

## CHAPTER II.

### SCHOOL DAYS IN HARTFORD, 1824-1832.

MISS CATHERINE BEECHER.--PROFESSOR FISHER.--THE WRECK OF THE ALBION

AND DEATH OF PROFESSOR FISHER.--"THE MINISTER'S WOOING."--MISS CATHERINE BEECHER'S SPIRITUAL HISTORY.--MRS. STOWE'S RECOLLECTIONS OF

HER SCHOOL DAYS IN HARTFORD.--HER CONVERSION.--UNITES WITH THE FIRST

CHURCH IN HARTFORD.--HER DOUBTS AND SUBSEQUENT RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT.

--HER FINAL PEACE.

The school days in Hartford began a new era in Harriet's life. It was the formative period, and it is therefore important to say a few words concerning her sister Catherine, under whose immediate supervision she was to continue her education. In fact, no one can comprehend either Mrs. Stowe or her writings without some knowledge of the life and character of this remarkable woman, whose strong, vigorous mind and tremendous personality indelibly stamped themselves on the sensitive, yielding, dreamy, and poetic nature of the younger sister. Mrs. Stowe herself has said that the two persons who most strongly influenced her at this period of her life were her brother Edward and her sister Catherine.

Catherine was the oldest child of Lyman Beecher and Roxanna Foote, his wife. In a little battered journal found among her papers is a short sketch of her life, written when she was seventy-six years of age. In a tremulous hand she begins: "I was born at East Hampton, L. I., September 5, 1800, at 5 P.M., in the large parlor opposite father's study. Don't remember much about it myself." The sparkle of wit in this brief notice of the circumstances of her birth is very characteristic. All through her life little ripples of fun were continually playing on the surface of that current of intense thought and feeling in which her deep, earnest nature flowed.

When she was ten years of age her father removed to Litchfield, Conn., and her happy girlhood was passed in that place. Her bright and versatile mind and ready wit enabled her to pass brilliantly through her school days with but little mental exertion, and those who knew her slightly might have imagined her to be only a bright, thoughtless, light-hearted girl. In Boston, at the age of twenty, she took lessons in music and drawing, and became so proficient in these branches as to secure a position as teacher in a young ladies' school, kept by a Rev. Mr. Judd, an Episcopal clergyman, at New London, Conn. About this time she formed the acquaintance of Professor Alexander Metcalf Fisher, of Yale College, one of the most distinguished young men in New England. In January of the year 1822 they became engaged, and the following spring Professor Fisher sailed for Europe to purchase books and scientific apparatus for the use of his department in the college.

In his last letter to Miss Beecher, dated March 31, 1822, he writes:--

"I set out at 10 precisely to-morrow, in the Albion for Liverpool; the ship has no superior in the whole number of excellent vessels belonging to this port, and Captain Williams is regarded as first on their list of commanders. The accommodations are admirable--fare \$140. Unless our ship should speak some one bound to America on the passage, you will probably not hear from me under two months."

Before two months had passed came vague rumors of a terrible shipwreck on the coast of Ireland. Then the tidings that the Albion was lost. Then came a letter from Mr. Pond, at Kinsale, Ireland, dated May 2, 1822:--

"You have doubtless heard of the shipwreck of the Albion packet of New York, bound to Liverpool. It was a melancholy shipwreck. It happened about four o'clock on the morning of the 22d of April. Professor Fisher, of Yale College, was one of the passengers. Out of twenty-three cabin passengers, but one reached the shore. He is a Mr. Everhart, of Chester County, Pennsylvania. He informs me that Professor Fisher was injured by things that fetched away in the cabin at the time the ship was knocked down. This was between 8 and 9 o'clock in the evening of the twenty-first. Mr. Fisher, though badly bruised, was calm and resolute, and assisted Captain Williams by taking the injured compass to his berth and repairing it. About five minutes before the vessel struck Captain Williams informed the

passengers of their danger, and all went on deck except Professor Fisher, who remained sitting in his berth. Mr. Everhart was the last person who left the cabin, and the last who ever saw Professor Fisher alive."

I should not have spoken of this incident of family history with such minuteness, except for the fact that it is so much a part of Mrs. Stowe's life as to make it impossible to understand either her character or her most important works without it. Without this incident "The Minister's Wooing" never would have been written, for both Mrs. Marvyn's terrible soul struggles and old Candace's direct and effective solution of all religious difficulties find their origin in this stranded, storm-beaten ship on the coast of Ireland, and the terrible mental conflicts through which her sister afterward passed, for she believed Professor Fisher eternally lost. No mind more directly and powerfully influenced Harriet's than that of her sister Catherine, unless it was her brother Edward's, and that which acted with such overwhelming power on the strong, unyielding mind of the older sister must have, in time, a permanent and abiding influence on the mind of the younger.

After Professor Fisher's death his books came into Miss Beecher's possession, and among them was a complete edition of Scott's works. It was an epoch in the family history when Doctor Beecher came downstairs one day with a copy of "Ivanhoe" in his hand, and said: "I have always said that my children should not read novels, but they must

read these."

