CHAPTER XX

REBELLION

We have introduced Mara to our readers as she appears in her seventeenth year, at the time when she is expecting the return of Moses as a young man of twenty; but we cannot do justice to the feelings which are roused in her heart by this expectation, without giving a chapter or two to tracing the history of Moses since we left him as a boy commencing the study of the Latin grammar with Mr. Sewell. The reader must see the forces that acted upon his early development, and what they have made of him.

It is common for people who write treatises on education to give forth their rules and theories with a self-satisfied air, as if a human being were a thing to be made up, like a batch of bread, out of a given number of materials combined by an infallible recipe. Take your child, and do thus and so for a given number of years, and he comes out a thoroughly educated individual.

But in fact, education is in many cases nothing more than a blind struggle of parents and guardians with the evolutions of some strong, predetermined character, individual, obstinate, unreceptive, and seeking by an inevitable law of its being to develop itself and gain free expression in its own way. Captain Kittridge's confidence that he would

as soon undertake a boy as a Newfoundland pup, is good for those whose idea of what is to be done for a human being are only what would be done for a dog, namely, give food, shelter, and world-room, and leave each to act out his own nature without let or hindrance.

But everybody takes an embryo human being with some plan of one's own what it shall do or be. The child's future shall shape out some darling purpose or plan, and fulfill some long unfulfilled expectation of the parent. And thus, though the wind of every generation sweeps its hopes and plans like forest-leaves, none are whirled and tossed with more piteous moans than those which come out green and fresh to shade the happy spring-time of the cradle. For the temperaments of children are often as oddly unsuited to parents as if capricious fairies had been filling cradles with changelings.

A meek member of the Peace Society, a tender, devout, poetical clergyman, receives an heir from heaven, and straightway devotes him to the Christian ministry. But lo! the boy proves a young war-horse, neighing for battle, burning for gunpowder and guns, for bowie-knives and revolvers, and for every form and expression of physical force;--he might make a splendid trapper, an energetic sea-captain, a bold, daring military man, but his whole boyhood is full of rebukes and disciplines for sins which are only the blind effort of the creature to express a nature which his parent does not and cannot understand. So again, the son that was to have upheld the old, proud merchant's time-honored firm, that should have been mighty in ledgers and great upon 'Change, breaks

his father's heart by an unintelligible fancy for weaving poems and romances. A father of literary aspirations, balked of privileges of early education, bends over the cradle of his son with but one idea. This child shall have the full advantages of regular college-training; and so for years he battles with a boy abhorring study, and fitted only for a life of out-door energy and bold adventure,--on whom Latin forms and Greek quantities fall and melt aimless and useless, as snow-flakes on the hide of a buffalo. Then the secret agonies,--the long years of sorrowful watchings of those gentler nurses of humanity who receive the infant into their bosom out of the void unknown, and strive to read its horoscope through the mists of their prayers and tears!--what perplexities,--what confusion! Especially is this so in a community where the moral and religious sense is so cultivated as in New England, and frail, trembling, self-distrustful mothers are told that the shaping and ordering not only of this present life, but of an immortal destiny, is in their hands.

On the whole, those who succeed best in the rearing of children are the tolerant and easy persons who instinctively follow nature and accept without much inquiry whatever she sends; or that far smaller class, wise to discern spirits and apt to adopt means to their culture and development, who can prudently and carefully train every nature according to its true and characteristic ideal.

Zephaniah Pennel was a shrewd old Yankee, whose instincts taught him from the first, that the waif that had been so mysteriously washed out

of the gloom of the sea into his family, was of some different class and lineage from that which might have filled a cradle of his own, and of a nature which he could not perfectly understand. So he prudently watched and waited, only using restraint enough to keep the boy anchored in society, and letting him otherwise grow up in the solitary freedom of his lonely seafaring life.

The boy was from childhood, although singularly attractive, of a moody, fitful, unrestful nature,--eager, earnest, but unsteady,--with varying phases of imprudent frankness and of the most stubborn and unfathomable secretiveness. He was a creature of unreasoning antipathies and attractions. As Zephaniah Pennel said of him, he was as full of hitches as an old bureau drawer. His peculiar beauty, and a certain electrical power of attraction, seemed to form a constant circle of protection and forgiveness around him in the home of his foster-parents; and great as was the anxiety and pain which he often gave them, they somehow never felt the charge of him as a weariness.

