

CHAPTER XIII

BOY AND GIRL

Zephaniah Pennel was what might be called a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

New England, in her earlier days, founding her institutions on the Hebrew Scriptures, bred better Jews than Moses could, because she read Moses with the amendments of Christ.

The state of society in some of the districts of Maine, in these days, much resembled in its spirit that which Moses labored to produce in ruder ages. It was entirely democratic, simple, grave, hearty, and sincere,--solemn and religious in its daily tone, and yet, as to all material good, full of wholesome thrift and prosperity. Perhaps, taking the average mass of the people, a more healthful and desirable state of society never existed. Its better specimens had a simple Doric grandeur unsurpassed in any age. The bringing up a child in this state of society was a far more simple enterprise than in our modern times, when the factious wants and aspirations are so much more developed.

Zephaniah Pennel was as high as anybody in the land. He owned not only the neat little schooner, "Brilliant," with divers small fishing-boats, but also a snug farm, adjoining the brown house, together with some fresh, juicy pasture-lots on neighboring islands, where he raised

mutton, unsurpassed even by the English South-down, and wool, which furnished homespun to clothe his family on all every-day occasions.

Mrs. Pennel, to be sure, had silks and satins, and flowered India chintz, and even a Cashmere shawl, the fruits of some of her husband's earlier voyages, which were, however, carefully stowed away for occasions so high and mighty, that they seldom saw the light. Not to wear best things every day was a maxim of New England thrift as little disputed as any verse of the catechism; and so Mrs. Pennel found the stuff gown of her own dyeing and spinning so respectable for most purposes, that it figured even in the meeting-house itself, except on the very finest of Sundays, when heaven and earth seemed alike propitious. A person can well afford to wear homespun stuff to meeting, who is buoyed up by a secret consciousness of an abundance of fine things that could be worn, if one were so disposed, and everybody respected Mrs. Pennel's homespun the more, because they thought of the things she didn't wear.

As to advantages of education, the island, like all other New England districts, had its common school, where one got the key of knowledge,--for having learned to read, write, and cipher, the young fellow of those regions commonly regarded himself as in possession of all that a man needs, to help himself to any further acquisitions he might desire. The boys then made fishing voyages to the Banks, and those who were so disposed took their books with them. If a boy did not wish to be bored with study, there was nobody to force him; but if a bright

one saw visions of future success in life lying through the avenues of knowledge, he found many a leisure hour to pore over his books, and work out the problems of navigation directly over the element they were meant to control.

Four years having glided by since the commencement of our story, we find in the brown house of Zephaniah Pennel a tall, well-knit, handsome boy of ten years, who knows no fear of wind or sea; who can set you over from Orr's Island to Harpswell, either in sail or row-boat, he thinks, as well as any man living; who knows every rope of the schooner Brilliant, and fancies he could command it as well as "father" himself; and is supporting himself this spring, during the tamer drudgeries of driving plough, and dropping potatoes, with the glorious vision of being taken this year on the annual trip to "the Banks," which comes on after planting. He reads fluently,--witness the "Robinson Crusoe," which never departs from under his pillow, and Goldsmith's "History of Greece and Rome," which good Mr. Sewell has lent him,--and he often brings shrewd criticisms on the character and course of Romulus or Alexander into the common current of every-day life, in a way that brings a smile over the grave face of Zephaniah, and makes Mrs. Pennel think the boy certainly ought to be sent to college.

As for Mara, she is now a child of seven, still adorned with long golden curls, still looking dreamily out of soft hazel eyes into some unknown future not her own. She has no dreams for herself--they are all for Moses. For his sake she has learned all the womanly little

accomplishments which Mrs. Kittridge has dragooned into Sally. She knits his mittens and his stockings, and hems his pocket-handkerchiefs, and aspires to make his shirts all herself. Whatever book Moses reads, forthwith she aspires to read too, and though three years younger, reads with a far more precocious insight.

Her little form is slight and frail, and her cheek has a clear transparent brilliancy quite different from the rounded one of the boy; she looks not exactly in ill health, but has that sort of transparent appearance which one fancies might be an attribute of fairies and sylphs. All her outward senses are finer and more acute than his, and finer and more delicate all the attributes of her mind. Those who contend against giving woman the same education as man do it on the ground that it would make the woman unfeminine, as if Nature had done her work so slightly that it could be so easily raveled and knit over. In fact, there is a masculine and a feminine element in all knowledge, and a man and a woman put to the same study extract only what their nature fits them to see, so that knowledge can be fully orb'd only when the two unite in the search and share the spoils.