The two years following the death of Professor Fisher were passed by Miss Catherine Beecher at Franklin, Mass., at the home of Professor Fisher's parents, where she taught his two sisters, studied mathematics with his brother Willard, and listened to Doctor Emmons' fearless and pitiless preaching. Hers was a mind too strong and buoyant to be crushed and prostrated by that which would have driven a weaker and less resolute nature into insanity. Of her it may well be said:--

"She faced the spectres of the mind  
And laid them, thus she came at length  
To find a stronger faith her own."

Gifted naturally with a capacity for close metaphysical analysis and a robust fearlessness in following her premises to a logical conclusion, she arrived at results startling and original, if not always of permanent value.

In 1840 she published in the "Biblical Repository" an article on Free Agency, which has been acknowledged by competent critics as the ablest refutation of Edwards on "The Will" which has appeared. An amusing incident connected with this publication may not be out of place here. A certain eminent theological professor of New England, visiting a distinguished German theologian and speaking of this production, said:

"The ablest refutation of Edwards on 'The Will' which was ever written is the work of a woman, the daughter of Dr. Lyman Beecher." The worthy Teuton raised both hands in undisguised astonishment. "You have a woman that can write an able refutation of Edwards on 'The Will'? God forgive Christopher Columbus for discovering America!"

Not finding herself able to love a God whom she thought of in her own language as "a perfectly happy being, unmoved by my sorrows or tears, and looking upon me only with dislike and aversion," she determined "to find happiness in living to do good." "It was right to pray and read the Bible, so I prayed and read. It was right to try to save others, so I labored for their salvation. I never had any fear of punishment or hope of reward all these years." She was tormented with doubts. "What has the Son of God done which the meanest and most selfish creature upon earth would not have done? After making such a wretched race and placing them in such disastrous circumstances, somehow, without any sorrow or trouble, Jesus Christ had a human nature that suffered and died. If something else besides ourselves will do all the suffering, who would not save millions of wretched beings and receive all the honor and gratitude without any of the trouble? Sometimes when such thoughts passed through my mind, I felt that it was all pride, rebellion, and sin."

So she struggles on, sometimes floundering deep in the mire of doubt, and then lifted for the moment above it by her naturally buoyant spirits, and general tendency to look on the bright side of things. In

this condition of mind, she came to Hartford in the winter of 1824, and began a school with eight scholars, and it was in the practical experience of teaching that she found a final solution of all her difficulties. She continues:--

"After two or three years I commenced giving instruction in mental philosophy, and at the same time began a regular course of lectures and instructions from the Bible, and was much occupied with plans for governing my school, and in devising means to lead my pupils to become obedient, amiable, and pious. By degrees I finally arrived at the following principles in the government of my school:--

"First. It is indispensable that my scholars should feel that I am sincerely and deeply interested in their best happiness, and the more I can convince them of this, the more ready will be their obedience.

"Second. The preservation of authority and order depends upon the certainty that unpleasant consequences to themselves will inevitably be the result of doing wrong.

"Third. It is equally necessary, to preserve my own influence and their affection, that they should feel that punishment is the natural result of wrong-doing in such a way that they shall regard themselves, instead of me, as the cause of their punishment.

"Fourth. It is indispensable that my scholars should see that my

requisitions are reasonable. In the majority of cases this can be shown, and in this way such confidence will be the result that they will trust to my judgment and knowledge, in cases where no explanation can be given.

"Fifth. The more I can make my scholars feel that I am actuated by a spirit of self-denying benevolence, the more confidence they will feel in me, and the more they will be inclined to submit to self-denying duties for the good of others.

"After a while I began to compare my experience with the government of God. I finally got through the whole subject, and drew out the results, and found that all my difficulties were solved and all my darkness dispelled."

Her solution in brief is nothing more than that view of the divine nature which was for so many years preached by her brother, Henry Ward Beecher, and set forth in the writings of her sister Harriet,--the conception of a being of infinite love, patience, and kindness who suffers with man. The sufferings of Christ on the cross were not the sufferings of his human nature merely, but the sufferings of the divine nature in Him. In Christ we see the only revelation of God, and that is the revelation of one that suffers. This is the fundamental idea in "The Minister's Wooing," and it is the idea of God in which the storm-tossed soul of the older sister at last found rest. All this was directly opposed to that fundamental principle of theologians that



God, being the infinitely perfect Being, cannot suffer, because suffering indicates imperfection. To Miss Beecher's mind the lack of ability to suffer with his suffering creatures was a more serious imperfection. Let the reader turn to the twenty-fourth chapter of "The Minister's Wooing" for a complete presentation of this subject, especially the passage that begins, "Sorrow is divine: sorrow is reigning on the throne of the universe."

In the fall of the year 1824, while her sister Catherine was passing through the soul crisis which we have been describing, Harriet came to the school that she had recently established.