We left him a boy beginning Latin with Mr. Sewell in company with the little Mara. This arrangement progressed prosperously for a time, and the good clergyman, all whose ideas of education ran through the halls of a college, began to have hopes of turning out a choice scholar. But when the boy's ship of life came into the breakers of that narrow and intricate channel which divides boyhood from manhood, the difficulties that had always attended his guidance and management wore an intensified form. How much family happiness is wrecked just then and there! How many

mothers' and sisters' hearts are broken in the wild and confused tossings and tearings of that stormy transition! A whole new nature is blindly upheaving itself, with cravings and clamorings, which neither the boy himself nor often surrounding friends understand.

A shrewd observer has significantly characterized the period as the time when the boy wishes he were dead, and everybody else wishes so too. The wretched, half-fledged, half-conscious, anomalous creature has all the desires of the man, and none of the rights; has a double and triple share of nervous edge and intensity in every part of his nature, and no definitely perceived objects on which to bestow it,--and, of course, all sorts of unreasonable moods and phases are the result.

One of the most common signs of this period, in some natures, is the love of contradiction and opposition,--a blind desire to go contrary to everything that is commonly received among the older people. The boy disparages the minister, quizzes the deacon, thinks the school-master an ass, and doesn't believe in the Bible, and seems to be rather pleased than otherwise with the shock and flutter that all these announcements create among peaceably disposed grown people. No respectable hen that ever hatched out a brood of ducks was more puzzled what to do with them than was poor Mrs. Pennel when her adopted nursling came into this state. Was he a boy? an immortal soul? a reasonable human being? or only a handsome goblin sent to torment her?

"What shall we do with him, father?" said she, one Sunday, to Zephaniah,

as he stood shaving before the little looking-glass in their bedroom. "He can't be governed like a child, and he won't govern himself like a man."

Zephaniah stopped and strapped his razor reflectively.

"We must cast out anchor and wait for day," he answered. "Prayer is a long rope with a strong hold."

It was just at this critical period of life that Moses Pennel was drawn into associations which awoke the alarm of all his friends, and from which the characteristic willfulness of his nature made it difficult to attempt to extricate him.

In order that our readers may fully understand this part of our history, we must give some few particulars as to the peculiar scenery of Orr's Island and the state of the country at this time.

The coast of Maine, as we have elsewhere said, is remarkable for a singular interpenetration of the sea with the land, forming amid its dense primeval forests secluded bays, narrow and deep, into which vessels might float with the tide, and where they might nestle unseen and unsuspected amid the dense shadows of the overhanging forest.

At this time there was a very brisk business done all along the coast of Maine in the way of smuggling. Small vessels, lightly built and swift of

sail, would run up into these sylvan fastnesses, and there make their deposits and transact their business so as entirely to elude the vigilance of government officers.

It may seem strange that practices of this kind should ever have obtained a strong foothold in a community peculiar for its rigid morality and its orderly submission to law; but in this case, as in many others, contempt of law grew out of weak and unworthy legislation. The celebrated embargo of Jefferson stopped at once the whole trade of New England, and condemned her thousand ships to rot at the wharves, and caused the ruin of thousands of families.

The merchants of the country regarded this as a flagrant, high-handed piece of injustice, expressly designed to cripple New England commerce, and evasions of this unjust law found everywhere a degree of sympathy, even in the breasts of well-disposed and conscientious people. In resistance to the law, vessels were constantly fitted out which ran upon trading voyages to the West Indies and other places; and although the practice was punishable as smuggling, yet it found extensive connivance. From this beginning smuggling of all kinds gradually grew up in the community, and gained such a foothold that even after the repeal of the embargo it still continued to be extensively practiced. Secret depositories of contraband goods still existed in many of the lonely haunts of islands off the coast of Maine. Hid in deep forest shadows, visited only in the darkness of the night, were these illegal stores of merchandise. And from these secluded resorts they found their way, no

one knew or cared to say how, into houses for miles around.

There was no doubt that the practice, like all other illegal ones, was demoralizing to the community, and particularly fatal to the character of that class of bold, enterprising young men who would be most likely to be drawn into it.

