

near the house. Obed brought her new flowers from the woods and instructed her how to plant them. He was thirteen or fifteen years of age, homely but clever, as we say, a tall knuckle-jointed, shad-faced youth; his hair was red, his cheeks freckled; his hands and feet were immense, his arms long and stout. He suffered from near-sightedness. He was dressed like his neighbors, in a shirt and skilts, excepting that his collar and waist-bands were fastened by silver buttons; and he wore a cocked hat. It seemed to please him to help Margaret, and he stayed till almost sunset, when Hash came in from his work. Hash hated or spited Obed partly on Margaret's account, partly because of misunderstandings with his mother, and partly from the perverseness of his own nature; and he annoyed him with the dog, Bull, who always growled and glared when he saw the boy. Margaret stood between him and the dog and saved him from serious harm. In the present instance, she held Bull by the neck, till Obed had time to run round the corner of the house and make his escape.

Margaret seated herself on the door-step to eat her supper, consisting of toasted brown bread and watered cider, served in a curiously wrought cherry-bowl and spoon. The family were taking their meal of bread, potatoes and cold pork in the kitchen. The sun had gone down. The whippoorwill came and sat on the Butternut, and sang his evening note, always plaintive, always welcome. The night-hawk dashed and hissed through the woods and the air on long, slim, quivering wings. A solitary robin chanted sweetly a long time from the hill. Myriads of insects swarmed and murmured over her head. Crickets chirped in the grass and under the decaying sills of the house. She heard the voice of the waterfall at the Outlet, and the croaking of a thousand frogs on the Pond. She saw the stars come out, Lyra, the Northern Crown, the Serpent. She looked into the heavens, she opened her ears to the dim evening melodies of the universe; yet as a child she was interrupted by the sharp voice of her mother, "Go to your roost, Peggy!"

"Yes, Molly dear," said her father, very softly, "Dick and Robin are asleep; see who will be up first, you or the silver rooster; who will open your eyes first, you or the dandelion?"

"Kiss me, Margery," said Chilion, as she went through the room,—she climbed into her chamber, she sank on her pallet, she closed her eyes, she fell into dreams of beauty and heaven,

of other forms than those daily about her, of sweeter voices than either father or mother.

We conclude this chapter by remarking, that the scenes and events of this Memoir belong to what may be termed the mediæval or transition period of New England history, that lying between the close of the war of our Revolution, and the commencement of the present century.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WIDOW WRIGHT.

MARGARET was up early in the morning, before the sun. She washed at the cistern and wiped herself on a coarse crash towel, rough, but invigorating, beautifying and healthy. She did her few chores, and, as she had promised, started for the Widow Wright's. Hash was getting ready his team, a yoke of starveling steers, in a tumbrel-cart, the axle fast in the wheels, which were cut from a solid block of wood. He set her in the cart, he desired to show his skill in driving, perhaps he wished to tease her on the way. "Haw! Buck, hish! Bright, gee up!"; vigorously plied he his whip of wood-chuck skin on a walnut stock. The cart reeled and rattled. It jolted over stones, canted on knolls, sidled into gutters. The way was rough, broken, unfinished. Margaret held fast by the stakes. "Good to settle your breakfast, Peggy. Going to see Obed, hey? and the widder? ask her if she can cure the yallers in Bright." Margaret was victimized and amused by her brother. She half cried, half laughed. Her brother came at last to the lot he was engaged in clearing. He lifted Margaret from the cart. She went on, and Bull followed her. Hash called the dog back, and in great wrath gave him a blow with his whip. The animal leaped and skulked away, and joined again with Margaret, who patted his head, and he ran along by her side. She entered woods; the path was narrow, grass-grown. She picked flowers, and followed the cow-tracks through the thickets of sweet fern almost as high as her head. She descended a pitch in the road to a brook,

which was crossed by a bridge of poles. The dog stopped to drink, she to look into the water. Minnows and pinheads were flashing and skirting through the clear, bright stream. There were hair-worms fabled to spring from horse-hair, in black lines writhing on the surface; caddice-worms clothed with shells and leaves, crawling on the bottom; and boat-flies swimming on their backs. The water made music with the stones. She waded in, and sported bare-feet on the smooth, shiny round pebbles. She looked under the bridge, and that shaded spot had a mystery to the child's mind, such perhaps as is more remembered in future years, than commented on at the time. She pursued a trout, that had shown its black eye and golden spotted back and vanished. She could not find it. On she went towards Mrs. Wright's.