In a letter to her son written in 1886, speaking of this period of her life, Mrs. Stowe says: "Somewhere between my twelfth and thirteenth year I was placed under the care of my elder sister Catherine, in the school that she had just started in Hartford, Connecticut. When I entered the school there were not more than twenty-five scholars in it, but it afterwards numbered its pupils by the hundreds. The school-room was on Main Street, nearly opposite Christ Church, over Sheldon & Colton's harness store, at the sign of the two white horses. I never shall forget the pleasure and surprise which these two white horses produced in my mind when I first saw them. One of the young men who worked in the rear of the harness store had a most beautiful tenor voice, and it was my delight to hear him singing in school hours :--

'When in cold oblivion's shade

Beauty, wealth, and power are laid,  
When, around the sculptured shrine,  
Moss shall cling and ivy twine,  
Where immortal spirits reign,  
There shall we all meet again.'

"As my father's salary was inadequate to the wants of his large family, the expense of my board in Hartford was provided for by a species of exchange. Mr. Isaac D. Bull sent a daughter to Miss Pierce's seminary in Litchfield, and she boarded in my father's family in exchange for my board in her father's family. If my good, refined, neat, particular stepmother could have chosen, she could not have found a family more exactly suited to her desires. The very soul of neatness and order pervaded the whole establishment. Mr. I. D. Bull was a fine, vigorous, white-haired man on the declining slope of life, but full of energy and of kindness. Mr. Samuel Collins, a neighbor who lived next door, used to frequently come in and make most impressive and solemn calls on Miss Mary Anne Bull, who was a brunette and a celebrated beauty of the day. I well remember her long raven curls falling from the comb that held them up on the top of her head. She had a rich soprano voice, and was the leading singer in the Centre Church choir. The two brothers also had fine, manly voices, and the family circle was often enlivened by quartette singing and flute playing. Mr. Bull kept a very large wholesale drug store on Front Street, in which his two sons, Albert and James, were clerks. The oldest son, Watson Bull, had established a retail drug store at the

sign of the 'Good Samaritan.' A large picture of the Good Samaritan relieving the wounded traveler formed a striking part of the sign, and was contemplated by me with reverence.

"The mother of the family gave me at once a child's place in her heart. A neat little hall chamber was allotted to me for my own, and a well made and kept single bed was given me, of which I took daily care with awful satisfaction. If I was sick nothing could exceed the watchful care and tender nursing of Mrs. Bull. In school my two most intimate friends were the leading scholars. They had written to me before I came and I had answered their letters, and on my arrival they gave me the warmest welcome. One was Catherine Ledyard Cogswell, daughter of the leading and best-beloved of Hartford physicians. The other was Georgiana May, daughter of a most lovely Christian woman who was a widow. Georgiana was one of many children, having two younger sisters, Mary and Gertrude, and several brothers. Catherine Cogswell was one of the most amiable, sprightly, sunny-tempered individuals I have ever known. She was, in fact, so much beloved that it was difficult for me to see much of her. Her time was all bespoken by different girls. One might walk with her to school, another had the like promise on the way home. And at recess, of which we had every day a short half hour, there was always a suppliant at Katy's shrine, whom she found it hard to refuse. Yet, among all these claimants, she did keep a little place here and there for me. Georgiana was older and graver, and less fascinating to the other girls, but between her and me there grew up the warmest friendship, which proved lifelong in its

constancy.

"Catherine and Georgiana were reading 'Virgil' when I came to the school. I began the study of Latin alone, and at the end of the first year made a translation of 'Ovid' in verse, which was read at the final exhibition of the school, and regarded, I believe, as a very creditable performance. I was very much interested in poetry, and it was my dream to be a poet. I began a drama called 'Cleon.' The scene was laid in the court and time of the emperor Nero, and Cleon was a Greek lord residing at Nero's court, who, after much searching and doubting, at last comes to the knowledge of Christianity. I filled blank book after blank book with this drama. It filled my thoughts sleeping and waking. One day sister Catherine pounced down upon me, and said that I must not waste my time writing poetry, but discipline my mind by the study of Butler's 'Analogy.' So after this I wrote out abstracts from the 'Analogy,' and instructed a class of girls as old as myself, being compelled to master each chapter just ahead of the class I was teaching. About this time I read Baxter's 'Saint's Rest.' I do not think any book affected me more powerfully. As I walked the pavements I used to wish that they might sink beneath me if only I might find myself in heaven. I was at the same time very much interested in Butler's 'Analogy,' for Mr. Brace used to lecture on such themes when I was at Miss Pierce's school at Litchfield. I also began the study of French and Italian with a Miss Degan, who was born in Italy.

"It was about this time that I first believed myself to be a Christian. I was spending my summer vacation at home, in Litchfield. I shall ever remember that dewy, fresh summer morning. I knew that it was a sacramental Sunday, and thought with sadness that when all the good people should take the sacrificial bread and wine I should be left out. I tried hard to feel my sins and count them up; but what with the birds, the daisies, and the brooks that rippled by the way, it was impossible. I came into church quite dissatisfied with myself, and as I looked upon the pure white cloth, the snowy bread and shining cups, of the communion table, thought with a sigh: 'There won't be anything for me to-day; it is all for these grown-up Christians.'

