

## CHAPTER II.

WORK AND BEAUTY.—AN IMPRESSION OF THE REAL.

THE child Margaret sits in the door of her house, on a low stool, with a small wheel, winding spools, in our vernacular, "quilling," for her mother, who, in a room near by, is mounted in a loom, weaving and smoking, the fumes of her pipe mingling with the whizz of the shuttle, the jarring of the lathe, and the clattering of treadles. From a windle the thread is conducted to the quills, and buzz, buzz goes Margaret's wheel, while a grey squirrel, squatted on her shoulder, inspects the operation with a most profound gravity.

"Look up the chimney, child," says the mother, "and see what time it is."

"I don't know how," replies Margaret.

"I suppose we must get the Master to learn you your *abc's* in this matter," rejoined the mother. "When the sun gets in one inch, it is ten o'clock, when it reaches the stone that bouges out there, it is dinner time. How many quills have you done?"

"The basket is full, and the box besides. Chilion said I might go and sail with him."

"We have a great deal to do. Miss Gisborne's flannel is promised the last of the week, and it must be drawn in to-morrow. I want you to clean the skans; there is a bunch of lucks down cellar, bring them up; get some plantain and dandelion on the smooth for greens; you must pick over some beans; put some kindlers under the pot; then you may go."

"I had a dream last night."

"You are always dreaming. I am afraid you will come to a bad end."

"It was a pretty dream."

"I can't help your dreams; here pick up this."

The woman had broken a thread in the chain, and while Margaret helped her out of the trouble, she looked into her mother's face, and, as if following out her thoughts, said, "A woman came near to me, she dropped tears upon me, she stood in the clouds."

"I can't stop to hear you now," replied her mother. "Run and do what I have told you."

When Margaret had finished the several chores, she went to the Pond. She was barefoot and barearmed. She wore a brown linen gown or tunic, open in front, a crimson skirt, a blue checked apron, and on her head was a green rush hat. By a narrow foot-path, winding through shrubbery and brambles, and defiling along the foot of a steep hill that rose near the house, she came to the margin of the water. Chilion, her brother, who was at work with a piece of glass, smoothing a snow-white bass-wood paddle, for a little bark canoe he had made her, saw Margaret approach with evident pleasure, yet received her in the quietest possible manner, as she leaped and laughed towards him. He asked her if she remembered the names of the flowers, and while he was finishing the paddle, she went along the shore to gather them. The Pond covered several hundreds of acres, its greatest diameter measured about a mile and a half; its outline was irregular, here divided by sharp rocks, there retreating into shaded coves; and on its face appeared three or four small islands, bearing trees and low bushes. Its banks, if not really steep, had a bluff and precipitous aspect from the tall forest that girdled it about. The region was evidently primitive, and the child, as she went along, trod on round smooth pebbles of white and rose quartz, dark hornblende, greenstone, and an occasional fragment of trap, the results of the diluvial ocean, if any body can tell when or what that was. In piles, among the stones, lay quivering and ever accumulating masses of fleece-like, and fox-colored foam; there were also the empty shells of various kinds of mollusks. She clomb over the white peeled trunks of hemlock trees, that had fallen into the water, or drifted to the shore; she trod through beds of fine silver-grey sand, and in the shallow edge of the Pond, she waded on a hard even bottom of the same, which the action of the waves had beaten into a smooth shining floor. She discovered flowers which her brother told her were horehound, skull-caps, and indian tobacco; she picked small green apples that disease had formed on the leaves of the willows; and beautiful velvety crimson berries from the black alder.

When all was ready, she got into her canoe, while her brother led the way in a boat of his own. With due instructions in the management of the paddle, she succeeded tolerably well. Chilion had often taken her on the water, and she

