

## CHAPTER XVII

### LESSONS

Moses felt elevated some inches in the world by the gift of a new Latin grammar, which had been bought for him in Brunswick. It was a step upward in life; no graduate from a college ever felt more ennobled.

"Wal', now, I tell ye, Moses Pennel," said Miss Roxy, who, with her press-board and big flat-iron, was making her autumn sojourn in the brown house, "I tell ye Latin ain't just what you think 'tis, steppin' round so crank; you must remember what the king of Israel said to Benhadad, king of Syria."

"I don't remember; what did he say?"

"I remember," said the soft voice of Mara; "he said, 'Let not him that putteth on the harness boast as him that putteth it off.'"

"Good for you, Mara," said Miss Roxy; "if some other folks read their Bibles as much as you do, they'd know more."

Between Moses and Miss Roxy there had always been a state of sub-acute warfare since the days of his first arrival, she regarding him as an unhopeful interloper, and he regarding her as a grim-visaged,

interfering gnome, whom he disliked with all the intense, unreasoning antipathy of childhood.

"I hate that old woman," he said to Mara, as he flung out of the door.

"Why, Moses, what for?" said Mara, who never could comprehend hating anybody.

"I do hate her, and Aunt Ruey, too. They are two old scratching cats; they hate me, and I hate them; they're always trying to bring me down, and I won't be brought down."

Mara had sufficient instinctive insight into the feminine rôle in the domestic concert not to adventure a direct argument just now in favor of her friends, and therefore she proposed that they should sit down together under a cedar hard by, and look over the first lesson.

"Miss Emily invited me to go over with you," she said, "and I should like so much to hear you recite."

Moses thought this very proper, as would any other male person, young or old, who has been habitually admired by any other female one. He did not doubt that, as in fishing and rowing, and all other things he had undertaken as yet, he should win himself distinguished honors.

"See here," he said; "Mr. Sewell told me I might go as far as I liked,

and I mean to take all the declensions to begin with; there's five of 'em, and I shall learn them for the first lesson; then I shall take the adjectives next, and next the verbs, and so in a fortnight get into reading."

Mara heaved a sort of sigh. She wished she had been invited to share this glorious race; but she looked on admiring when Moses read, in a loud voice, "Penna, pennæ, pennæ, pennam," etc.

"There now, I believe I've got it," he said, handing Mara the book; and he was perfectly astonished to find that, with the book withdrawn, he boggled, and blundered, and stumbled ingloriously. In vain Mara softly prompted, and looked at him with pitiful eyes as he grew red in the face with his efforts to remember.

"Confound it all!" he said, with an angry flush, snatching back the book; "it's more trouble than it's worth."

Again he began the repetition, saying it very loud and plain; he said it over and over till his mind wandered far out to sea, and while his tongue repeated "penna, pennæ," he was counting the white sails of the fishing-smacks, and thinking of pulling up codfish at the Banks.

"There now, Mara, try me," he said, and handed her the book again; "I'm sure I must know it now."

But, alas! with the book the sounds glided away; and "penna" and "pennam" and "pennis" and "pennæ" were confusedly and indiscriminately mingled. He thought it must be Mara's fault; she didn't read right, or she told him just as he was going to say it, or she didn't tell him right; or was he a fool? or had he lost his senses?

That first declension has been a valley of humiliation to many a sturdy boy--to many a bright one, too; and often it is, that the more full of thought and vigor the mind is, the more difficult it is to narrow it down to the single dry issue of learning those sounds. Heinrich Heine said the Romans would never have found time to conquer the world, if they had had to learn their own language; but that, luckily for them, they were born into the knowledge of what nouns form their accusatives in "um."

Long before Moses had learned the first declension, Mara knew it by heart; for her intense anxiety for him, and the eagerness and zeal with which she listened for each termination, fixed them in her mind. Besides, she was naturally of a more quiet and scholar-like turn than he,--more intellectually developed. Moses began to think, before that memorable day was through, that there was some sense in Aunt Roxy's quotation of the saying of the King of Israel, and materially to retrench his expectations as to the time it might take to master the grammar; but still, his pride and will were both committed, and he worked away in this new sort of labor with energy.

It was a fine, frosty November morning, when he rowed Mara across the bay in a little boat to recite his first lesson to Mr. Sewell.