Nevertheless, when father began to speak, I was drawn to listen by a certain pathetic earnestness in his voice. Most of father's sermons were as unintelligible to me as if he had spoken in Choctaw. But sometimes he preached what he was accustomed to call a 'frame sermon;' that is, a sermon that sprung out of the deep feeling of the occasion, and which consequently could be neither premeditated nor repeated. His text was taken from the Gospel of John, the declaration of Jesus: 'Behold, I call you no longer servants, but friends.' His theme was Jesus as a soul friend offered to every human being.

"Forgetting all his hair-splitting distinctions and dialectic subtleties, he spoke in direct, simple, and tender language of the great love of Christ and his care for the soul. He pictured Him as patient with our errors, compassionate with our weaknesses, and sympathetic for our sorrows. He went on to say how He was ever near

us, enlightening our ignorance, guiding our wanderings, comforting our sorrows with a love unwearied by faults, unchilled by ingratitude, till at last He should present us faultless before the throne of his glory with exceeding joy.

"I sat intent and absorbed. Oh! how much I needed just such a friend, I thought to myself. Then the awful fact came over me that I had never had any conviction of my sins, and consequently could not come to Him. I longed to cry out 'I will,' when father made his passionate appeal, 'Come, then, and trust your soul to this faithful friend.' Like a flash it came over me that if I needed conviction of sin, He was able to give me even this also. I would trust Him for the whole. My whole soul was illumined with joy, and as I left the church to walk home, it seemed to me as if Nature herself were hushing her breath to hear the music of heaven.

"As soon as father came home and was seated in his study, I went up to him and fell in his arms saying, 'Father, I have given myself to Jesus, and He has taken me.' I never shall forget the expression of his face as he looked down into my earnest, childish eyes; it was so sweet, so gentle, and like sunlight breaking out upon a landscape. 'Is it so?' he said, holding me silently to his heart, as I felt the hot tears fall on my head. 'Then has a new flower blossomed in the kingdom this day.'"

If she could have been let alone, and taught "to look up and not down,

forward and not back, out and not in," this religious experience might have gone on as sweetly and naturally as the opening of a flower in the gentle rays of the sun. But unfortunately this was not possible at that time, when self-examination was carried to an extreme that was calculated to drive a nervous and sensitive mind well-nigh distracted. First, even her sister Catherine was afraid that there might be something wrong in the case of a lamb that had come into the fold without being first chased all over the lot by the shepherd; great stress being laid, in those days, on what was called "being under conviction." Then also the pastor of the First Church in Hartford, a bosom friend of Dr. Beecher, looked with melancholy and suspicious eyes on this unusual and doubtful path to heaven,--but more of this hereafter. Harriet's conversion took place in the summer of 1825, when she was fourteen, and the following year, April, 1826, Dr. Beecher resigned his pastorate in Litchfield to accept a call to the Hanover Street Church, Boston, Mass. In a letter to her grandmother Foote at Guilford, dated Hartford, March 4, 1826, Harriet writes:--

"You have probably heard that our home in Litchfield is broken up. Papa has received a call to Boston, and concluded to accept, because he could not support his family in Litchfield. He was dismissed last week Tuesday, and will be here (Hartford) next Tuesday with mamma and Isabel. Aunt Esther will take Charles and Thomas to her house for the present. Papa's salary is to be \$2,000 and \$500 settlement.

"I attend school constantly and am making some progress in my studies.

I devote most of my attention to Latin and to arithmetic, and hope soon to prepare myself to assist Catherine in the school."

This breaking up of the Litchfield home led Harriet, under her father's advice, to seek to connect herself with the First Church of Hartford. Accordingly, accompanied by two of her school friends, she went one day to the pastor's study to consult with him concerning the contemplated step. The good man listened attentively to the child's simple and modest statement of Christian experience, and then with an awful, though kindly, solemnity of speech and manner said, "Harriet, do you feel that if the universe should be destroyed (awful pause) you could be happy with God alone?" After struggling in vain, in her mental bewilderment, to fix in her mind some definite conception of the meaning of the sounds which fell on her ear like the measured strokes of a bell, the child of fourteen stammered out, "Yes, sir."

"You realize, I trust," continued the doctor, "in some measure at least, the deceitfulness of your heart, and that in punishment for your sins God might justly leave you to make yourself as miserable as you have made yourself sinful?"

"Yes, sir," again stammered Harriet.

Having thus effectually, and to his own satisfaction, fixed the child's attention on the morbid and over-sensitive workings of her own heart, the good and truly kind-hearted man dismissed her with a



fatherly benediction. But where was the joyous ecstasy of that beautiful Sabbath morning of a year ago? Where was that heavenly friend? Yet was not this as it should be, and might not God leave her "to make herself as miserable as she had made herself sinful"?