When Moses was full of Romulus and Numa, Mara pondered the story of the nymph Egeria--sweet parable, in which lies all we have been saying. Her trust in him was boundless. He was a constant hero in her eyes, and in her he found a steadfast believer as to all possible feats and exploits to which he felt himself competent, for the boy often had privately assured her that he could command the Brilliant as well as father

himself.

Spring had already come, loosing the chains of ice in all the bays and coves round Harpswell, Orr's Island, Maquoit, and Middle Bay. The magnificent spruces stood forth in their gala-dresses, tipped on every point with vivid emerald; the silver firs exuded from their tender shoots the fragrance of ripe pineapple; the white pines shot forth long weird fingers at the end of their fringy boughs; and even every little mimic evergreen in the shadows at their feet was made beautiful by the addition of a vivid border of green on the sombre coloring of its last year's leaves. Arbutus, fragrant with its clean, wholesome odors, gave forth its thousand dewy pink blossoms, and the trailing *Linnea borealis* hung its pendent twin bells round every mossy stump and old rock damp with green forest mould. The green and vermilion matting of the partridge-berry was impearled with white velvet blossoms, the checkerberry hung forth a translucent bell under its varnished green leaf, and a thousand more fairy bells, white or red, hung on blueberry and huckleberry bushes. The little Pearl of Orr's Island had wandered many an hour gathering bouquets of all these, to fill the brown house with sweetness when her grandfather and Moses should come in from work.

The love of flowers seemed to be one of her earliest characteristics, and the young spring flowers of New England, in their airy delicacy and fragility, were much like herself; and so strong seemed the affinity between them, that not only Mrs. Pennel's best India china vases on the keeping-room mantel were filled, but here stood a tumbler of scarlet

rock columbine, and there a bowl of blue and white violets, and in another place a saucer of shell-tinted crowfoot, blue liverwort, and white anemone, so that Zephaniah Pennel was wont to say there wasn't a drink of water to be got, for Mara's flowers; but he always said it with a smile that made his weather-beaten, hard features look like a rock lit up by a sunbeam. Little Mara was the pearl of the old seaman's life, every finer particle of his nature came out in her concentrated and polished, and he often wondered at a creature so ethereal belonging to him--as if down on some shaggy sea-green rock an old pearl oyster should muse and marvel on the strange silvery mystery of beauty that was growing in the silence of his heart.

But May has passed; the arbutus and the Linnea are gone from the woods, and the pine tips have grown into young shoots, which wilt at noon under a direct reflection from sun and sea, and the blue sky has that metallic clearness and brilliancy which distinguishes those regions, and the planting is at last over, and this very morning Moses is to set off in the Brilliant for his first voyage to the Banks. Glorious knight he! the world all before him, and the blood of ten years racing and throbbing in his veins as he talks knowingly of hooks, and sinkers, and bait, and lines, and wears proudly the red flannel shirt which Mara had just finished for him.

"How I do wish I were going with you!" she says. "I could do something, couldn't I--take care of your hooks, or something?"

"Pooh!" said Moses, sublimely regarding her while he settled the collar of his shirt, "you're a girl; and what can girls do at sea? you never like to catch fish--it always makes you cry to see 'em flop."

"Oh, yes, poor fish!" said Mara, perplexed between her sympathy for the fish and her desire for the glory of her hero, which must be founded on their pain; "I can't help feeling sorry when they gasp so."

"Well, and what do you suppose you would do when the men are pulling up twenty and forty pounder?" said Moses, striding sublimely. "Why, they flop so, they'd knock you over in a minute."

"Do they? Oh, Moses, do be careful. What if they should hurt you?"

"Hurt me!" said Moses, laughing; "that's a good one. I'd like to see a fish that could hurt me."

"Do hear that boy talk!" said Mrs. Pennel to her husband, as they stood within their chamber-door.

"Yes, yes," said Captain Pennel, smiling; "he's full of the matter. I believe he'd take the command of the schooner this morning, if I'd let him."

The Brilliant lay all this while courtesying on the waves, which kissed and whispered to the little coquettish craft. A fairer June morning had

not risen on the shores that week; the blue mirror of the ocean was all dotted over with the tiny white sails of fishing-craft bound on the same errand, and the breeze that was just crisping the waters had the very spirit of energy and adventure in it.

Everything and everybody was now on board, and she began to spread her fair wings, and slowly and gracefully to retreat from the shore. Little Moses stood on the deck, his black curls blowing in the wind, and his large eyes dancing with excitement,--his clear olive complexion and glowing cheeks well set off by his red shirt.

