

I. ABBY'S YEAR IN LOWELL.

CHAPTER I.

“MR. ATKINS, I say! Husband, why can't you speak? Do you hear what Abby says?”

“Anything worth hearing '?”was the responsive question of Mr. Atkins; and he laid down the New Hampshire Patriot, and peered over his spectacles, with a look which seemed to say, that an event so uncommon deserved particular attention.

“Why, she says that she means to go to Lowell, and work in the factory.”

“Well, wife, let her go;”and Mr. Atkins took up the Patriot again.

“But I do not see how I can spare her; the spring cleaning is not done, nor the soap made, nor the boys' summer clothes; and you say that you intend to board your own ' men-folks' and keep two more cows than you did last year; and Charley can scarcely go alone. f do not see how I can get along without her.”

“But you say she does not assist you any about the house.”

“Well, husband, she might”

“Yes, she might do a great many things which she does not think of doing; and as I do not see that she means to be useful here, we will let her go to the factory.”

“Father, are you in earnest ? may I go to Lowell ?”said Abby; and she raised her bright black eyes to her father's, with a look of exquisite delight.

“Yes, Abby, if you will promise me one thing, and that is, that you will stay a whole year without visiting us, excepting in case' of sickness, and that you will stay but one year.”

“I will promise anything, father, if you will only let me go; for I thought you would say that I had better stay at home, and pick rocks, and weed the garden, and drop corn, and rake hay; and I do not want to do such work any longer. May I go with the Slater girls next Tuesday? for that is the day they have set for their return.”

“Yes, Abby, if you will remember that you are to stay a year, and only one year.”

Abby retired to rest that night with a heart fluttering with pleasure; for ever since the visit of the Slater girls, with new silk dresses, and Navarino bonnets trimmed with flowers, and lace veils, and gauze handkerchiefs, her head had been filled with visions of fine clothes; and she thought if she could only go where she could dress like them, she should be completely happy. She was naturally very fond of dress, and often, while a little girl, had she sat on the grass bank by the road-side, watching the stage which went daily by her father's retired dwelling; and when she saw the gay ribbons and smart shawls, which passed like a bright phantom before her wondering eyes, she had thought that when older she too would have such things; and she looked forward to womanhood as to a state in which the chief pleasure must consist in wearing fine clothes. But as years passed over her, she became aware that this was a source from which she could never derive any enjoyment, while she remained at home, for her father was neither able nor willing to gratify her in this respect, and she had begun to fear that she must always wear the same brown cambric bonnet, and that the same calico gown would always be her “go-to-meeting dress.”And now what a bright picture had been formed by her ardent and uncultivated imagination !

Yes, she would go to Lowell, and earn all that she possibly could, and spend those earnings in beautiful attire; she would have silk dresses, one of grass green, and another of cherry red, and another upon the colour of which she would decide when she purchased it; and she would have a new Navarino bonnet, far more beautiful than Judith Slater's; and when at

last she fell asleep, it was to dream of satin and lace, and her glowing fancy revelled all night in a vast and beautiful collection of milliners' finery.

But very different were the dreams of Abby's mother; and when she awoke the next morning, her first words to her husband were, "Mr. Atkins, were you serious last night when you told Abby that she might go to Lowell ? I thought at first that you were vexed because I interrupted you, and said it to stop the conversation."

"Yes, wife, I was serious, and you did not interrupt me, for I had been listening to all that you and Abby were saying. She is a wild, thoughtless girl, and I hardly know what it is best to do with her; but perhaps it will be as well to try an experiment, and let her think and act a little while for herself. I expect that she will spend all her earnings in fine clothes, but after she has done so she may see the folly of it; at all events, she will be rather more likely to understand the value of money when she has been obliged to work for it. After she has had her own way for one year, she may possibly be willing to return home, and become a little more steady, and be willing to devote her active energies (for she is* a very capable girl) to household duties, for hitherto her services have been principally out of doors, where she is now too old to work. I am also willing that she should see a little of the world, and what is going on in it; and I hope that, if she receives no benefit, she will at least return to us uninjured."

"O, husband, I have many fears for her," was the reply of Mrs. Atkins, "she is so very giddy and thoughtless, and the Slater girls are as hair-brained as herself, and will lead her on in all sorts of folly. I wish you would tell her that she must stay at home."

"I have made a promise," said Mr. Atkins, "and I will keep it; and Abby, I trust, will keep hers."