In a letter addressed to her brother Edward, about this time, she writes: "My whole life is one continued struggle: I do nothing right. I yield to temptation almost as soon as it assails me. My deepest feelings are very evanescent. I am beset behind and before, and my sins take away all my happiness. But that which most constantly besets me is pride--I can trace almost all my sins back to it."

In the mean time, the school is prospering. February 16, 1827, Catherine writes to Dr. Beecher: "My affairs go on well. The stock is all taken up, and next week I hope to have out the prospectus of the 'Hartford Female Seminary.' I hope the building will be done, and all things in order, by June. The English lady is coming with twelve pupils from New York." Speaking of Harriet, who was at this time with her father in Boston, she adds: "I have received some letters from Harriet to-day which make me feel uneasy. She says, 'I don't know as I am fit for anything, and I have thought that I could wish to die young, and let the remembrance of me and my faults perish in the grave, rather than live, as I fear I do, a trouble to every one. You don't know how perfectly wretched I often feel: so useless, so weak, so destitute of all energy. Mamma often tells me that I am a strange, inconsistent being. Sometimes I could not sleep, and have groaned and

cried till midnight, while in the day-time I tried to appear cheerful and succeeded so well that papa reproved me for laughing so much. I was so absent sometimes that I made strange mistakes, and then they all laughed at me, and I laughed, too, though I felt as though I should go distracted. I wrote rules; made out a regular system for dividing my time; but my feelings vary so much that it is almost impossible for me to be regular."

But let Harriet "take courage in her dark sorrows and melancholies," as Carlyle says: "Samuel Johnson too had hypochondrias; all great souls are apt to have, and to be in thick darkness generally till the eternal ways and the celestial guiding stars disclose themselves, and the vague abyss of life knits itself up into firmaments for them."

At the same time (the winter of 1827), Catherine writes to Edward concerning Harriet: "If she could come here (Hartford) it might be the best thing for her, for she can talk freely to me. I can get her books, and Catherine Cogswell, Georgiana May, and her friends here could do more for her than any one in Boston, for they love her and she loves them very much. Georgiana's difficulties are different from Harriet's: she is speculating about doctrines, etc. Harriet will have young society here all the time, which she cannot have at home, and I think cheerful and amusing friends will do much for her. I can do better in preparing her to teach drawing than any one else, for I best know what is needed."

It was evidently necessary that something should be done to restore Harriet to a more tranquil and healthful frame of mind; consequently in the spring of 1827, accompanied by her friend Georgiana May, she went to visit her grandmother Foote at Nut Plains, Guilford. Miss May refers to this visit in a letter to Mrs. Foote, in January of the following winter.

HARTFORD, January 4, 1828.

DEAR MRS. FOOTE:-- . . . I very often think of you and the happy hours I passed at your house last spring. It seems as if it were but yesterday: now, while I am writing, I can see your pleasant house and the familiar objects around you as distinctly as the day I left them. Harriet and I are very much the same girls we were then. I do not believe we have altered very much, though she is improved in some respects.

The August following this visit to Guilford Harriet writes to her brother Edward in a vein which is still streaked with sadness, but shows some indication of returning health of mind.

"Many of my objections you did remove that afternoon we spent together. After that I was not as unhappy as I had been. I felt, nevertheless, that my views were very indistinct and contradictory, and feared that if you left me thus I might return to the same dark, desolate state in which I had been all summer. I felt that my immortal

interest, my happiness for both worlds, was depending on the turn my feelings might take. In my disappointment and distress I called upon God, and it seemed as if I was heard. I felt that He could supply the loss of all earthly love. All misery and darkness were over. I felt as if restored, nevermore to fall. Such sober certainty of waking bliss had long been a stranger to me. But even then I had doubts as to whether these feelings were right, because I felt love to God alone without that ardent love for my fellow-creatures which Christians have often felt. . . . I cannot say exactly what it is makes me reluctant to speak of my feelings. It costs me an effort to express feeling of any kind, but more particularly to speak of my private religious feelings. If any one questions me, my first impulse is to conceal all I can. As for expression of affection towards my brothers and sisters, my companions or friends, the stronger the affection the less inclination have I to express it. Yet sometimes I think myself the most frank, open, and communicative of beings, and at other times the most reserved. If you can resolve all these caprices into general principles, you will do more than I can. Your speaking so much philosophically has a tendency to repress confidence. We never wish to have our feelings analyzed down; and very little, nothing, that we say brought to the test of mathematical demonstration.

"It appears to me that if I only could adopt the views of God you presented to my mind, they would exert a strong and beneficial influence over my character. But I am afraid to accept them for several reasons. First, it seems to be taking from the majesty and

dignity of the divine character to suppose that his happiness can be at all affected by the conduct of his sinful, erring creatures.

Secondly, it seems to me that such views of God would have an effect on our own minds in lessening that reverence and fear which is one of the greatest motives to us for action. For, although to a generous mind the thought of the love of God would be a sufficient incentive to action, there are times of coldness when that love is not felt, and

then there remains no sort of stimulus. I find as I adopt these sentiments I feel less fear of God, and, in view of sin, I feel only a sensation of grief which is more easily dispelled and forgotten than that I formerly felt."