This lady had lost her husband a few years before. He left her in possession of a small farm, and a larger reversion in the medicinal riches of the whole district. It had been a part of Dr. Wright's occupation to gather and prepare herbs for the sick. His *materia medica* was large, various and productive. He learnt as he could the nature of diseases, and was sometimes called to prescribe as well as to sell his drugs. When he died, his wife came in full possession of his secrets and his practice. She gathered plants from all the woods, sands and swamps. She knew the quality of every root, stalk, leaf, flower and berry. Her son Obed she was instructing to be her servitor and aid, as well as the successor of his father. The lady's habits were careful, saving, thriving. She cultivated, in addition, a few acres of land. Her house was neat and comfortable. It was a small frame building, clap-boarded on the sides and roof. It had a warm, sunny position, on a southern slope, with rocks and woods behind. It stood in the centre of a large yard, surrounded on all sides by a stump-fence, those of hemlock-trees, with their large, spreading, tangled roots, like the feet of giants, turned towards the street, making an impenetrable and very durable barrier. You entered the yard by a stile formed of the branches of these roots. Within the enclosure were beds of cultivated herbs, caraway, rue, savory, thyme, tansy, parsley and other aromatic and medicinal plants. Obed was at work among the beds. Margaret climbed the stile. Bull leaped up after her. When Obed saw Margaret his dull face gave a recognition of joy which was succeeded by an expression of dismay.

"Bull won't hurt you, Obed. He's a good dog," said Margaret. "Put your hand on his head."

"He's a great dog," said Obed. "He's got dreadful big teeth. Hash's allers makin' him bite me."

The dog went and laid down in the sun under the eaves of the house. Margaret helped Obed pull the weeds from his beds, while with a hoe he loosened and aired the roots of the plants. The atmosphere was charged with the perfume of the flowers. Margaret shook the thyme-bed, and a shadowy motion, like the waving of a cloud, floated over it. Bees, flies, beetles, butterflies, were bustling upon it, diving into every flower, and searching every cup.

"What d'ye think of the yarbs, Moll?" said the widow, who stood in the door of her house.

"They look pretty," replied Margaret.

"Not looks, child, 'tis use. We'll get a hundred bunches, this year. The saffron we'll cut to-morrow, and the balm 'll be ready soon."

"You are not going to cut all these pretty flowers, are you?"

"Yes. Them's for medicine. Wait till the flowers is gone, they wouldn't be worth more'n your toad-flax and bean vines. They wouldn't fetch a bungtown copper. See here, that's sage, good for tea. That's goat's rue, good for women as has little babies. Guess you was a little baby once. I've known ye ever sen ye warn't more'n so high."

"Was I so little?" asked Margaret.

"Yes, and pimpin enough. An I fed yer marm with rue, and comfrey-root, or ye never'd come teu this. Ye was thin and poor as a late chicken. Now sow some sand."

Margaret took the dish, and began to sprinkle the floor.

"Well done," said the woman. "Ye'll make a smart gal. Here's some honey and bread."

The Widow Wright was dressed in the costume of the times, a white linen short-gown, checked apron, black petticoat. She wore on her head a large brown turban. Her eye was black and piercing, and she possessed a singular power of laughter which was employed to express every variety of emotion, whether pleasure or pain, anger or complacence.

