

THE VERMONT TRANSCRIPT.

Vol. I.

ST. ALBANS, VT., FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1865.

No. 49.

THE TRANSCRIPT.

PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY.

HENRY A. CUTLER.

TERMS OF SUBSCRIPTION:—For square of 12 lines, one year, in advance, \$2.00; for 6 months, \$1.00; for 3 months, \$0.50. Single copies, 10 cents. All communications should be addressed to the Publisher, at the office of the Transcript.

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affection. She was always, in fact, torturing herself by some such cruel sacrifice to the proprieties. When Mr. Bruce, the advocate, snatched a few moments from his treadmill below for a cup of tea and the fireside, and was taking Fairy Alice on his knee, and twisting her golden hair into a new style of head-dress, not as yet sanctioned by fashionable head-dressers, Mrs. Bruce, who would be looking on restlessly, and with the cold expression spreading gradually over her face, like a film of ice upon a pond, at last would interpose, "Please don't, Charles; don't you see you are rumpling all her new dress?"

"We will take care of that," would answer Mr. Bruce, smoothing it down carefully.

"Besides," continued Mrs. Bruce, the film gradually thickening, "you are giving the child such bad habits, do, please, set her down."

A shade would come upon the forehead of the advocate; deepening presently, "What harm is Fairy doing?" "there is no one by; surely, for a few moments, it can make much matter."

"The child's mind will never be formed if she is indulged in these tricks. Please set her down—do, now."

All this while Fairy Alice's face has been growing thoughtful and distressed. She is so wise and so discreet, she knows perfectly what is coming, and is actually gently sliding down off the paternal knee.

"Come here, Alice," said her mother, sternly and firmly; "get a chair and learn to sit as you would in society."

Mr. Bruce would set her down abruptly, push back his chair, and with a heavy sigh, stride rapidly out of the room. Poor Fairy Alice would look very sad, and timorously fetch her own special chair, and sit there in silence, with her parent, now a perfect block of Wenham ice, but inwardly wrung by what she deemed this cruel disrespect to her in presence of their child. Wise Fairy Alice, quite conscious of this feeling in her mother, made an effort at indifference and easy conversation, just, indeed, as experienced elders would have done in a similarly delicate situation. She drew her chair near to her pole, silent mamma, yet not so near as to outrage any of the proprieties, and began to prattle about London, and its joys and wonders, where, indeed, her mamma's heart always turned. Nor was this any irregular dispoised child's talk, but sober and thoughtful and pointed. But Mrs. Bruce restrained her, not harshly, but coldly, hinted that an unrestrained curiosity was about one of the most dangerous faults in young people, and then "asking questions" was a criminal offense against the laws of society. Fairy Alice accepted the reproof, drew away her chair to the distance prescribed by the laws of society, and worked sadly at her sampler for the rest of the night.

How often these little misconceptions took place over the figure of Fairy Alice, whose heart bled to every recurrence, it would be idle to mention. Wise Fairy Alice took note of all that was hidden underneath, and of those polite battles, concealed it was thought, from her, under this aspect of cold speeches and indirect allusion. Many a time did Mr. Bruce, the advocate, rise up from his fireside, and, pushing back his chair, walk from the room, with that sigh of impatience. Little Fairy grew very sad over all this, and sometimes dimmed her bright eyes with some tears.

Besides this wonderful love which she had inspired, she had a greater claim to that indulgence which is supposed to spoil children, from her being naturally delicate. She was fragile and airy; and some four years ago had been just snatched from death. A famous physician had a terrible tussle with the grim King of Terrors over her slight little frame, fought him desperately, inch by inch, and finally conquered him. Little Fairy Alice, over whom, for three weeks, there had been white, ghastly faces, and despair and terror and agony, recovers; but it was felt that a second such contest and such a victory was not to be thought of, and would end fatally. She was henceforth to be watched jealously, and that little fairy chest of hers to be fenced about with all manner of precautions.

However, at the end of the first year, it was said that she was getting strong; and in a year or two more, the eminent physician, taking soundings and gauges with his instrument, pronounced that everything was going on well, and that in a year or so she would be as 'stout' as could be desired, and have a chest that might envy all the world for its strength and endurance. Meanwhile, colds and draughts were to be avoided; and, "don't let the little lady work too hard."