A letter dated January 3, 1828, shows us that Harriet had returned to Hartford and was preparing herself to teach drawing and painting, under the direction of her sister Catherine.

MY DEAR GRANDMOTHER,--I should have written before to assure you of my remembrance of you, but I have been constantly employed, from nine in the morning till after dark at night, in taking lessons of a painting and drawing master, with only an intermission long enough to swallow a little dinner which was sent to me in the school-room. You may easily believe that after spending the day in this manner, I did not feel in a very epistolary humor in the evening, and if I had been, I could not have written, for when I did not go immediately to bed I was obliged

to get a long French lesson.

The seminary is finished, and the school going on nicely. Miss Clarissa Brown is assisting Catherine in the school. Besides her, Catherine, and myself, there are two other teachers who both board in the family with us: one is Miss Degan, an Italian lady who teaches French and Italian; she rooms with me, and is very interesting and agreeable. Miss Hawks is rooming with Catherine. In some respects she reminds me very much of my mother. She is gentle, affectionate, modest, and retiring, and much beloved by all the scholars. . . . I am still going on with my French, and carrying two young ladies through Virgil, and if I have time, shall commence Italian.

I am very comfortable and happy.

I propose, my dear grandmamma, to send you by the first opportunity a dish of fruit of my own painting. Pray do not now devour it in anticipation, for I cannot promise that you will not find it sadly tasteless in reality. If so, please excuse it, for the sake of the poor young artist. I admire to cultivate a taste for painting, and I wish to improve it; it was what my dear mother admired and loved, and I cherish it for her sake. I have thought more of this dearest of all earthly friends these late years, since I have been old enough to know her character and appreciate her worth. I sometimes think that, had she lived, I might have been both better and happier than I now am, but God is good and wise in all his ways.

A letter written to her brother Edward in Boston, dated March 27, 1828, shows how slowly she adopted the view of God that finally became one of the most characteristic elements in her writings.

"I think that those views of God which you have presented to me have had an influence in restoring my mind to its natural tone. But still, after all, God is a being afar off. He is so far above us that anything but the most distant reverential affection seems almost sacrilegious. It is that affection that can lead us to be familiar that the heart needs. But easy and familiar expressions of attachment and that sort of confidential communication which I should address to papa or you would be improper for a subject to address to a king, much less for us to address to the King of kings. The language of prayer is of necessity stately and formal, and we cannot clothe all the little minutiae of our wants and troubles in it. I wish I could describe to you how I feel when I pray. I feel that I love God,--that is, that I love Christ,--that I find comfort and happiness in it, and yet it is not that kind of comfort which would arise from free communication of my wants and sorrows to a friend. I sometimes wish that the Saviour were visibly present in this world, that I might go to Him for a solution of some of my difficulties. . . . Do you think, my dear brother, that there is such a thing as so realizing the presence and character of God that He can supply the place of earthly friends? I really wish to know what you think of this. . . . Do you suppose that

God really loves sinners before they come to Him? Some say that we ought to tell them that God hates them, that He looks on them with utter abhorrence, and that they must love Him before He will look on them otherwise. Is it right to say to those who are in deep distress, 'God is interested in you; He feels for and loves you'?"

Appended to this letter is a short note from Miss Catherine Beecher, who evidently read the letter over and answered Harriet's questions herself. She writes: "When the young man came to Jesus, is it not said that Jesus loved him, though he was unrenewed?"

In April, 1828, Harriet again writes to her brother Edward:---

"I have had more reason to be grateful to that friend than ever before. He has not left me in all my weakness. It seems to me that my love to Him is the love of despair. All my communion with Him, though sorrowful, is soothing. I am painfully sensible of ignorance and deficiency, but still I feel that I am willing that He should know all. He will look on all that is wrong only to purify and reform. He will never be irritated or impatient. He will never show me my faults in such a manner as to irritate without helping me. A friend to whom I would acknowledge all my faults must be perfect. Let any one once be provoked, once speak harshly to me, once sweep all the chords of my soul out of tune, I never could confide there again. It is only to the most perfect Being in the universe that imperfection can look and hope for patience. How strange! . . . You do not know how harsh and



forbidding everything seems, compared with his character. All through the day in my intercourse with others, everything has a tendency to destroy the calmness of mind gained by communion with Him. One flatters me, another is angry with me, another is unjust to me.

"You speak of your predilections for literature having been a snare to you. I have found it so myself. I can scarcely think, without tears and indignation, that all that is beautiful and lovely and poetical has been laid on other altars. Oh! will there never be a poet with a heart enlarged and purified by the Holy Spirit, who shall throw all the graces of harmony, all the enchantments of feeling, pathos, and poetry, around sentiments worthy of them? . . . It matters little what service He has for me. . . . I do not mean to live in vain. He has given me talents, and I will lay them at his feet, well satisfied, if He will accept them. All my powers He can enlarge. He made my mind, and He can teach me to cultivate and exert its faculties."