Miss Emily had provided a plate of seed-cake, otherwise called cookies, for the children, as was a kindly custom of old times, when the little people were expected. Miss Emily had a dim idea that she was to do something for Mara in her own department, while Moses was reciting his lesson; and therefore producing a large sampler, displaying every form and variety of marking-stitch, she began questioning the little girl, in a low tone, as to her proficiency in that useful accomplishment.

Presently, however, she discovered that the child was restless and uneasy, and that she answered without knowing what she was saying. The fact was that she was listening, with her whole soul in her eyes, and feeling through all her nerves, every word Moses was saying. She knew all the critical places, where he was likely to go wrong; and when at last, in one place, he gave the wrong termination, she involuntarily called out the right one, starting up and turning towards them. In a moment she blushed deeply, seeing Mr. Sewell and Miss Emily both looking at her with surprise.

"Come here, pussy," said Mr. Sewell, stretching out his hand to her.

"Can you say this?"

"I believe I could, sir."

"Well, try it."

She went through without missing a word. Mr. Sewell then, for curiosity, heard her repeat all the other forms of the lesson. She had them perfectly.

"Very well, my little girl," he said, "have you been studying, too?"

"I heard Moses say them so often," said Mara, in an apologetic manner, "I couldn't help learning them."

"Would you like to recite with Moses every day?"

"Oh, yes, sir, so much."

"Well, you shall. It is better for him to have company."

Mara's face brightened, and Miss Emily looked with a puzzled air at her brother.

"So," she said, when the children had gone home, "I thought you wanted me to take Mara under my care. I was going to begin and teach her some marking stitches, and you put her up to studying Latin. I don't understand you."

"Well, Emily, the fact is, the child has a natural turn for study, that

no child of her age ought to have; and I have done just as people always will with such children; there's no sense in it, but I wanted to do it. You can teach her marking and embroidery all the same; it would break her little heart, now, if I were to turn her back."

"I do not see of what use Latin can be to a woman."

"Of what use is embroidery?"

"Why, that is an accomplishment."

"Ah, indeed!" said Mr. Sewell, contemplating the weeping willow and tombstone trophy with a singular expression, which it was lucky for Miss Emily's peace she did not understand. The fact was, that Mr. Sewell had, at one period of his life, had an opportunity of studying and observing minutely some really fine works of art, and the remembrance of them sometimes rose up to his mind, in the presence of the chefs-d'oeuvre on which his sister rested with so much complacency. It was a part of his quiet interior store of amusement to look at these bits of Byzantine embroidery round the room, which affected him always with a subtle sense of drollery.

"You see, brother," said Miss Emily, "it is far better for women to be accomplished than learned."

"You are quite right in the main," said Mr. Sewell, "only you must let

me have my own way just for once. One can't be consistent always."

So another Latin grammar was bought, and Moses began to feel a secret respect for his little companion, that he had never done before, when he saw how easily she walked through the labyrinths which at first so confused him. Before this, the comparison had been wholly in points where superiority arose from physical daring and vigor; now he became aware of the existence of another kind of strength with which he had not measured himself. Mara's opinion in their mutual studies began to assume a value in his eyes that her opinions on other subjects had never done, and she saw and felt, with a secret gratification, that she was becoming more to him through their mutual pursuit. To say the truth, it required this fellowship to inspire Moses with the patience and perseverance necessary for this species of acquisition. His active, daring temperament little inclined him to patient, quiet study. For anything that could be done by two hands, he was always ready; but to hold hands still and work silently in the inner forces was to him a species of undertaking that seemed against his very nature; but then he would do it--he would not disgrace himself before Mr. Sewell, and let a girl younger than himself outdo him.

But the thing, after all, that absorbed more of Moses's thoughts than all his lessons was the building and rigging of a small schooner, at which he worked assiduously in all his leisure moments. He had dozens of blocks of wood, into which he had cut anchor moulds; and the melting of lead, the running and shaping of anchors, the whittling of masts and



spars took up many an hour. Mara entered into all those things readily, and was too happy to make herself useful in hemming the sails.

When the schooner was finished, they built some ways down by the sea, and invited Sally Kittridge over to see it launched.

"There!" he said, when the little thing skimmed down prosperously into the sea and floated gayly on the waters, "when I'm a man, I'll have a big ship; I'll build her, and launch her, and command her, all myself; and I'll give you and Sally both a passage in it, and we'll go off to the East Indies--we'll sail round the world!"

