

CHAPTER IX

MOSES

Sunday morning rose clear and bright on Harpswell Bay. The whole sea was a waveless, blue looking-glass, streaked with bands of white, and flecked with sailing cloud-shadows from the skies above. Orr's Island, with its blue-black spruces, its silver firs, its golden larches, its scarlet sumachs, lay on the bosom of the deep like a great many-colored gem on an enchanted mirror. A vague, dreamlike sense of rest and Sabbath stillness seemed to brood in the air. The very spruce-trees seemed to know that it was Sunday, and to point solemnly upward with their dusky fingers; and the small tide-waves that chased each other up on the shelly beach, or broke against projecting rocks, seemed to do it with a chastened decorum, as if each blue-haired wave whispered to his brother, "Be still--be still."

Yes, Sunday it was along all the beautiful shores of Maine--netted in green and azure by its thousand islands, all glorious with their majestic pines, all musical and silvery with the caresses of the sea-waves, that loved to wander and lose themselves in their numberless shelly coves and tiny beaches among their cedar shadows.

Not merely as a burdensome restraint, or a weary endurance, came the shadow of that Puritan Sabbath. It brought with it all the sweetness

that belongs to rest, all the sacredness that hallows home, all the memories of patient thrift, of sober order, of chastened yet intense family feeling, of calmness, purity, and self-respecting dignity which distinguish the Puritan household. It seemed a solemn pause in all the sights and sounds of earth. And he whose moral nature was not yet enough developed to fill the blank with visions of heaven was yet wholesomely instructed by his weariness into the secret of his own spiritual poverty.

Zephaniah Pennel, in his best Sunday clothes, with his hard visage glowing with a sort of interior tenderness, ministered this morning at his family-altar--one of those thousand priests of God's ordaining that tend the sacred fire in as many families of New England. He had risen with the morning star and been forth to meditate, and came in with his mind softened and glowing. The trance-like calm of earth and sea found a solemn answer with him, as he read what a poet wrote by the sea-shores of the Mediterranean, ages ago: "Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honor and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind. The trees of the Lord are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted; where the birds make their nests; as for the stork, the fir-trees are her house. O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all."

Ages ago the cedars that the poet saw have rotted into dust, and from their cones have risen generations of others, wide-winged and grand. But the words of that poet have been wafted like seed to our days, and sprung up in flowers of trust and faith in a thousand households.

"Well, now," said Miss Ruey, when the morning rite was over, "Mis' Pennel, I s'pose you and the Cap'n will be wantin' to go to the meetin', so don't you gin yourse'ves a mite of trouble about the children, for I'll stay at home with 'em. The little feller was starty and fretful in his sleep last night, and didn't seem to be quite well."

"No wonder, poor dear," said Mrs. Pennel; "it's a wonder children can forget as they do."

"Yes," said Miss Ruey; "you know them lines in the 'English Reader,'--

'Gay hope is theirs by fancy led,
Least pleasing when possessed;
The tear forgot as soon as shed,
The sunshine of the breast.'

Them lines all'ys seemed to me affectin'."

Miss Ruey's sentiment was here interrupted by a loud cry from the bedroom, and something between a sneeze and a howl.

"Massy! what is that ar young un up to!" she exclaimed, rushing into the adjoining bedroom.

There stood the young Master Hopeful of our story, with streaming eyes and much-bedaubed face, having just, after much labor, succeeded in making Miss Ruey's snuff-box fly open, which he did with such force as to send the contents in a perfect cloud into eyes, nose, and mouth. The scene of struggling and confusion that ensued cannot be described. The washings, and wipings, and sobbings, and exhortings, and the sympathetic sobs of the little Mara, formed a small tempest for the time being that was rather appalling.

"Well, this 'ere's a youngster that's a-goin' to make work," said Miss Ruey, when all things were tolerably restored. "Seems to make himself at home first thing."