Abby flew round in high spirits to make the necessary preparations for her departure, and her mother assisted her with a heavy heart.

CHAPTER II.

THE evening before she left home her father called her to him, and fixing upon her a calm, earnest, and almost mournful look, he said, "Abby, do you ever think?" Abby was subdued, and almost awed, by her father's look and manner. There was something unusual in it something in his expression which was unexpected in him, but which reminded her of her teacher's look at the Sabbath school, when he was endeavouring to impress upon her mind some serious truth. "Yes, father," she at length replied, "I have thought a great deal lately about going to Lowell."

But I do not believe, my child, that you have had one serious reflection upon the subject, and I fear that I have done wrong in consenting to let you go from home. If I was too poor to maintain you here, and had no employment about which you could make yourself useful, I should feel no self-reproach, and would let you go, trusting that all might yet be well; but now I have done what I may at some future time severely repent of; and, Abby, if you do not wish to make me wretched, you will return to us a better, milder, and more thoughtful girl."

That night Abby reflected more seriously than she had ever done in her life before. Her father's words, rendered more impressive by the look and tone with which they were delivered, had sunk into her heart as words of his had never done before. She had been surprised at his ready acquiescence in her wishes, but it had now a new meaning. She felt that she was about to be abandoned to herself, because her parents despaired of being able to do anything for her; they thought her too wild, reckless, and untameable, to be softened by aught but the stern lessons of experience. I will surprise them, said she to herself; I will show them that I have some reflection; and after I come home, my father shall never ask me if I think. Yes, I know what their fears are, and I will let them see that I can take care of myself, and as good care as they have ever taken of me. I know that I have not done as well as I might have done; but I will begin now, and when I return, they shall see that I am a better, milder, and more thoughtful girl. And the money which I intended to spend in fine dress shall be put into the bank; I will save it all, and my father shall see that I can earn money, and take care of it too. O, how different I will be from what they think I am; and how very glad it will make my father and mother to see that I am not so very bad, after all.

New feelings and new ideas had begotten new resolutions, and Abby's dreams that night were of smiles from her mother, and words from her father, such as she had never received nor deserved.

When she bade them farewell the next morning, she said nothing of the change which had taken place in her views and feelings, for she felt a slight degree of self-distrust in her own firmness of purpose.

Abby's self-distrust was commendable and auspicious; but she had a very prominent development in that part of the head where phrenologists locate the organ of firmness; and when she had once determined upon a thing, she usually went through with it. She had now resolved to pursue a course entirely different from that which was expected of her, and as different from the one she had first marked out for herself. This was more difficult, on account of her strong propensity for dress, a love of which was freely gratified by her companions. But when Judith Slater pressed her to purchase this beautiful piece of silk, or that splendid piece of muslin, her constant reply was, "No, I have determined not to buy any such things, and I will keep my resolution."

Before she came to Lowell, she wondered, in her simplicity, how people could live where there were so many stores, and not spend all their money; and it now required all her firmness to resist being overcome by the tempting display of beauties which met her eyes whenever she promenaded the illuminated streets. It was hard to walk by the milliners' shops with an unwavering step; and when she came to the confectioneries, she could not help stopping. But she did not yield to the temptation; she did not spend her money in them. When she saw fine strawberries, she said to herself, "I can gather them in our own pasture next year;" when she looked upon the nice peaches, cherries, and plums which stood in tempting array behind their crystal barriers, she said again, "I will do without them this summer;" and when apples, pears, and nuts were offered to her for sale, she thought that she would eat none of them till she went home. But she felt that the only safe place for her earnings was the savings' bank, and there they were regularly deposited, that it might be out of her power to indulge in momentary whims. She gratified no feeling but a newly-awakened desire for mental improvement, and spent her leisure hours in reading useful books.

Abby's year was one of perpetual self-contest and self-denial; but it was by no means one of unmitigated misery. The ruling desire of years was not to be conquered by the resolution of a moment; but when the contest was over, there was for her the triumph of victory. If the battle was sometimes desperate, there was so much more merit in being conqueror. One Sabbath was spent in tears, because Judith Slater did not wish her to attend their meeting with such a dowdy bonnet; and another fellow-boarder thought her gown must have been made in "the year one." The colour mounted to her cheeks, and the lightning flashed from her eyes, when asked if she had "just come down;" and she felt as though she should be glad to be away from them all, when she heard their sly innuendoes about "bush-whackers." Still she remained unshaken. It is but for a year, said she to herself, and the time and money that my father thought I should spend in folly shall be devoted to a better purpose.