None of the three doubted the feasibility of this scheme; the little vessel they had just launched seemed the visible prophecy of such a future; and how pleasant it would be to sail off, with the world all before them, and winds ready to blow them to any port they might wish!

The three children arranged some bread and cheese and doughnuts on a rock on the shore, to represent the collation that was usually spread in those parts at a ship launch, and felt quite like grown people--acting life beforehand in that sort of shadowy pantomime which so delights little people. Happy, happy days--when ships can be made with a jack-knife and anchors run in pine blocks, and three children together can launch a schooner, and the voyage of the world can all be made in one sunny Saturday afternoon!

"Mother says you are going to college," said Sally to Moses.

"Not I, indeed," said Moses; "as soon as I get old enough, I'm going up to Umbagog among the lumberers, and I'm going to cut real, splendid timber for my ship, and I'm going to get it on the stocks, and have it built to suit myself."

"What will you call her?" said Sally.

"I haven't thought of that," said Moses.

"Call her the Ariel," said Mara.

"What! after the spirit you were telling us about?" said Sally.

"Ariel is a pretty name," said Moses. "But what is that about a spirit?"

"Why," said Sally, "Mara read us a story about a ship that was wrecked, and a spirit called Ariel, that sang a song about the drowned mariners."

Mara gave a shy, apprehensive glance at Moses, to see if this allusion called up any painful recollections.

No; instead of this, he was following the motions of his little schooner on the waters with the briskest and most unconcerned air in the world.

"Why didn't you ever show me that story, Mara?" said Moses.

Mara colored and hesitated; the real reason she dared not say.

"Why, she read it to father and me down by the cove," said Sally, "the afternoon that you came home from the Banks; I remember how we saw you coming in; don't you, Mara?"

"What have you done with it?" said Moses.

"I've got it at home," said Mara, in a faint voice; "I'll show it to you, if you want to see it; there are such beautiful things in it."

That evening, as Moses sat busy, making some alterations in his darling schooner, Mara produced her treasure, and read and explained to him the story. He listened with interest, though without any of the extreme feeling which Mara had thought possible, and even interrupted her once in the middle of the celebrated--

"Full fathom five thy father lies,"

by asking her to hold up the mast a minute, while he drove in a peg to make it rake a little more. He was, evidently, thinking of no drowned father, and dreaming of no possible sea-caves, but acutely busy in fashioning a present reality; and yet he liked to hear Mara read, and,

when she had done, told her that he thought it was a pretty--quite a pretty story, with such a total absence of recognition that the story had any affinities with his own history, that Mara was quite astonished.

She lay and thought about him hours, that night, after she had gone to bed; and he lay and thought about a new way of disposing a pulley for raising a sail, which he determined to try the effect of early in the morning.

What was the absolute truth in regard to the boy? Had he forgotten the scenes of his early life, the strange catastrophe that cast him into his present circumstances? To this we answer that all the efforts of Nature, during the early years of a healthy childhood, are bent on effacing and obliterating painful impressions, wiping out from each day the sorrows of the last, as the daily tide effaces the furrows on the seashore. The child that broods, day after day, over some fixed idea, is so far forth not a healthy one. It is Nature's way to make first a healthy animal, and then develop in it gradually higher faculties. We have seen our two children unequally matched hitherto, because unequally developed. There will come a time, by and by in the history of the boy, when the haze of dreamy curiosity will steam up likewise from his mind, and vague yearnings, and questionings, and longings possess and trouble him, but it must be some years hence.

\* \* \* \* \*

Here for a season we leave both our child friends, and when ten years have passed over their heads,--when Moses shall be twenty, and Mara seventeen,--we will return again to tell their story, for then there will be one to tell. Let us suppose in the interval, how Moses and Mara read Virgil with the minister, and how Mara works a shepherdess with Miss Emily, which astonishes the neighborhood,--but how by herself she learns, after divers trials, to paint partridge, and checkerberry, and trailing arbutus,--how Moses makes better and better ships, and Sally grows up a handsome girl, and goes up to Brunswick to the high school,--how Captain Kittridge tells stories, and Miss Roxy and Miss Ruey nurse and cut and make and mend for the still rising generation,--how there are quiltings and tea-drinkings and prayer meetings and Sunday sermons,--how Zephaniah and Mary Pennel grow old gradually and graciously, as the sun rises and sets, and the eternal silver tide rises and falls around our little gem, Orr's Island.