get confused."

"Oh, my dear Miss Kilburn, spare yourself! We don't expect you to take part in the play. I don't admit that you're what you say at all; but we only want you to lend us your countenance."

"Oh, is that all? And what do you expect to do with my countenance?" Annie said, with a laugh of misgiving.

"Everything. We know how much influence your name has—one of the old Hatboro' names—in the community, and all that; and we do want to interest the whole community in our scheme. We want to establish a Social Union for the work-people, don't you know, and we think it would be much nicer if it seemed to originate with the old village people."

Annie could not resist an impression in favor of the scheme. It gave definition to the vague intentions with which she had returned to Hatboro'; it might afford her a chance to make reparation for the figure on the soldiers' monument.

"I'm not sure," she began. "If I knew just what a Social Union is—"

"Well, at first," Mr. Brandreth interposed, "it will only be a reading-room, supplied with the magazines and papers, and well lighted and heated, where the work-people—those who have no families especially—could spend their evenings. Afterward we should hope to have a kitchen, and supply tea and coffee—and oysters perhaps—at a nominal cost; and ice-cream in the summer."

"But what have your out-door theatricals to do— But of course. You intend to give the proceeds—"

"Exactly. And we want the proceeds to be as large as possible. We propose to give our time and money to getting the thing up in the best shape, and then we want all the villagers to give their half-dollars and make it a success every way."

"I see," said Annie.

"We want it to be successful, and we want it to be distinguished; we want to make it unique. Mrs. Munger is going

to give her grounds and the decorations, and there will be a supper afterward, and a little dance."

"Such things are a great deal of trouble," said Annie, with a smile, from the vantage-ground of her larger experience. "What do you propose to do—what play?"

"Well, we've about decided upon some scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*. They would be very easy to set, out-doors, don't you know, and everybody knows them, and they wouldn't be hard to do. The ballroom in the house of the Capulets could be made to open on a kind of garden terrace—Mrs. Munger has a lovely terrace in her grounds for lawn-tennis—and then we could have a minuet on the grass. You know Miss Mather introduces a minuet in that scene, and makes a great deal of it. Oh, I forgot. She's come up since you went away."

"Yes; I hadn't heard of her. Isn't a minuet at Verona in the time of the Scaligeri rather—"

"Well, yes, it is, rather. But you've no idea how pretty it is. And then, you know, we could have the whole of the balcony scene, and other bits that we choose to work in—perhaps parts of other acts that would suit the scene."

"Yes, it would be charming; I can see how very charming it could be made."

"Then we may count upon you?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," she said; "but I don't really know what I'm to do."

Mr. Brandreth had risen; but he sat down again, as if glad to afford her any light he could throw upon the subject.

"How am I to 'influence people,' as you say?" she continued. "I'm quite a stranger in Hatboro'; I hardly know anybody."

"But a great many people know *you*, Miss Kilburn. Your name is associated with the history of the place, and you could do everything for us. You *won't* refuse!" cried Mr. Brandreth, winningly. "For instance, you know Mrs. Wilmington."

"Oh yes; she's an old girl-friend of mine."

"Then you know how enormously clever she is. She can do anything. We want her to take an active part—the part of the Nurse. She's delightfully funny. But you know her peculiar temperament—how she hates initiative of all

kinds; and we want somebody to bring Mr. Wilmington round. If we could get them committed to the scheme, and a man like Mr. Putney—he'd make a capital Mercutio—it would go like wildfire. We want to interest the churches, too. The object is so worthy, and the theatricals will be so entirely unobjectionable in every respect. We have the Unitarians and Universalists, of course. The Baptists and Methodists will be hard to manage; but the Orthodox are of so many different shades; and I understand the new minister, Mr. Peck, is very liberal. He was here in your house, I believe."

"Yes; but I never saw him," said Annie. "He boarded with the farmer. I'm a Unitarian myself."

"Of course. It would be a great point gained if we could interest him. Every care will be taken to have the affair unobjectionable. You see, the design is to let everybody come to the theatricals, and only those remain to the supper and dance whom we invite. That will keep out the socially objectionable element—the shoe-shop hands and the straw-shop girls."