"Poor little dear," said Mrs. Pennel, in the excess of loving-kindness, "I hope he will; he's welcome, I'm sure."

"Not to my snuff-box," said Miss Ruey, who had felt herself attacked in a very tender point.

"He's got the notion of lookin' into things pretty early," said Captain Pennel, with an indulgent smile.

"Well, Aunt Ruey," said Mrs. Pennel, when this disturbance was somewhat

abated, "I feel kind o' sorry to deprive you of your privileges to-day."

"Oh! never mind me," said Miss Ruey, briskly. "I've got the big Bible, and I can sing a hymn or two by myself. My voice ain't quite what it used to be, but then I get a good deal of pleasure out of it." Aunt Ruey, it must be known, had in her youth been one of the foremost leaders in the "singers' seats," and now was in the habit of speaking of herself much as a retired prima donna might, whose past successes were yet in the minds of her generation.

After giving a look out of the window, to see that the children were within sight, she opened the big Bible at the story of the ten plagues of Egypt, and adjusting her horn spectacles with a sort of sideway twist on her little pug nose, she seemed intent on her Sunday duties. A moment after she looked up and said, "I don't know but I must send a message by you over to Mis' Deacon Badger, about a worldly matter, if 'tis Sunday; but I've been thinkin', Mis' Pennel, that there'll have to be clothes made up for this 'ere child next week, and so perhaps Roxy and I had better stop here a day or two longer, and you tell Mis' Badger that we'll come to her a Wednesday, and so she'll have time to have that new press-board done,--the old one used to pester me so."

"Well, I'll remember," said Mrs. Pennel.

"It seems a'most impossible to prevent one's thoughts wanderin' Sundays," said Aunt Ruey; "but I couldn't help a-thinkin' I could get

such a nice pair o' trousers out of them old Sunday ones of the Cap'n's in the garret. I was a-lookin' at 'em last Thursday, and thinkin' what a pity 'twas you hadn't nobody to cut down for; but this 'ere young un's going to be such a tearer, he'll want somethin' real stout; but I'll try and put it out of my mind till Monday. Mis' Pennel, you'll be sure to ask Mis' Titcomb how Harriet's toothache is, and whether them drops cured her that I gin her last Sunday; and ef you'll jist look in a minute at Major Broad's, and tell 'em to use bayberry wax for his blister, it's so healin'; and do jist ask if Sally's baby's eye-tooth has come through yet."

"Well, Aunt Ruey, I'll try to remember all," said Mrs. Pennel, as she stood at the glass in her bedroom, carefully adjusting the respectable black silk shawl over her shoulders, and tying her neat bonnet-strings.

"I s'pose," said Aunt Ruey, "that the notice of the funeral'll be gin out after sermon."

"Yes, I think so," said Mrs. Pennel.

"It's another loud call," said Miss Ruey, "and I hope it will turn the young people from their thoughts of dress and vanity,--there's Mary Jane Sanborn was all took up with gettin' feathers and velvet for her fall bonnet. I don't think I shall get no bonnet this year till snow comes. My bonnet's respectable enough,--don't you think so?"

"Certainly, Aunt Ruey, it looks very well."

"Well, I'll have the pork and beans and brown-bread all hot on table agin you come back," said Miss Ruey, "and then after dinner we'll all go down to the funeral together. Mis' Pennel, there's one thing on my mind,--what you goin' to call this 'ere boy?"

"Father and I've been thinkin' that over," said Mrs. Pennel.

"Wouldn't think of giv'n him the Cap'n's name?" said Aunt Ruey.

"He must have a name of his own," said Captain Pennel. "Come here, sonny," he called to the child, who was playing just beside the door.

The child lowered his head, shook down his long black curls, and looked through them as elfishly as a Skye terrier, but showed no inclination to come.

"One thing he hasn't learned, evidently," said Captain Pennel, "and that is to mind."

"Here!" he said, turning to the boy with a little of the tone he had used of old on the quarter-deck, and taking his small hand firmly.