The following November she writes from Groton, Conn., to Miss May:--

"I am in such an uncertain, unsettled state, traveling back and forth, that I have very little time to write. In the first place, on my arrival in Boston I was obliged to spend two days in talking and telling news. Then after that came calling, visiting, etc., and then I came off to Groton to see my poor brother George, who was quite out of spirits and in very trying circumstances. To-morrow I return to Boston and spend four or five days, and then go to Franklin, where I spend

the rest of my vacation.

"I found the folks all well on my coming to Boston, and as to my new brother, James, he has nothing to distinguish him from forty other babies, except a very large pair of blue eyes and an uncommonly fair complexion, a thing which is of no sort of use or advantage to a man or boy.

"I am thinking very seriously of remaining in Groton and taking care of the female school, and at the same time being of assistance and company for George. On some accounts it would not be so pleasant as returning to Hartford, for I should be among strangers. Nothing upon this point can be definitely decided till I have returned to Boston, and talked to papa and Catherine."

Evidently papa and Catherine did not approve of the Groton plan, for in February of the following winter Harriet writes from Hartford to Edward, who is at this time with his father in Boston:---

"My situation this winter (1829) is in many respects pleasant. I room with three other teachers, Miss Fisher, Miss Mary Dutton, and Miss Brigham. Ann Fisher you know. Miss Dutton is about twenty, has a fine mathematical mind, and has gone as far into that science perhaps as most students at college. She is also, as I am told, quite learned in the languages. . . . Miss Brigham is somewhat older: is possessed of a fine mind and most unconquerable energy and perseverance of

character. From early childhood she has been determined to obtain an education, and to attain to a certain standard. Where persons are determined to be anything, they will be. I think, for this reason, she will make a first-rate character. Such are my companions. We spend our time in school during the day, and in studying in the evening. My plan of study is to read rhetoric and prepare exercises for my class the first half hour in the evening; after that the rest of the evening is divided between French and Italian. Thus you see the plan of my employment and the character of my immediate companions. Besides these, there are others among the teachers and scholars who must exert an influence over my character. Miss Degan, whose constant occupation it is to make others laugh; Mrs. Gamage, her room-mate, a steady, devoted, sincere Christian. . . . Little things have great power over me, and if I meet with the least thing that crosses my feelings, I am often rendered unhappy for days and weeks. . . . I wish I could bring myself to feel perfectly indifferent to the opinions of others. I believe that there never was a person more dependent on the good and evil opinions of those around than I am. This desire to be loved forms, I fear, the great motive for all my actions. . . . I have been reading carefully the book of Job, and I do not think that it contains the views of God which you presented to me. God seems to have stripped a dependent creature of all that renders life desirable, and then to have answered his complaints from the whirlwind; and instead of showing mercy and pity, to have overwhelmed him by a display of his power and justice. . . . With the view I received from you, I should have expected that a being who sympathizes with his guilty, afflicted

creatures would not have spoken thus. Yet, after all, I do believe that God is such a being as you represent Him to be, and in the New Testament I find in the character of Jesus Christ a revelation of God as merciful and compassionate; in fact, just such a God as I need.

"Somehow or another you have such a reasonable sort of way of saying things that when I come to reflect I almost always go over to your side. . . . My mind is often perplexed, and such thoughts arise in it that I cannot pray, and I become bewildered. The wonder to me is, how all ministers and all Christians can feel themselves so inexcusably sinful, when it seems to me we all come into the world in such a way that it would be miraculous if we did not sin. Mr. Hawes always says in prayer, 'We have nothing to offer in extenuation of any of our sins,' and I always think when he says it, that we have everything to offer in extenuation. The case seems to me exactly as if I had been brought into the world with such a thirst for ardent spirits that there was just a possibility, though no hope, that I should resist, and then my eternal happiness made dependent on my being temperate. Sometimes when I try to confess my sins, I feel that after all I am more to be pitied than blamed, for I have never known the time when I have not had a temptation within me so strong that it was certain I should not overcome it. This thought shocks me, but it comes with such force, and so appealingly, to all my consciousness, that it stifles all sense of sin. . . .

"Sometimes when I read the Bible, it seems to be wholly grounded on

the idea that the sin of man is astonishing, inexcusable, and without palliation or cause, and the atonement is spoken of as such a wonderful and undeserved mercy that I am filled with amazement. Yet if I give up the Bible I gain nothing, for the providence of God in nature is just as full of mystery, and of the two I think that the Bible, with all its difficulties, is preferable to being without it; for the Bible holds out the hope that in a future world all shall be made plain. . . . So you see I am, as Mr. Hawes says, 'on the waves,' and all I can do is to take the word of God that He does do right and there I rest."