"Oh," said Annie. "But isn't the—the Social Union for just that class?"

"Yes, it's *expressly* for them, and we intend to organize a system of entertainments—lectures, concerts, readings—for the winter, and keep them interested the whole year round in it. The object is to show them that the best people in the community have their interests at heart, and wish to get on common ground with them."

"Yes," said Annie, "the object is certainly very good."

Mr. Brandreth rose again, and put out his hand. "Then you will help us?"

"Oh, I don't know about that yet."

"At least you won't hinder us?"

"Certainly not."

"Then I consider you in a very hopeful condition, Miss Kilburn, and I feel that I can safely leave you to Mrs. Munger. She is coming to see you as soon as she gets back."

Annie made no motion to detain him. Without regretting him, she found herself sadder when he was gone, and she threw herself upon the old feather-cushioned lounge to enjoy a reverie in keeping with the dreary storm outside. Was it for this that she had left Rome? She had felt, as every American of conscience feels abroad, the drawings of a duty, obscure

and indefinable, toward her country, the duty to come home and do something for it, be something in it. This is the impulse of no common patriotism; it is perhaps a sense of the opportunity which America supremely affords for the race to help itself, and for each member of it to help all the rest.

But from the moment Annie arrived in Hatboro' the difficulty of being helpful to anything or any one had increased upon her with every new fact that she had learned about it and the people in it. To her they seemed terribly self-sufficing. They seemed occupied and prosperous, from her front parlor window; she did not see anybody going by who appeared to be in need of her; and she shrank from a more thorough exploration of the place. Like most amateur humanitarians, she fancied necessity coming to her and taking away her good works, as it were, in a basket; but till Mr. Brandreth appeared with his scheme, nothing had applied for her help. She had always hated theatricals; they bored her; and yet the Social Union was a good object, and if this scheme would bring her acquainted in Hatboro' it might be the stepping-stone to something better, something really or more ideally useful. She wondered what South Hatboro' was like; she would get Mrs. Bolton's opinion, which, if severe, would be just. She would ask Mrs. Bolton about Mrs. Munger too. She would tell Mrs. Bolton to tell Mr. Peck to call to dine. Would it be thought patronizing to Mr. Peck?

The fire from the Franklin-stove diffused a drowsy comfort through the room, the rain lashed the window-panes, and the wind shrilled in the gable. Annie fell off to sleep. When she woke up she heard Mrs. Bolton laying the table for her one o'clock dinner, and she knew it was half past twelve, because Mrs. Bolton always laid the table just half an hour beforehand. She went out to speak to Mrs. Bolton.

There was no want of distinctness in Mrs. Bolton's opinion, but Annie felt that there was a want of perspective and proportion in it, arising from the narrowness of Mrs. Bolton's experience and her ignorance of the world; she was farm-bred, and she had always lived upon the outskirts of Hatboro', even when it was a much smaller place than now. But Mrs. Bolton had her criterions, and she be-

lieved in them firmly; in a time when agnosticism extends among cultivated people to every region of conjecture, the social convictions of Mrs. Bolton were untainted by misgiving. In the first place, she despised laziness, and as South Hatboro' was the summer home of open and avowed disoccupation, of an idleness so entire that it had to seek refuge from itself in all manner of pastimes, she held its population in a contempt to which her meagre phrase did imperfect justice. From time to time she had to stop altogether, and vent it in "Wells!" of varying accents and inflections, but all expressive of aversion, and in snorts and sniffs still more intense in purport.

Then she held that people who had nothing else to do ought at least to be exemplary in their lives, and she was merciless to the goings-on in South Hatboro', which had penetrated on the breath of scandal to the elder village. When Annie came to find out what these were, she did not think them dreadful; they were small flirtations and harmless intimacies between the members of the summer community, which in the imagination of the village blackened into guilty intrigue. On the tongues of some, South Hatboro' was another Gomorrah; Mrs. Bolton believed the worst, especially of the women.

"I hear," said Mrs. Bolton, "that them women come up here for *rest*. I don't know what they want to rest *from*; but if it's from doin' nothin' all winter long, I guess they go back to the city poot' near 's tired 's they come."