Zephaniah Pennel, who was made of a kind of straight-grained, uncompromising oaken timber such as built the Mayflower of old, had always borne his testimony at home and abroad against any violations of the laws of the land, however veiled under the pretext of righting a wrong or resisting an injustice, and had done what he could in his neighborhood to enable government officers to detect and break up these unlawful depositories. This exposed him particularly to the hatred and ill-will of the operators concerned in such affairs, and a plot was laid by a few of the most daring and determined of them to establish one of their depositories on Orr's Island, and to implicate the family of Pennel himself in the trade. This would accomplish two purposes, as they hoped,--it would be a mortification and defeat to him,--a revenge which they coveted; and it would, they thought, insure his silence and complicity for the strongest reasons.

The situation and characteristics of Orr's Island peculiarly fitted it for the carrying out of a scheme of this kind, and for this purpose we must try to give our readers a more definite idea of it.

The traveler who wants a ride through scenery of more varied and singular beauty than can ordinarily be found on the shores of any land whatever, should start some fine clear day along the clean sandy road, ribboned with strips of green grass, that leads through the flat pitch-pine forests of Brunswick toward the sea. As he approaches the salt water, a succession of the most beautiful and picturesque lakes seems to be lying softly cradled in the arms of wild, rocky forest shores, whose outlines are ever changing with the windings of the road.

At a distance of about six or eight miles from Brunswick he crosses an arm of the sea, and comes upon the first of the interlacing group of islands which beautifies the shore. A ride across this island is a constant succession of pictures, whose wild and solitary beauty entirely distances all power of description. The magnificence of the evergreen forests,--their peculiar air of sombre stillness,--the rich intermingling ever and anon of groves of birch, beech, and oak, in picturesque knots and tufts, as if set for effect by some skillful landscape-gardener,--produce a sort of strange dreamy wonder; while the sea, breaking forth both on the right hand and the left of the road into the most romantic glimpses, seems to flash and glitter like some strange gem which every moment shows itself through the framework of a new setting. Here and there little secluded coves push in from the sea, around which lie soft tracts of green meadow-land, hemmed in and guarded by rocky pine-crowned ridges. In such sheltered spots may be seen neat white houses, nestling like sheltered doves in the beautiful solitude.

When one has ridden nearly to the end of Great Island, which is about four miles across, he sees rising before him, from the sea, a bold romantic point of land, uplifting a crown of rich evergreen and forest trees over shores of perpendicular rock. This is Orr's Island.

It was not an easy matter in the days of our past experience to guide a horse and carriage down the steep, wild shores of Great Island to the long bridge that connects it with Orr's. The sense of wild seclusion reaches here the highest degree; and one crosses the bridge with a feeling as if genii might have built it, and one might be going over it to fairy-land. From the bridge the path rises on to a high granite ridge, which runs from one end of the island to the other, and has been called the Devil's Back, with that superstitious generosity which seems to have abandoned all romantic places to so undeserving an owner.

By the side of this ridge of granite is a deep, narrow chasm, running a mile and a half or two miles parallel with the road, and veiled by the darkest and most solemn shadows of the primeval forest. Here scream the jays and the eagles, and fish-hawks make their nests undisturbed; and the tide rises and falls under black branches of evergreen, from which depend long, light festoons of delicate gray moss. The darkness of the forest is relieved by the delicate foliage and the silvery trunks of the great white birches, which the solitude of centuries has allowed to grow in this spot to a height and size seldom attained elsewhere.

It was this narrow, rocky cove that had been chosen by the smuggler

Atkinson and his accomplices as a safe and secluded resort for their operations. He was a seafaring man of Bath, one of that class who always prefer uncertain and doubtful courses to those which are safe and reputable. He was possessed of many of those traits calculated to make him a hero in the eyes of young men; was dashing, free, and frank in his manners, with a fund of humor and an abundance of ready anecdote which made his society fascinating; but he concealed beneath all these attractions a character of hard, grasping, unscrupulous selfishness, and an utter destitution of moral principle.

Moses, now in his sixteenth year, and supposed to be in a general way doing well, under the care of the minister, was left free to come and go at his own pleasure, unwatched by Zephaniah, whose fishing operations often took him for weeks from home. Atkinson hung about the boy's path, engaging him first in fishing or hunting enterprises; plied him with choice preparations of liquor, with which he would enhance the hilarity of their expeditions; and finally worked on his love of adventure and that impatient restlessness incident to his period of life to draw him fully into his schemes. Moses lost all interest in his lessons, often neglecting them for days at a time--accounting for his negligence by excuses which were far from satisfactory. When Mara would expostulate with him about this, he would break out upon her with a fierce irritation. Was he always going to be tied to a girl's apron-string? He was tired of study, and tired of old Sewell, whom he declared an old granny in a white wig, who knew nothing of the world. He wasn't going to college--it was altogether too slow for him--he was going to see life

and push ahead for himself.