There was a bee-hive in front of the house, a close, well built shed, open to the south. The little workers were streaming through the air like a shower, dropping at the mouth of the hive, their legs laden and yellow with the dust of flowers. Margaret stood in front of the range. The bees shot by her from side to side, multitudes wheeled round her, some lit on her hat, some crawled over her neck. She watched the con-

fusion; she listened to the hum within the hive. Not one offered her harm; she was not stung.

"A marvellous wonderful gal," uttered the widow to herself, as she surveyed the scene from the door. "Pity 'tis she's Brown Moll's child."

Margaret had an errand at the place, to get some honey for a bee-hunt Chilion had proposed for the next day, and stated her desire to the widow. There was an old feud between the two families, not affecting intercourse and acquaintance, so much as matters of interest. The widow received the message rather coldly, and beginning in unwillingness, ended with invective.

"He's a lazy, good for nothin feller, Chil is. He's no better than a peaking mud-sucker. He lives on us all here like house-leek. He's no more use than yer prigged up creepers. He is worse than the witches, vervain nor dill won't keep him away. I tell ye, Chil shan't have no honey."

Margaret was abashed, silenced. She could understand that her brother would feel disappointed; that he was not so bad. Beyond this she did not discriminate

"Chilion is good," she stammered out at last.

"Good! what's he good for?" rejoined the woman. "Does he get any money? Can he find yarbs? He don't know the difference between snake-root and lavender."

"He's good to me," said Margaret. This was an appeal that struck the woman with some force. She seemed to soften.

"Ye are a good child; ye help Obed."

"Yes," said Margaret, as if watching her cue, "I will help Obed. I'll mind the beds when the birds are about. I'll go into the woods and get plants. I'll keep Bull off from him."

"Bein ye'll help Obed, I'll give ye the honey. But don't come agin."

Margaret, taking the article in question on some green leaves, went merrily home.

We cannot dismiss this chapter without remarking that the Widow Wright revered the memory of her husband. It was certainly of some use for her to do so, as his reputation had been considerable in the line of his practice. The representation of the deceased, which she herself bore, she designed by degrees to transfer to her son. The silver buttons, which shone on Obed, as well as other articles of dress he occasionally wore, belonged to his late father. With all

her thrift and care, the lady liked our Margaret very well. "She was so feat and spry, and knowing, and good-natered," she said, "she *could* be made of some use to somebody."

CHAPTER V.

THE BEE-HUNT.—MARGARET GOES FARTHER INTO NATURE.—SHE SINS AND REPENTS.—THE MASTER.

THE next morning, Chilion and Margaret, joined by Obed, started on a bee-hunt. Obed was to remain with them till they should have been successful in this enterprise, then Margaret agreed to help him gather such plants and roots, growing wild in the woods, as could be of use to his mother. They took with them the honey, an axe, leather-mittens for the hands, and screens for the face, some brimstone and a tinder-box, a basket, spade, &c., for their several purposes. They entered the woods lying to the south of the Pond, an unlimited range, extending in some directions many miles. The honey was placed on a stump, and several bees, springing up as it were from vacuity, lading themselves with it, darted off. Our hunters pursued, watching the course of their flight, and were conducted by the unconscious guides to their own abode. This was a chesnut tree, hollow at the root and partially decayed in the top. Not many strokes were requisite to bring it crashing to the ground. It was a more difficult job to possess themselves of the honey. The angry bees seemed to spurt out from their nest like fire; their simultaneous start, their mixed and deepened buzz, their thousand wings beating as for life, made a noise not unlike a distant waterfall, or the hidden roar of an abyss. Their persecutors speedily covered their faces and hands and waited for the alarm to subside. Margaret said she thought they would not hurt her, as those at the widow's did not. It is said there are some persons whom bees never sting. She kindled the brimstone each side of the tree. The bees within, called out by a rap on the trunk, and those without, flying and crawling about their nest, fell dead in the smoke. Chilion cut about the cavity where the comb was deposited. Margaret, looking in, and seeing