Perhaps Annie felt that it was useless to try to enlighten her in regard to the fatigues from which the summer sojourner in the country escapes so eagerly; the cares of giving and going to lunches and dinners; the labor of afternoon teas; the late hours and the heavy suppers of evening receptions; the drain of charity-doing and play-going; the slavery of amateur art study, and parlor readings, and *musicales*; the writing of invitations and acceptances and refusals; the trying on of dresses; the calls made and received. She let her talk on, and tried to figure, as well as she could from her talk, the form and magnitude of the task laid upon her by Mr. Brandreth, of reconciling Old Hatboro' to South Hatboro', and uniting them in a common enterprise.

"What sort of person is Mr. Brandreth, Mrs. Bolton?" she asked, finally.

"Well, I suppose I'd ought to apologize to you for not comin' quicker to open the door for him," began Mrs. Bolton.

"You didn't come at all," said Annie, with an amused willingness to let her get at Mr. Brandreth in her own way.

"Well, no; you're right. I don't presume I did, or't I *should*. I guess I'd let him staid and soaked it out, if I'd had *my* way."

"Why, what is there wrong about him?"

"Wrong? There ain't *anything* about him. He don't amount to a row of pins. He *is* the greatest— Well, 'f I was his mother I guess I wouldn't stand it long to have him following round with that Mrs. Munger the way he doos."

"Why, Mrs. Bolton, you don't mean to say that Mr. Brandreth and Mrs. Munger are carrying on a flirtation?"

"I don't know what you call it. He's taggin' her round all the while, or her him."

"But, Mrs. Bolton! She's got a son in college! Where *is* her husband?"

"She *says* he's out West somewhere; Sent Paul or Sent Louis. He hain't never troubled Hatboro' any. I guess he ain't never goin' to, either. But she's got plenty of money, and I don't suppose but what it's her money he's after. I guess if she *could* get a divorce she wouldn't let the church hinder her—well, not a great deal."

Annie had heard so much worse talk about very good people in the American colony at Rome that these dark hints of Mrs. Bolton's did not alarm her. "Mrs. Bolton," she said, abruptly leaving the subject of Mrs. Munger, "I've been thinking whether I oughtn't to do something about Mr. Peck. I don't want him to feel that he was unwelcome to me in my house; I should like him to feel that I approved of his having been here."

As this was not a question, Mrs. Bolton, after the fashion of country people, held her peace embarrassingly, and Annie went on:

"Does he never come to see you?"

"Well, he was here last night," said Mrs. Bolton.

"Last *night*!" cried Annie. "Why in the world didn't you let me know?"

"I didn't know as you wanted to know," began Mrs. Bolton, with a sullen defiance mixed with pleasure in Annie's reproach. "He was out there in my settin'-room with his little girl."

"But don't you see that if you didn't let me know he was here it would look to

him as if I didn't wish to meet him—as if I had told you that you were not to introduce him?"

Probably Mrs. Bolton believed too that a man's mind was agile enough for these conjectures; but she said she did not suppose he would take it in that way; she added that he staid longer than she expected, because the little girl seemed to like it so much; she always cried when she had to go away.

"Do you mean that she's attached to the place?" demanded Annie.

"Well, yes, she is," Mrs. Bolton admitted. "And the cat."

Annie had a great desire to tell Mrs. Bolton that she had behaved very stupidly. But she knew Mrs. Bolton would not stand that, and she had to content herself with saying, severely, "The next time he comes, let me know without fail, please. What is the child like?" she asked.

"Well, I guess it must favor the mother, if anything. It don't seem to take after him any."

"Why don't you have it here often, then," asked Annie, "if it's so much attached to the place?"

"Well, I didn't know as you wanted to have it round," replied Mrs. Bolton, bluntly.

Annie made a "Tchk!" of impatience with her obtuseness, and asked, "Where is Mr. Peck staying?"

"Well, he's staying at Mis' Warner's till he can get settled."

"Is it far from here?"

"It's down in the north part of the village—Over the Track."

"Is Mr. Bolton at home?"