The child surrendered, and let the good man lift him on his knee and stroke aside the clustering curls; the boy then looked fixedly at him

with his great gloomy black eyes, his little firm-set mouth and bridled chin,--a perfect little miniature of proud manliness.

"What's your name, little boy?"

The great eyes continued looking in the same solemn quiet.

"Law, he don't understand a word," said Zephaniah, putting his hand kindly on the child's head; "our tongue is all strange to him. Kittridge says he's a Spanish child; may be from the West Indies; but nobody knows,--we never shall know his name."

"Well, I dare say it was some Popish nonsense or other," said Aunt Ruey; "and now he's come to a land of Christian privileges, we ought to give him a good Scripture name, and start him well in the world."

"Let's call him Moses," said Zephaniah, "because we drew him out of the water."

"Now, did I ever!" said Miss Ruey; "there's something in the Bible to fit everything, ain't there?"

"I like Moses, because I had a brother of that name," said Mrs. Pennel.

The child had slid down from his protector's knee, and stood looking from one to the other gravely while this discussion was going on. What

change of destiny was then going on for him in this simple formula of adoption, none could tell; but, surely, never orphan stranded on a foreign shore found home with hearts more true and loving.

"Well, wife, I suppose we must be goin'," said Zephaniah.

About a stone's throw from the open door, the little fishing-craft lay courtesying daintily on the small tide-waves that came licking up the white pebbly shore. Mrs. Pennel seated herself in the end of the boat, and a pretty placid picture she was, with her smooth, parted hair, her modest, cool, drab bonnet, and her bright hazel eyes, in which was the Sabbath calm of a loving and tender heart. Zephaniah loosed the sail, and the two children stood on the beach and saw them go off. A pleasant little wind carried them away, and back on the breeze came the sound of Zephaniah's Sunday-morning psalm:--

"Lord, in the morning thou shalt hear
My voice ascending high;
To thee will I direct my prayer,
To thee lift up mine eye.

"Unto thy house will I resort.
To taste thy mercies there;
I will frequent thy holy court,
And worship in thy fear."

The surface of the glassy bay was dotted here and there with the white sails of other little craft bound for the same point and for the same purpose. It was as pleasant a sight as one might wish to see.

Left in charge of the house, Miss Ruey drew a long breath, took a consoling pinch of snuff, sang "Bridgewater" in an uncommonly high key, and then began reading in the prophecies. With her good head full of the "daughter of Zion" and the house of Israel and Judah, she was recalled to terrestrial things by loud screams from the barn, accompanied by a general flutter and cackling among the hens.

Away plodded the good soul, and opening the barn-door saw the little boy perched on the top of the hay-mow, screaming and shrieking,--his face the picture of dismay,--while poor little Mara's cries came in a more muffled manner from some unexplored lower region. In fact, she was found to have slipped through a hole in the hay-mow into the nest of a very domestic sitting-hen, whose clamors at the invasion of her family privacy added no little to the general confusion.

The little princess, whose nicety as to her dress and sensitiveness as to anything unpleasant about her pretty person we have seen, was lifted up streaming with tears and broken eggs, but otherwise not seriously injured, having fallen on the very substantial substratum of hay which Dame Poulet had selected as the foundation of her domestic hopes.

"Well, now, did I ever!" said Miss Ruey, when she had ascertained that

no bones were broken; "if that ar young un isn't a limb! I declare for't I pity Mis' Pennel,--she don't know what she's undertook. How upon 'arth the critter managed to get Mara on to the hay, I'm sure I can't tell,--that ar little thing never got into no such scrapes before."

