

CHAPTER XIX

EIGHTEEN

In fact, at this very moment our scene-shifter changes the picture. Away rolls the image of Mrs. Kittridge's kitchen, with its sanded floor, its scoured rows of bright pewter platters, its great, deep fireplace, with wide stone hearth, its little looking-glass with a bit of asparagus bush, like a green mist, over it. Exeunt the image of Mrs. Kittridge, with her hands floury from the bread she has been moulding, and the dry, ropy, lean Captain, who has been sitting tilting back in a splint-bottomed chair,--and the next scene comes rolling in. It is a chamber in the house of Zephaniah Pennel, whose windows present a blue panorama of sea and sky. Through two windows you look forth into the blue belt of Harpswell Bay, bordered on the farther edge by Harpswell Neck, dotted here and there with houses, among which rises the little white meeting-house, like a mother-bird among a flock of chickens. The third window, on the other side of the room, looks far out to sea, where only a group of low, rocky islands interrupts the clear sweep of the horizon line, with its blue infinitude of distance.

The furniture of this room, though of the barest and most frigid simplicity, is yet relieved by many of those touches of taste and fancy which the indwelling of a person of sensibility and imagination will shed off upon the physical surroundings. The bed was draped with a white

spread, embroidered with a kind of knotted tracery, the working of which was considered among the female accomplishments of those days, and over the head of it was a painting of a bunch of crimson and white trillium, executed with a fidelity to Nature that showed the most delicate gifts of observation. Over the mantelpiece hung a painting of the Bay of Genoa, which had accidentally found a voyage home in Zephaniah Pennel's sea-chest, and which skillful fingers had surrounded with a frame curiously wrought of moss and sea-shells. Two vases of India china stood on the mantel, filled with spring flowers, crowfoot, anemones, and liverwort, with drooping bells of the twin-flower. The looking-glass that hung over the table in one corner of the room was fancifully webbed with long, drooping festoons of that gray moss which hangs in such graceful wreaths from the boughs of the pines in the deep forest shadows of Orr's Island. On the table below was a collection of books: a whole set of Shakespeare which Zephaniah Pennel had bought of a Portland bookseller; a selection, in prose and verse, from the best classic writers, presented to Mara Lincoln, the fly-leaf said, by her sincere friend, Theophilus Sewell; a Virgil, much thumbed, with an old, worn cover, which, however, some adroit fingers had concealed under a coating of delicately marbled paper;--there was a Latin dictionary, a set of Plutarch's Lives, the Mysteries of Udolpho, and Sir Charles Grandison, together with Edwards on the Affections, and Boston's Fourfold State;--there was an inkstand, curiously contrived from a sea-shell, with pens and paper in that phase of arrangement which betokened frequency of use; and, lastly, a little work-basket, containing a long strip of curious and delicate embroidery, in which the needle yet

hanging showed that the work was in progress.

By a table at the sea-looking window sits our little Mara, now grown to the maturity of eighteen summers, but retaining still unmistakable signs of identity with the little golden-haired, dreamy, excitable, fanciful "Pearl" of Orr's Island.

She is not quite of a middle height, with something beautiful and child-like about the moulding of her delicate form. We still see those sad, wistful, hazel eyes, over which the lids droop with a dreamy languor, and whose dark lustre contrasts singularly with the golden hue of the abundant hair which waves in a thousand rippling undulations around her face. The impression she produces is not that of paleness, though there is no color in her cheek; but her complexion has everywhere that delicate pink tinting which one sees in healthy infants, and with the least emotion brightens into a fluttering bloom. Such a bloom is on her cheek at this moment, as she is working away, copying a bunch of scarlet rock-columbine which is in a wine-glass of water before her; every few moments stopping and holding her work at a distance, to contemplate its effect. At this moment there steps behind her chair a tall, lithe figure, a face with a rich Spanish complexion, large black eyes, glowing cheeks, marked eyebrows, and lustrous black hair arranged in shining braids around her head. It is our old friend, Sally Kittridge, whom common fame calls the handsomest girl of all the region round Harpswell, Maquoit, and Orr's Island. In truth, a wholesome, ruddy, blooming creature she was, the sight of whom cheered and warmed

one like a good fire in December; and she seemed to have enough and to spare of the warmest gifts of vitality and joyous animal life. She had a well-formed mouth, but rather large, and a frank laugh which showed all her teeth sound--and a fortunate sight it was, considering that they were white and even as pearls; and the hand that she laid upon Mara's at this moment, though twice as large as that of the little artist, was yet in harmony with her vigorous, finely developed figure.

"Mara Lincoln," she said, "you are a witch, a perfect little witch, at painting. How you can make things look so like, I don't see. Now, I could paint the things we painted at Miss Plucher's; but then, dear me! they didn't look at all like flowers. One needed to write under them what they were made for."

"Does this look like to you, Sally?" said Mara. "I wish it would to me. Just see what a beautiful clear color that flower is. All I can do, I can't make one like it. My scarlet and yellows sink dead into the paper."