was not much afraid. It was commonly reported that the Pond had no bottom, and an indefinable awe possessed the minds of people regarding it; but this Margaret was too young to feel; she took manifest delight in skimming across the top of that deep dark mystery. She toppled somewhat, her canoe shook and tilted, but on it went; there was a thin wake, a slight rustle of the water; her brother kept near her, and she enjoyed the fearful pastime. Reaching the opposite shore, Chilion drew up his boat, and went to a rock, where he set himself to catch fish with a long pole. Margaret played awhile with her canoe, and turned into a recess where the trees and rocks darkened the water, the surface of which lay calm and clear. The coolness of the spot was inviting, and birds were merry-making in the underwood, and deep in the water she saw the blue sky and the white clouds. "That looks like her," she said, calling to mind her dream. She urged her canoe up a flat rock on the shore, where she took off her hat and apron; and, simply dressed as she was, the process of disrobing being speedily done, she waded into the water. She said, "I will go down to the bottom, I will tread on the clouds;" she sunk to her neck, she plunged her head under; she could discover nothing but the rocky or smooth sandy bed of the Pond. Was she disappointed? A sand-piper glided weet weeting along the shore; she ran after it, but could not catch it; she sat down and sozzled her feet in the foam; she saw a blue-jay washing itself, ducking its crest, and hustling the water with its wings, and she did the same. She got running mosses, twin-flower vines, and mountain laurel blossoms, and wound them about her neck and waist, and pushing off in her canoe, looked into the water as a mirror. Her dark clear hazle eyes, her fair white skin, the leaves and flowers, made a pretty vision. She smiled and was smiled on in turn; she held out her hand, which was reciprocated by the fair spirit below; she called her own name, the rocks and woods answered; she looked about her, but saw nothing. Had she fears or hopes? It may have been only childish sport. "I will jump to that girl," she said, "I will tumble the clouds." She sprang from her canoe, and dropped quietly, softly on the bottom; she had driven her companion away, and as she came up, her garlands broke and floated off in the ripples. Wiping herself on a coarse towel her mother wove for her, she dressed, and went back to her brother. A horn rang through the woods. "Dinner is ready," he said, "we must go."

Returning, they came to the greensward in front of the house, where was a peach tree.

"I remember," said her brother, "when you and that were of the same size, now it shades you. It is just as old as you are. How full of fruit it is."

"Beautiful peaches they are too," said Margaret, "when they are ripe. How did it grow?"

"I put a peach-stone in the ground one winter," replied her brother, "and it sprouted in the spring."

"I was an acorn once," rejoined she, "so Obed says, and why didn't I grow up an oak-tree?"

A dog bounding towards them interrupted the conversation. This animal had enormous proportions, and looked like a cross of wolf and mastiff; his color was a brindled black, his head was like the ideas we have of Cerberus, his legs were thick and strong, and he was called Bull. Following the dog, approached the jolly-faced father of Margaret from the barn, where he had been swingling flax; his hat, face, and clothes were covered and strung with tow and whitish down, but you could see him laugh through the veil; and the glow of his red face would make you laugh. He caught Margaret and set her on the dog, who galloped away with his load. They encountered her older brother coming in from the woods, where he had been burning a piece; his frock crusted with ashes, his face smirched with coals. He spoke tartly to Margaret, and contrived to trip the dog as he ran by, and throw his sister to the ground.

"Oh, don't do so," said she.

"Let Bull alone," he replied, speaking in a blubbering washy manner, which we cannot imitate. "You'll spile him; would you make a goslin of him? Here's your sticks right in the track;" saying which he scattered with his foot a little paling she had constructed about a dandelion. She must needs cry; the dog went to her, looked in her eyes, lapped her tears, and she put her arms about his neck. Her brother, who seemed to be a kind of major domo in the family, whistled the dog away, and ordered his sister into the house to help her mother. Her father and older brother wore checked shirts, and a sort of brown tow trowsers known at the time—these things happened some years ago—as skilts; they were short, reaching just below the knee, and very large, being a full half yard broad at the bottom; supported by no braces or gallows, and resting on the hips. Neither wore any coat, vest, or neckcloth. Her father had on what was once a

three-cornered hat, but the corners were now reduced to loose ragged flaps; and he wore in addition a leather apron. Her brother had a cap made of wood-chuck skin, steeple-shaped, from which the hair was pretty well rubbed off. They went to the cistern on the back side of the house, washed and rinsed themselves for dinner. The father discovered a game-some expression of face, shining scirrous skin, and plump ruby head; his eyes were bloodshot, his cheeks wheeled and puffed, and through his red lips his laughter exposed a suite of fair white teeth; his head was nearly bald, and the crown showed smooth and glairy; and under the thin flossy wreath of hair, that invested the lower part of his head, you could not fail to see that one of his ears was gone. Her brother had a more catonian look, and thick locks of coarse black hair kept well with his dark russet, sunburnt face, and his lips, if by nothing else, were swollen with large quids of tobacco.

The dinner-table, appropriate to the place in which it was set, consisted of boards laid on a movable cross-frame without a cloth. A large wooden dish or trencher, contained, flummery-like, in one mass, the entire substance of the meal — pork, potatoes, greens, beans. There were no suits of knives and forks, and the family helped themselves on wooden plates, with cuttoes. A large silver tankard curiously embossed, and bearing some armorial signets, formed an exception to the general aspect of things, and looked quite baronially down on its serf-like companions. This filled with cider constituted their drink. They were seated on blocks of wood and rag-bottom chairs. Margaret occupied a corner of the table near her younger brother Chilion, and had a cherry plate with a wolf's bone knife and fork he made for her. They all ate heartily and enjoyed their meal. After dinner, Chilion went with his gun into the woods, the father and elder brother returned to their respective employments, her mother resumed her smoking and weaving, and Margaret had a new stint at quilling.