Her birthday came round somewhere about Easter—a great festival in the house; the two parents made her presents, and there was usually some little gala organized for the day. Happily, too, at this season, Mr. Bruce had a sort of vacation at his courts, and putting on a little extra pressure in advance, contrived to devote one day to a sort of affectionate illness. And it had come to one special year when Fairy Alice was nine years old and the prettiest little queen of her age that had been seen in the city.

They were to start early on the festive morning, take railway train to some pretty country district where there was abbey ruins, breakfast at a rustic inn, wander about, dine on the grass, and have a very happy day generally. There was a friend whom Mr. Bruce thought of a little wistfully that morning, who had been of those parties before, and whose cheerfulness and hearty spirits had been the most delightful leaven. On the last anniversary he had been with them; but, since then, circumstances had occurred which would render his presence undesirable. Fairy Alice was looking in that direction wistfully also; but though not in full possession of the facts yet, with a wonderful instinct, she never alluded to it or questioned her parents.

This was an old friend of Mr. Bruce's—a shrewd, long-headed, genial, true, honest and blunt man of business; a burly figure, a broad chest, a square head, a thoughtful eye, and shaggy eyebrow sheltering it. A brave, clear, healthy creature in mind and body, with a bell voice, and a quick sharp manner. Captain Bell, too, was his name—"Commander Bell," was upon his card. He had served, not much within the range of shot and shell, but more in a pacific field, yet not less laborious direction: in guard ships, and on packet stations, and along the coasts generally. He was now waiting for something more in the same category.

Fast friend he had always been to Mr. Bruce, rough and thick and thin, as it is called, rough and smooth, broad and narrow, weak and woe. Had often saved and extricated him in certain little difficulties; had counselled him always, and had, unluckily, specially advised him against that marriage with Mrs. Bruce. This interference had one day unluckily travelled to that lady's ears—how it does not much matter now. It became the unpardonable sin, naturally an offense never to be forgiven. And before long, by some ingenious device, kept for such purposes in the conjugal armory, and in the management of which wives are tolerably skilful, there sprang up a coldness and an almost positive hostility.

"Take care, Charles," said Mrs. Bruce; "she will fall out."

"Fall out?" said he, laughing; "Fairy is too wise for that; or if she does, I must go after her, for I have her here fast."

"Oh, how pretty!" said Fairy, with great delight. "On the right, ladies and gentlemen, you will observe—"

"There," said Mrs. Bruce, "you have seen quite enough; so come down, Fairy."

"Oh, mamma, let me stay. I am quite safe here."

"I tell you, Helen, nothing can happen to her. I have fast hold of her."

"But what is the use of it?" said Mrs. Bruce, her film of ice now beginning to spread. "It is so unmeaning. Why encourage the child in this sort of games? No well-brought-up girl ever climbs up on cushions."

Little Fairy, of a sudden grown serious, glides at once to the floor. Color came into Mr. Bruce's cheeks. "What," he was going to say, "even on this day she cannot spare me, or spare this little creature;" but with a strong effort he checked himself, broke into the vulgarity of a faint whistling (an excess he was never guilty of for his private pastime), and said nothing. Again little Fairy, with that curious delicacy so much beyond her year, began tremulously her usual little prattle and so for this once the difficulty was solved.

After a few moments Mr. Bruce worked his mind clear of it; but Mrs. Bruce's nature was one of those which are specially sensitive, and make no difference in their sensitiveness whether the soreness be caused by themselves or others. "She was cold and aggrieved. Just as their journey was coming to an end a brilliant idea occurred to him, which would make a suitable finish to this immortal day. The Sable Harmonists were at this time fulfilling an engagement at the Edinburgh theatre, and after convulsing (said the bills) crowned heads indiscriminately over Europe, were now giving an "elegant drawing-room" entertainment, to what the same official document called "Nightly Thousands."

In fact, it was this very image—gongs, cymbals, certain in its vast comprehension, but a little loose in English—that attracted Mr. Bruce's eye from the railway carriage window. "Suppose," said he, "we finish all with the Ethiopians, and make part of the 'Nightly Thousands'!" I declare we shall!" he added, growing enthusiastic at his own conception; "it will throw little Fairy into convulsions of laughter. She will fall in love with bones, and adore the banjo-fellow who sings the pathetic ballads."