Mara's life during this time was intensely wearing. A frail, slender, delicate girl of thirteen, she carried a heart prematurely old with the most distressing responsibility of mature life. Her love for Moses had always had in it a large admixture of that maternal and care-taking element which, in some shape or other, qualities the affection of woman to man. Ever since that dream of babyhood, when the vision of a pale mother had led the beautiful boy to her arms, Mara had accepted him as something exclusively her own, with an intensity of ownership that seemed almost to merge her personal identity with his. She felt, and saw, and enjoyed, and suffered in him, and yet was conscious of a higher nature in herself, by which unwillingly he was often judged and condemned. His faults affected her with a kind of guilty pain, as if they were her own; his sins were borne bleeding in her heart in silence, and with a jealous watchfulness to hide them from every eye but hers. She busied herself day and night interceding and making excuses for him, first to her own sensitive moral nature, and then with everybody around, for with one or another he was coming into constant collision. She felt at this time a fearful load of suspicion, which she dared not express to a human being.

Up to this period she had always been the only confidant of Moses, who poured into her ear without reserve all the good and the evil of his nature, and who loved her with all the intensity with which he was capable of loving anything. Nothing so much shows what a human being is

in moral advancement as the quality of his love. Moses Pennel's love was egotistic, exacting, tyrannical, and capricious--sometimes venting itself in expressions of a passionate fondness, which had a savor of protecting generosity in them, and then receding to the icy pole of surly petulance. For all that, there was no resisting the magnetic attraction with which in his amiable moods he drew those whom he liked to himself.

Such people are not very wholesome companions for those who are sensitively organized and predisposed to self-sacrificing love. They keep the heart in a perpetual freeze and thaw, which, like the American northern climate, is so particularly fatal to plants of a delicate habit. They could live through the hot summer and the cold winter, but they cannot endure the three or four months when it freezes one day and melts the next,--when all the buds are started out by a week of genial sunshine, and then frozen for a fortnight. These fitful persons are of all others most engrossing, because you are always sure in their good moods that they are just going to be angels,--an expectation which no number of disappointments seems finally to do away. Mara believed in Moses's future as she did in her own existence. He was going to do something great and good,--that she was certain of. He would be a splendid man! Nobody, she thought, knew him as she did; nobody could know how good and generous he was sometimes, and how frankly he would confess his faults, and what noble aspirations he had!

But there was no concealing from her watchful sense that Moses was

beginning to have secrets from her. He was cloudy and murky; and at some of the most harmless inquiries in the world, would flash out with a sudden temper, as if she had touched some sore spot. Her bedroom was opposite to his; and she became quite sure that night after night, while she lay thinking of him, she heard him steal down out of the house between two and three o'clock, and not return till a little before day-dawn. Where he went, and with whom, and what he was doing, was to her an awful mystery,--and it was one she dared not share with a human being. If she told her kind old grandfather, she feared that any inquiry from him would only light as a spark on that inflammable spirit of pride and insubordination that was rising within him, and bring on an instantaneous explosion. Mr. Sewell's influence she could hope little more from; and as to poor Mrs. Pennel, such communications would only weary and distress her, without doing any manner of good. There was, therefore, only that one unfailing Confidant--the Invisible Friend to whom the solitary child could pour out her heart, and whose inspirations of comfort and guidance never fail to come again in return to true souls.

One moonlight night, as she lay thus praying, her senses, sharpened by watching, discerned a sound of steps treading under her window, and then a low whistle. Her heart beat violently, and she soon heard the door of Moses's room open, and then the old chamber-stairs gave forth those inconsiderate creaks and snaps that garrulous old stairs always will when anybody is desirous of making them accomplices in a night-secret. Mara rose, and undrawing her curtain, saw three men standing before the

house, and saw Moses come out and join them. Quick as thought she threw on her clothes and wrapping her little form in a dark cloak, with a hood, followed them out. She kept at a safe distance behind them,--so far back as just to keep them in sight. They never looked back, and seemed to say but little till they approached the edge of that deep belt of forest which shrouds so large a portion of the island. She hurried along, now nearer to them lest they should be lost to view in the deep shadows, while they went on crackling and plunging through the dense underbrush.