Mrs. Pennel stood with Mara on the shore to see them go. The fair little golden-haired Ariadne shaded her eyes with one arm, and stretched the other after her Theseus, till the vessel grew smaller, and finally seemed to melt away into the eternal blue. Many be the wives and lovers that have watched those little fishing-craft as they went gayly out like this, but have waited long--too long--and seen them again no more. In night and fog they have gone down under the keel of some ocean packet or Indiaman, and sunk with brave hearts and hands, like a bubble in the mighty waters. Yet Mrs. Pennel did not turn back to her house in apprehension of this. Her husband had made so many voyages, and always returned safely, that she confidently expected before long to see them home again.

The next Sunday the seat of Zephaniah Pennel was vacant in church. According to custom, a note was put up asking prayers for his safe

return, and then everybody knew that he was gone to the Banks; and as the roguish, handsome face of Moses was also missing, Miss Roxy whispered to Miss Ruey, "There! Captain Pennel's took Moses on his first voyage. We must contrive to call round on Mis' Pennel afore long. She'll be lonesome."

Sunday evening Mrs. Pennel was sitting pensively with little Mara by the kitchen hearth, where they had been boiling the tea-kettle for their solitary meal. They heard a brisk step without, and soon Captain and Mrs. Kittridge made their appearance.

"Good evening, Mis' Pennel," said the Captain; "I's a-tellin' my good woman we must come down and see how you's a-getting along. It's raly a work of necessity and mercy proper for the Lord's day. Rather lonesome, now the Captain's gone, ain't ye? Took little Moses, too, I see. Wasn't at meetin' to-day, so I says, Mis' Kittridge, we'll just step down and chirk 'em up a little."

"I didn't really know how to come," said Mrs. Kittridge, as she allowed Mrs. Pennel to take her bonnet; "but Aunt Roxy's to our house now, and she said she'd see to Sally. So you've let the boy go to the Banks? He's young, ain't he, for that?"

"Not a bit of it," said Captain Kittridge. "Why, I was off to the Banks long afore I was his age, and a capital time we had of it, too. Golly! how them fish did bite! We stood up to our knees in fish before we'd

fished half an hour."

Mara, who had always a shy affinity for the Captain, now drew towards him and climbed on his knee. "Did the wind blow very hard?" she said.

"What, my little maid?"

"Does the wind blow at the Banks?"

"Why, yes, my little girl, that it does, sometimes; but then there ain't the least danger. Our craft ride out storms like live creatures. I've stood it out in gales that was tight enough, I'm sure. 'Member once I turned in 'tween twelve and one, and hadn't more'n got asleep, afore I came clump out of my berth, and found everything upside down. And 'stead of goin' upstairs to get on deck, I had to go right down. Fact was, that 'ere vessel jist turned clean over in the water, and come right side up like a duck."

"Well, now, Cap'n, I wouldn't be tellin' such a story as that," said his helpmeet.

"Why, Polly, what do you know about it? you never was to sea. We did turn clear over, for I 'member I saw a bunch of seaweed big as a peck measure stickin' top of the mast next day. Jist shows how safe them ar little fishing craft is,--for all they look like an egg-shell on the mighty deep, as Parson Sewell calls it."

"I was very much pleased with Mr. Sewell's exercise in prayer this morning," said Mrs. Kittridge; "it must have been a comfort to you, Mis' Pennel."

"It was, to be sure," said Mrs. Pennel.

"Puts me in mind of poor Mary Jane Simpson. Her husband went out, you know, last June, and hain't been heard of since. Mary Jane don't really know whether to put on mourning or not."

"Law! I don't think Mary Jane need give up yet," said the Captain.

"Member one year I was out, we got blowed clear up to Baffin's Bay, and got shut up in the ice, and had to go ashore and live jist as we could among them Esquimaux. Didn't get home for a year. Old folks had clean giv' us up. Don't need never despair of folks gone to sea, for they's sure to turn up, first or last."

"But I hope," said Mara, apprehensively, "that grandpapa won't get blown up to Baffin's Bay. I've seen that on his chart,--it's a good ways."

"And then there's them 'ere icebergs," said Mrs. Kittridge; "I'm always 'fraid of running into them in the fog."

"Law!" said Captain Kittridge, "I've met 'em bigger than all the colleges up to Brunswick,--great white bears on 'em,--hungry as Time in

the Primer. Once we came kersmash on to one of 'em, and if the Flying Betsey hadn't been made of whalebone and injer-rubber, she'd a-been stove all to pieces. Them white bears, they was so hungry, that they stood there with the water jist runnin' out of their chops in a perfect stream."

"Oh, dear, dear," said Mara, with wide round eyes, "what will Moses do if they get on the icebergs?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Kittridge, looking solemnly at the child through the black bows of her spectacles, "we can truly say:--

"Dangers stand thick through all the ground,
To push us to the tomb,'

as the hymn-book says."