The following summer, in July, she writes to Edward: "I have never been so happy as this summer. I began it in more suffering than I ever before have felt, but there is One whom I daily thank for all that suffering, since I hope that it has brought me at last to rest entirely in Him. I do hope that my long, long course of wandering and darkness and unhappiness is over, and that I have found in Him who died for me all, and more than all, I could desire. Oh, Edward, you can feel as I do; you can speak of Him! There are few, very few, who can. Christians in general do not seem to look to Him as their best friend, or realize anything of his unutterable love. They speak with a cold, vague, reverential awe, but do not speak as if in the habit of close and near communion; as if they confided to Him every joy and sorrow and constantly looked to Him for direction and guidance. I cannot express to you, my brother, I cannot tell you, how that Saviour appears to me. To bear with one so imperfect, so weak, so

inconsistent, as myself, implied long suffering and patience more than words can express. I love most to look on Christ as my teacher, as one who, knowing the utmost of my sinfulness, my waywardness, my folly, can still have patience; can reform, purify, and daily make me more like himself."

So, after four years of struggling and suffering, she returns to the place where she started from as a child of thirteen. It has been like watching a ship with straining masts and storm-beaten sails, buffeted by the waves, making for the harbor, and coming at last to quiet anchorage. There have been, of course, times of darkness and depression, but never any permanent loss of the religious trustfulness and peace of mind indicated by this letter.

The next three years were passed partly in Boston, and partly in Guilford and Hartford. Writing of this period of her life to the Rev. Charles Beecher, she says:---

My Dear Brother:---The looking over of father's letters in the period of his Boston life brings forcibly to my mind many recollections. At this time I was more with him, and associated in companionship of thought and feeling for a longer period than any other of my experience.

In the summer of 1832 she writes to Miss May, revealing her spiritual and intellectual life in a degree unusual, even for her.

"After the disquisition on myself above cited, you will be prepared to understand the changes through which this wonderful ego et me ipse has passed.

"The amount of the matter has been, as this inner world of mine has become worn out and untenable, I have at last concluded to come out of it and live in the external one, and, as F----- S----- once advised me, to give up the pernicious habit of meditation to the first Methodist minister that would take it, and try to mix in society somewhat as another person would.

"'Horas non numero nisi serenas.' Uncle Samuel, who sits by me, has just been reading the above motto, the inscription on a sun-dial in Venice. It strikes me as having a distant relationship to what I was going to say. I have come to a firm resolution to count no hours but unclouded ones, and to let all others slip out of my memory and reckoning as quickly as possible. . . .

"I am trying to cultivate a general spirit of kindness towards everybody. Instead of shrinking into a corner to notice how other people behave, I am holding out my hand to the right and to the left, and forming casual or incidental acquaintances with all who will be acquainted with me. In this way I find society full of interest and pleasure--a pleasure which pleaseth me more because it is not old and worn out. From these friendships I expect little; therefore generally

receive more than I expect. From past friendships I have expected everything, and must of necessity have been disappointed. The kind words and looks and smiles I call forth by looking and smiling are not much by themselves, but they form a very pretty flower border to the way of life. They embellish the day or the hour as it passes, and when they fade they only do just as you expected they would. This kind of pleasure in acquaintanceship is new to me. I never tried it before. When I used to meet persons, the first inquiry was, 'Have they such and such a character, or have they anything that might possibly be of use or harm to me?'"

It is striking, the degree of interest a letter had for her.

"Your long letter came this morning. It revived much in my heart. Just think how glad I must have been this morning to hear from you. I was glad. . . . I thought of it through all the vexations of school this morning. . . . I have a letter at home; and when I came home from school, I went leisurely over it.

"This evening I have spent in a little social party,--a dozen or so,--and I have been zealously talking all the evening. When I came to my cold, lonely room, there was your letter lying on the dressing-table. It touched me with a sort of painful pleasure, for it seems to me uncertain, improbable, that I shall ever return and find you as I have found your letter. Oh, my dear G-----, it is scarcely well to love friends thus. The greater part that I see cannot move me deeply. They



are present, and I enjoy them; they pass and I forget them. But those that I love differently; those that I LOVE; and oh, how much that word means! I feel sadly about them. They may change; they must die; they are separated from me, and I ask myself why should I wish to love with all the pains and penalties of such conditions? I check myself when expressing feelings like this, so much has been said of it by the sentimental, who talk what they could not have felt. But it is so deeply, sincerely so in me, that sometimes it will overflow. Well, there is a heaven,--a heaven,--a world of love, and love after all is the life-blood, the existence, the all in all of mind."

This is the key to her whole life. She was impelled by love, and did what she did, and wrote what she did, under the impulse of love. Never could "Uncle Tom's Cabin" or "The Minister's Wooing" have been written, unless by one to whom love was the "life-blood of existence, the all in all of mind." Years afterwards Mrs. Browning was to express this same thought in the language of poetry.

"But when a soul by choice and conscience doth  
Throw out her full force on another soul,  
The conscience and the concentration both  
Make mere life love. For life in perfect whole  
And aim consummated is love in sooth,  
As nature's magnet heat rounds pole with pole."