"Why, I think your flowers are wonderful! You are a real genius, that's what you are! I am only a common girl; I can't do things as you can."

"You can do things a thousand times more useful, Sally. I don't pretend to compare with you in the useful arts, and I am only a bungler in ornamental ones. Sally, I feel like a useless little creature. If I could go round as you can, and do business, and make bargains, and push

ahead in the world, I should feel that I was good for something; but somehow I can't."

"To be sure you can't," said Sally, laughing. "I should like to see you try it."

"Now," pursued Mara, in a tone of lamentation, "I could no more get into a carriage and drive to Brunswick as you can, than I could fly. I can't drive, Sally--something is the matter with me; and the horses always know it the minute I take the reins; they always twitch their ears and stare round into the chaise at me, as much as to say, 'What! you there?' and I feel sure they never will mind me. And then how you can make those wonderful bargains you do, I can't see!--you talk up to the clerks and the men, and somehow you talk everybody round; but as for me, if I only open my mouth in the humblest way to dispute the price, everybody puts me down. I always tremble when I go into a store, and people talk to me just as if I was a little girl, and once or twice they have made me buy things that I knew I didn't want, just because they will talk me down."

"Oh, Mara, Mara," said Sally, laughing till the tears rolled down her cheeks, "what do you ever go a-shopping for?--of course you ought always to send me. Why, look at this dress--real India chintz; do you know I made old Pennywhistle's clerk up in Brunswick give it to me just for the price of common cotton? You see there was a yard of it had got faded by lying in the shop-window, and there were one or two holes and imperfections in it, and you ought to have heard the talk I made! I

abused it to right and left, and actually at last I brought the poor wretch to believe that he ought to be grateful to me for taking it off his hands. Well, you see the dress I've made of it. The imperfections didn't hurt it the least in the world as I managed it,--and the faded breadth makes a good apron, so you see. And just so I got that red spotted flannel dress I wore last winter. It was moth-eaten in one or two places, and I made them let me have it at half-price;--made exactly as good a dress. But after all, Mara, I can't trim a bonnet as you can, and I can't come up to your embroidery, nor your lace-work, nor I can't draw and paint as you can, and I can't sing like you; and then as to all those things you talk with Mr. Sewell about, why they're beyond my depth,--that's all I've got to say. Now, you are made to have poetry written to you, and all that kind of thing one reads of in novels. Nobody would ever think of writing poetry to me, now, or sending me flowers and rings, and such things. If a fellow likes me, he gives me a quince, or a big apple; but, then, Mara, there ain't any fellows round here that are fit to speak to."

"I'm sure, Sally, there always is a train following you everywhere, at singing-school and Thursday lecture."

"Yes--but what do I care for 'em?" said Sally, with a toss of her head.

"Why they follow me, I don't see. I don't do anything to make 'em, and I tell 'em all that they tire me to death; and still they will hang round. What is the reason, do you suppose?"

"What can it be?" said Mara, with a quiet kind of arch drollery which suffused her face, as she bent over her painting.

"Well, you know I can't bear fellows--I think they are hateful."

"What! even Tom Hiers?" said Mara, continuing her painting.

"Tom Hiers! Do you suppose I care for him? He would insist on waiting on me round all last winter, taking me over in his boat to Portland, and up in his sleigh to Brunswick; but I didn't care for him."

"Well, there's Jimmy Wilson, up at Brunswick."

"What! that little snip of a clerk! You don't suppose I care for him, do you?--only he almost runs his head off following me round when I go up there shopping; he's nothing but a little dressed-up yard-stick! I never saw a fellow yet that I'd cross the street to have another look at. By the by, Mara, Miss Roxy told me Sunday that Moses was coming down from Umbagog this week."

"Yes, he is," said Mara; "we are looking for him every day."

"You must want to see him. How long is it since you saw him?"

"It is three years," said Mara. "I scarcely know what he is like now. I was visiting in Boston when he came home from his three-years' voyage,

and he was gone into the lumbering country when I came back. He seems almost a stranger to me."

"He's pretty good-looking," said Sally. "I saw him on Sunday when he was here, but he was off on Monday, and never called on old friends. Does he write to you often?"

"Not very," said Mara; "in fact, almost never; and when he does, there is so little in his letters."

"Well, I tell you, Mara, you must not expect fellows to write as girls can. They don't do it. Now, our boys, when they write home, they tell the latitude and longitude, and soil and productions, and such things. But if you or I were only there, don't you think we should find something more to say? Of course we should,--fifty thousand little things that they never think of."

Mara made no reply to this, but went on very intently with her painting. A close observer might have noticed a suppressed sigh that seemed to retreat far down into her heart. Sally did not notice it.

What was in that sigh? It was the sigh of a long, deep, inner history, unwritten and untold--such as are transpiring daily by thousands, and of which we take no heed.