Far from seeming impressed with any wholesome remorse of conscience, the little culprit frowned fierce defiance at Miss Ruey, when, after having repaired the damages of little Mara's toilet, she essayed the good old plan of shutting him into the closet. He fought and struggled so fiercely that Aunt Ruey's carroty frisette came off in the skirmish, and her head-gear, always rather original, assumed an aspect verging on the supernatural. Miss Ruey thought of Philistines and Moabites, and all the other terrible people she had been reading about that morning, and came as near getting into a passion with the little elf as so good-humored and Christian an old body could possibly do. Human virtue is frail, and every one has some vulnerable point. The old Roman senator could not control himself when his beard was invaded, and the like sensitiveness resides in an old woman's cap; and when young master irreverently clawed off her Sunday best, Aunt Ruey, in her confusion of mind, administered a sound cuff on either ear.

Little Mara, who had screamed loudly through the whole scene, now conceiving that her precious new-found treasure was endangered, flew at poor Miss Ruey with both little hands; and throwing her arms round her "boy," as she constantly called him, she drew him backward, and looked defiance at the common enemy. Miss Ruey was dumb-struck.

"I declare for't, I b'lieve he's bewitched her," she said, stupefied, having never seen anything like the martial expression which now gleamed from those soft brown eyes. "Why, Mara dear,--putty little Mara."

But Mara was busy wiping away the angry tears that stood on the hot, glowing cheeks of the boy, and offering her little rosebud of a mouth to kiss him, as she stood on tiptoe.

"Poor boy,--no kie,--Mara's boy," she said; "Mara love boy;" and then giving an angry glance at Aunt Ruey, who sat much disheartened and confused, she struck out her little pearly hand, and cried, "Go way,--go way, naughty!"

The child jabbered unintelligibly and earnestly to Mara, and she seemed to have the air of being perfectly satisfied with his view of the case, and both regarded Miss Ruey with frowning looks. Under these peculiar circumstances, the good soul began to bethink her of some mode of compromise, and going to the closet took out a couple of slices of cake, which she offered to the little rebels with pacificatory words.

Mara was appeased at once, and ran to Aunt Ruey; but the boy struck the cake out of her hand, and looked at her with steady defiance. The little one picked it up, and with much chipping and many little feminine manoeuvres, at last succeeded in making him taste it, after which appetite got the better of his valorous resolutions,--he ate and was

comforted; and after a little time, the three were on the best possible footing. And Miss Ruey having smoothed her hair, and arranged her frisette and cap, began to reflect upon herself as the cause of the whole disturbance. If she had not let them run while she indulged in reading and singing, this would not have happened. So the toilful good soul kept them at her knee for the next hour or two, while they looked through all the pictures in the old family Bible.

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The evening of that day witnessed a crowded funeral in the small rooms of Captain Kittridge. Mrs. Kittridge was in her glory. Solemn and lugubrious to the last degree, she supplied in her own proper person the want of the whole corps of mourners, who generally attract sympathy on such occasions. But what drew artless pity from all was the unconscious orphan, who came in, led by Mrs. Pennel by the one hand, and with the little Mara by the other.

The simple rite of baptism administered to the wondering little creature so strongly recalled that other scene three years before, that Mrs. Pennel hid her face in her handkerchief, and Zephaniah's firm hand shook a little as he took the boy to offer him to the rite. The child received the ceremony with a look of grave surprise, put up his hand quickly and wiped the holy drops from his brow, as if they annoyed him; and shrinking back, seized hold of the gown of Mrs. Pennel. His great beauty, and, still more, the air of haughty, defiant firmness with which

he regarded the company, drew all eyes, and many were the whispered comments.

"Pennel'll have his hands full with that ar chap," said Captain Kittridge to Miss Roxy.

Mrs. Kittridge darted an admonitory glance at her husband, to remind him that she was looking at him, and immediately he collapsed into solemnity.

The evening sunbeams slanted over the blackberry bushes and mullein stalks of the graveyard, when the lonely voyager was lowered to the rest from which she should not rise till the heavens be no more. As the purple sea at that hour retained no trace of the ships that had furrowed its waves, so of this mortal traveler no trace remained, not even in that infant soul that was to her so passionately dear.