"Yes, he is," said Mrs. Bolton, with the effect of not intending to deny it.

"Then I want him to hitch up—now—at once—right away—and go and get the child and bring her here to dinner with me." Annie got so far with her severity, feeling that it was needed to mask a proceeding so romantic; perhaps so silly. She added, timidly, "Can he do it?"

"I d' know but what he can," said Mrs. Bolton, dryly, and whatever her feeling really was in regard to the matter, her manner gave no hint of it. Annie did not know whether Bolton was going on her errand or not, from Mrs. Bolton, but in ten or twelve minutes she saw him emerge from the avenue into the street, in the carry-all, tightly curtained against the storm. Half an hour later he return-

ed, and his wife set down in the library a shabbily dressed little girl, with her cheeks bright and her hair curling from the weather, and staring at Annie, and rather disposed to cry. She said, hastily, "Bring in the cat, Mrs. Bolton; we're going to have the cat to dinner with us."

This inspiration seemed to decide the little girl against crying. The cat was equipped with a doily, and actually provided with dinner at a small table apart; but the child did not look at it as Annie had expected she would, but remained with her eyes fastened on Annie herself. She did not stir from the spot where Mrs. Bolton had put her down, but she let Annie take her up and arrange her in a chair, with large books graduated to the desired height under her, and made no sign of satisfaction or disapproval. Once she looked round, when Mrs. Bolton finally went out after bringing in the last dish for dinner, and then fastened her eyes on Annie again, twisting her head shyly round to follow her in every gesture and expression as Annie fitted on a napkin under her chin, cut up her meat, poured her milk, and buttered her bread. She answered nothing to the chatter which Annie tried to make lively and entertaining, and made no sound but that of a broken and suppressed breathing. Annie had forgotten to ask her name of Mrs. Bolton, and she asked it in vain of the child herself, with a great variety of circumlocution; she was so unused to children that she was ashamed to invent any pet name for her; she called her, in what she felt to be a stiff and school-mistressly fashion, "Little Girl," and carried on a one-sided conversation with her, growing more and more nervous herself without perceiving that the child's condition was approaching a climax. She had taken off her glasses, from the notion that they embarrassed her guest, and she did not see the pretty lips beginning to curl, nor the searching eyes clouding with tears; the storm of sobs that suddenly burst upon her astounded her.

"Mrs. Bolton! Mrs. Bolton!" she scream-

ed, in hysterical helplessness. Mrs. Bolton rushed in, and with an instant perception of the situation, caught the child to her bony breast, and fled with it to her own room, where Annie heard its wails die gradually away amid murmurs of comfort and reassurance from Mrs. Bolton.

She felt like a great criminal and a great fool; at the same time she felt vexed with the stupid child which she had meant so well by, and indignant with Mrs. Bolton, whose flight with it had somehow implied a reproach of her behavior. When she could govern herself, she went out to Mrs. Bolton's room, where she found the little one quiet enough, and Mrs. Bolton tying on the long apron in which she cleared up the dinner and washed the dishes.

"I guess she'll get along now," she said, without the critical tone which Annie was prepared to resent. "She was scared some, and she felt kind of strange, I presume."

"Yes, and I behaved like a simpleton, dressing up the cat, I suppose," answered Annie. "But I thought it would amuse her."

"You can't tell how children will take a thing. I don't believe they like anything that's out of the common—well, not a great deal."

There was a sympathy in Mrs. Bolton's manner which encouraged Annie to go on and accuse herself more and more, and then an unresponsive blankness that silenced her. She went back to her own rooms crushed and humiliated; and to get away from her shame, she began to write a letter.

It was to a friend in Rome, and from the sense we all have that a letter which is to go such a great distance ought to be a long letter, and from finding that she had really a great deal to say, she let it grow so that she began apologizing for its length half a dozen pages before the end. It took her nearly the whole afternoon, and she regained a little of her self-respect by ridiculing the people she had met.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

JUNE COMETH.

BY CHARLES W. COLEMAN, JUN.

O LOVER-BIRD, haste to thy wooing;
Break forth into bloom, red rose;
For the east doth flush with an eager blush,
And June thro' the garden goes.