This vision of ecstatic bliss was too much for little Fairy, discreet little Fairy as she was. She almost uttered a cry. The beatific vision of the sable grotesques took her by surprise. "Oh, papa, papa!" she said "how delightful!" You are too good! How we shall enjoy it!"

"Well, then, it is agreed," said he "we shall have just time to drive home, and put on all our festive garments."

Fairy Alice was thinking of a sweet little wreath which would lie quit smoothly on her golden locks. Mrs. Bruce had not yet said a word. For the moment he had forgotten her. "What do you say to the Ethiopians?" he said, with a sort of gaiety.

"Personally, I am not interested," she answered, the ice forming rapidly,—"since you ask me the question."

"Oh, nonsense!" said he, with an affectionate heartiness, "you must come! We could not go without you, eh, Fairy?"

"Oh, mamma must come!" said the little girl, eagerly.

Mrs. Bruce's lip moved a little. "I thought you were consulting me as to the propriety of going at all, not as to whether I would go myself. If you do ask me, I should say we have had enjoyment enough."

"But once a year," said Mr. Bruce, calmly,—"for little Fairy's birthday comes only so often,—such a little disposition is not too much; the most rigid moralist must admit that."

"You can do as you please," said she. "If you ask my advice, I would think it scarcely proper to corrupt the child's mind with these profane shows."

Mr. Bruce colored up. "We will not discuss it," he added, in a low voice, "before her. Wait until we reach home," and he muttered something to himself, yet which she heard, and which took the shape of "outrageous."

They walked home in silence, little Fairy the heaviest-hearted of the three. As they entered the hall, she put up her lips to her father's face. "Papa," she said, "stoop down," and he stooped down. The cold lady had swept on in front. "Don't—don't ask me to see bones to-night, nor," she added with something like a twitch of pain, for it was a trial—"nor the banjo-man. We will give them up. Listen, papa," she added; "stoop down again. I am sure I should not like the banjo, nor—nor the bones."

"My little darling," said he, "don't be cast down; we shall see about it yet. Poor little plant," he said to himself, "she will be dried up—frozen—withered—if this goes on. Run up to the drawing-room and tell them to get tea."

"Helen!" he called out.—Mrs. Bruce had ascended just one flight—"would you mind coming here for moment?"

Mrs. Bruce descended again, stately, cold, impassive, yet with more color in her cheek. She entered his legal study, and the door was closed.

What took place within was not known to any of the household. But for Fairy Alice, who knew and could interpret circumstances with a wonderful intelligence, it was a terrible period, a time almost of agony. Her little heart fluttered distressfully; she was consumed with a strange agitation; for she knew well the unpleasant conflict there was going forward in the sacred study. A quarter of an hour, it was all over with the notion of the sable harmonists. Already were those diverting artists convulsing 'Nightly Thousands'; but she never thought of those exquisite delineations with regret; nay, even they presented images repugnant and almost satanic.

Three-quarters of an hour and the study-door opened; some one passed out with a haughty, defiant rustle. The storm was over. Mrs. Bruce came into the drawing-room with hot cheeks, and little Fairy Alice crept up to her timorously. The stately lady put her by without a word, went to the fire, stood over it, and studied the coals with an intense earnestness, then walked away, still stately. Thus the sun of the happy anniversary set disastrously, this happiest day of the year. For long after it was looked back to with an uneasy horror and shrinking, and if its image presented itself at nightfall, was dismissed with something like a shudder.

For it bore fruit. Within a day or two after it was known that Mrs. Bruce was to make a journey to see her friends in London. To stay for a short or a long time, indistinctly, to go speedily, and with as little delay. No one of the friends or acquaintances guessed what was behind this journey or what a pretense it covered. It was only held as confirmation certain of the fact that Mrs. Bruce was heart and soul an alien, and was longing to be with her English friends. It was thought curious that she was to go alone; and that Fairy Alice was to stay with Mr. Bruce. More curious still was the fact that a female relative of Mr. Bruce's was to come into residence immediately, and take charge of the establishment until Mrs. Bruce returned.

Mr. Bruce pursued his law sheets up as it were in strict confinement in the sacred study. But outside, sad and the solemn preparation went on for departure.