CHAPTER III.

AT the close of a pleasant April day, Mr. Atkins sat at his kitchen fireside, with Charley upon his knees. "Wife," said he to Mrs. Atkins, who was busily preparing the evening meal, "is it not a year since Abby left home?"

"Why, husband, let me think: I always clean up the house thoroughly just before fast-day, and I had not done it when Abby went away. I remember speaking to her about it, and telling her that it was wrong to leave me at such a busy time, and she said, 'Mother, I will be at home to do it all next year.' Yes, it is a year, and I should not be surprised if she should come this week."

"Perhaps she will not come at all," said Mr. Atkins, with a gloomy look; "she has written us but few letters, and they have been very short and unsatisfactory. I suppose she has sense enough to know that no news is better than bad news, and having nothing pleasant to tell about herself, she thinks she will tell us nothing at all. But if I ever get her home again, I will keep her here. I assure you, her first year in Lowell shall also be her last."

"Husband, I told you my fears, and if you had set up your authority, Abby would have been obliged to stay at home; but perhaps she is doing pretty well. You know she is not accustomed to writing, and that may account for the few and short

letters we have received; but they have all, even the shortest, contained the assurance that she would be at home at the close of the year."

"Pa, the stage has stopped here," said little Charley, and he bounded from his father's knee. The next moment the room rang with the shout of "Abby has come ! Abby has come !" In a few moments more, she was in the midst of the joyful throng. Her father pressed her hand in silence, and tears gushed from her mother's eyes. Her brothers and sisters were clamorous with delight, all but little Charley, to whom Abby was a stranger, and who repelled with terror all her overtures for a better acquaintance. Her parents gazed upon her with speechless pleasure, for they felt that a change for the better had taken place in their once wayward girl. Yes, there she stood before them, a little taller and a little thinner, and, when the flush of emotion had faded away, perhaps a little paler; but the eyes were bright in their joyous radiance, and the smile of health and innocence was playing around the rosy lips. She carefully laid aside her new straw bonnet, with its plain trimming of light blue ribbon, and her dark merino dress showed to the best advantage her neat symmetrical form. There was more delicacy of personal appearance than when she left them, and also more softness of manner; for constant collision with so many young females had worn off the little asperities which had marked her conduct while at home. "Well, Abby, how many silk gowns have you got ?" said her father, as she opened a large new trunk. "Not one, father," said she; and she fixed her dark eyes upon him with an expression which told all. "But here are some little books for the children, and a new calico dress for mother; and here is a nice black silk handkerchief for you to wear around your neck on Sundays; accept it, dear father, for it is your daughter's first gift."

"You had better have bought me a pair of spectacles, for I am sure I cannot see anything." There were tears in the rough farmer's eyes, but he tried to laugh and joke, that they might not be perceived. "But what did you do with all your money?" "I thought I had better leave it there," said Abby, and she placed her bank-book in her father's hand. Mr. Atkins looked a moment, and the forced smile faded away. The surprise had been too great, and tears fell thick and fast from the father's eyes.

"It is but a little," said Abby. "But it was all you could save," replied her father, "and I am proud of you, Abby; yes, proud that I am the father of such a girl. It is not this paltry sum which pleases me so much, but the prudence, self-command, and real affection for us which you have displayed. But was it not sometimes hard to resist temptation ?"

"Yes, father, you can never know how hard; but it was the thought of this night which sustained me through it all. I knew how you would smile, and what my mother would say and feel; and though there have been moments, yes, hours, that have seen me wretched enough, yet this one evening will repay for all. There is but one thing now to mar my happiness, and that is the thought that this little fellow has quite forgotten me;" and she drew Charley to her side. But the new picture book had already effected wonders, and in a few moments he was in her lap, with his arms around her neck, and his mother could not persuade him to retire that night until he had given "sister Abby" a hundred kisses.

"Father," said Abby, as she arose to retire, when the tall clock struck eleven, "may I not sometime go back to Lowell ? I should like to add a little to the sum in the bank, and I should be glad of one silk gown !"

"Yes, Abby, you may do anything you wish. I shall never again be afraid to let you spend a year in Lowell."

LUCINDA.