The kind-hearted Captain, feeling the fluttering heart of little Mara, and seeing the tears start in her eyes, addressed himself forthwith to consolation. "Oh, never you mind, Mara," he said, "there won't nothing hurt 'em. Look at me. Why, I've been everywhere on the face of the earth. I've been on icebergs, and among white bears and Indians, and seen storms that would blow the very hair off your head, and here I am, dry and tight as ever. You'll see 'em back before long."

The cheerful laugh with which the Captain was wont to chorus his

sentences sounded like the crackling of dry pine wood on the social hearth. One would hardly hear it without being lightened in heart; and little Mara gazed at his long, dry, ropy figure, and wrinkled thin face, as a sort of monument of hope; and his uproarious laugh, which Mrs. Kittridge sometimes ungraciously compared to "the crackling of thorns under a pot," seemed to her the most delightful thing in the world.

"Mary Jane was a-tellin' me," resumed Mrs. Kittridge, "that when her husband had been out a month, she dreamed she see him, and three other men, a-floatin' on an iceberg."

"Laws," said Captain Kittridge, "that's jist what my old mother dreamed about me, and 'twas true enough, too, till we got off the ice on to the shore up in the Esquimaux territory, as I was a-tellin'. So you tell Mary Jane she needn't look out for a second husband yet, for that ar dream's a sartin sign he'll be back."

"Cap'n Kittridge!" said his helpmeet, drawing herself up, and giving him an austere glance over her spectacles; "how often must I tell you that there is subjects which shouldn't be treated with levity?"

"Who's been a-treatin' of 'em with levity?" said the Captain. "I'm sure I ain't. Mary Jane's good-lookin', and there's plenty of young fellows as sees it as well as me. I declare, she looked as pretty as any young gal when she ris up in the singers' seats to-day. Put me in mind of you, Polly, when I first come home from the Injies."

"Oh, come now, Cap'n Kittridge! we're gettin' too old for that sort o' talk."

"We ain't too old, be we, Mara?" said the Captain, trotting the little girl gayly on his knee; "and we ain't afraid of icebergs and no sich, be we? I tell you they's a fine sight of a bright day; they has millions of steeples, all white and glistening, like the New Jerusalem, and the white bears have capital times trampin' round on 'em. Wouldn't little Mara like a great, nice white bear to ride on, with his white fur, so soft and warm, and a saddle made of pearls, and a gold bridle?"

"You haven't seen any little girls ride so," said Mara, doubtfully.

"I shouldn't wonder if I had; but you see, Mis' Kittridge there, she won't let me tell all I know," said the Captain, sinking his voice to a confidential tone; "you jist wait till we get alone."

"But, you are sure," said Mara, confidingly, in return, "that white bears will be kind to Moses?"

"Lord bless you, yes, child, the kindest critturs in the world they be, if you only get the right side of 'em," said the Captain.

"Oh, yes! because," said Mara, "I know how good a wolf was to Romulus and Remus once, and nursed them when they were cast out to die. I read

that in the Roman history."

"Jist so," said the Captain, enchanted at this historic confirmation of his apocrypha.

"And so," said Mara, "if Moses should happen to get on an iceberg, a bear might take care of him, you know."

"Jist so, jist so," said the Captain; "so don't you worry your little curly head one bit. Some time when you come down to see Sally, we'll go down to the cove, and I'll tell you lots of stories about chil'en that have been fetched up by white bears, jist like Romulus and what's his name there."

"Come, Mis' Kittridge," added the cheery Captain; "you and I mustn't be keepin' the folks up till nine o'clock."

"Well now," said Mrs. Kittridge, in a doleful tone, as she began to put on her bonnet, "Mis' Pennel, you must keep up your spirits--it's one's duty to take cheerful views of things. I'm sure many's the night, when the Captain's been gone to sea, I've laid and shook in my bed, hearin' the wind blow, and thinking what if I should be left a lone widow."

"There'd a-been a dozen fellows a-wanting to get you in six months, Polly," interposed the Captain. "Well, good-night, Mis' Pennel; there'll be a splendid haul of fish at the Banks this year, or there's no truth

in signs. Come, my little Mara, got a kiss for the dry old daddy? That's my good girl. Well, good night, and the Lord bless you."

And so the cheery Captain took up his line of march homeward, leaving little Mara's head full of dazzling visions of the land of romance to which Moses had gone. She was yet on that shadowy boundary between the dreamland of childhood and the real land of life; so all things looked to her quite possible; and gentle white bears, with warm, soft fur and pearl and gold saddles, walked through her dreams, and the victorious curls of Moses appeared, with his bright eyes and cheeks, over glittering pinnacles of frost in the ice-land.