

the country. The boys and girls of today know very little of the industry and thrift it has taken to settle the land now so prosperous and full of wealth and of people. The country folks had to depend mostly upon their own exertions, instead of fortunes left them from rich ancestors; they had come away from their ancestral homes, or their fathers had, and the only legacy they counted upon was the honor and honesty of those whose names they bore; and men rose as it were upon their merits, to be leaders of the people, or "heroes in the strife" instead of being boomed by political bosses. I guess that must be why we hear people talk of "the good old days." But I must launch into my story or my readers will think this is a preamble.

In a very old house, old for those primitive days, in central New York, a widow with her family of daughters and one son, was living contentedly, it seemed, but the Western fever came and the young man wanted to seek his fortune in the new West. He had confided to his mother his idea of leaving York state, but she scarcely thought he could be in earnest so determined when they were alone one day to sound him on the subject. And addressing him she said, "And so you've made up your mind, have you, to go further west, George?" and she looked up at her tall boy who measured six feet without his boots. "Yes, decidedly. I've tried teaching here, and working the farm as well, and I'm not getting on fast enough, and even if I were, I have the Western fever, I want to do more, work on a larger scale than one can in a small town. I prefer prairies to woods, I think, there's more room to breathe in."

"I can't see anything you have to complain of here," said his mother. "You are highly respected according to your years, George, think how young you are, though you do seem much older, because of your manner quite as much as your height, I fancy. I do think your cares have been too many; if the girls had married and had homes of their own, your responsibilities would have been lighter."

"I'm not complaining of anything, and especially of my sisters; they are provided for by their father's will, except one, and I shall always care for her until she marries, and watch over her afterwards, you may depend upon that, but that's neither here nor there, I'm going West, I shall start out alone as soon as spring opens, if you are unwilling to leave the homestead, mother, so that's settled."

Mrs. Fleming knew it was no use remonstrating when George made up his mind, so she said no more, but went about with a sober face and downcast look, for she loved the old home, and sometimes she fancied sentiment had died out in the new generation. She was aware that the girls would object to her going, but she must go with her boy, he was the pride of her life, and she felt disappointed more on his account really than the girls had not married when they were younger. Now they were decidedly too particular and their opportunities for choosing were not so good as they had been formerly; though they still entertained some of their old beaux, he had been coming in the same way for years. Mrs. Fleming was not a match maker and consequently let things take their course, much the wisest plan.

The weather was extremely cold and the family always sat together in the evening in the long dining room and enjoyed each other's society; it saved fire and work to do this and then they liked it better, and the parlor fire was only lighted on state occasions, nor the best chamber used either for that matter, that was reserved for people from a distance, Albany or New York City, or some grand visitor, for the

family were well connected, and could entertain royally, and were rather fond of it, especially in winter time when days were dull and they were tired of indoor occupations. There was plenty of linen, too, in the high chests of drawers, and flannel in abundance, all home-made, packed away in musk and lavender; all the women folks knew how to spin and weave in those days, and every girl was expected to make her own outfit of linen and the like, when she was going to be married, and the five daughters of Rachel Fleming, born while she was the wife of the Rev. Erastus Gilman, were not behind hand with their stock of bed and table linen and flannel and linsey-woolsey, nor of their own personal apparel. But aside from all this comparatively new material—there were closets and presses filled with those things made at a still earlier period in Mrs. John Fleming's day (she who was Hettie Warner) and though it was not so fine as theirs, it had the sanctity of age, and the Fleming mark. The present Mrs. Fleming, however, was as proud of her own name and lineage as the Flemings themselves, if not more so, and talked to her son of the Van Dykes who had settled in Manhattan very early in the seventeenth century and were as valiant in resisting the British as the Yankees were, and a great deal prouder if they were not braver but she was not quite so sure of that.

On the day when George announced his decision in decisive terms to his mother, she pondered over all the changes that would have to be made in their manner of living, and what the breaking-up would involve; and she thought how little George knew, manly and generous as he was, what it would be to the women of the family, this sundering of old ties, this going out from the home into the wide, wide world for which he yearned with a passionate longing, as boys do; he knew not why, but it was his destiny.

Mrs. Fleming felt, too, she was no longer a young woman to endure hardships, and when she looked back upon the past it was no wonder she felt old, her hair was plentifully streaked with gray, and though she was straight and trim in figure, and her years sat lightly on her, perhaps because she was surrounded with young people, yet she almost gave way in thinking over George's words and considered all that it must mean to her in particular. The girls must be spoken to seriously; she was sure they had not thought of it as a certainty at all, and she determined to tell them that very day. Christmas was near and preparations had already begun for the annual holidays. And with the thought of Christmas came the flood of memories surging through her soul and welling up in tears. But she wiped away the tears with that old-fashioned mastery that will not betray emotion.

Evening was drawing near and supper over, the family gathered around the great fire of hickory logs burning brightly on the massive iron fire-dogs. The tall brass candle sticks on the high mantel were lighted though they were only tallow dips, and on the great oak table, drawn near the fire, a lamp (minus a chimney) gave an uncertain light by which, with the aid of the fire, the evening work was done night after night, year in and year out, fine sewing, embroidery, mending, knitting of all kinds, fancy or plain, as well as reading.

Ruth, the eldest daughter, noticed her mother's soberer demeanor, for she was usually cheerful and smiling and observed to her sisters aside, as her mother sat with her needles, knitting as usual, "Do you see how worried mother looks; I'm afraid she's ill or may be she is over tired. We must be more careful about her; she does far too much for her time of life." But

before Sarah, who was nearest, could reply, Mrs. Fleming had caught the idea, by intuition, as it were, and began her defense, saying, "Yes, girls, I am in a quandary, not with work, nor about Christmas or company. I am glad there's a house full coming; but I've something to tell you all, and as your brother is out, it is a good time to explain." "I know what it is," said Almira, one of the younger ones; "George is going to be married." "No, quite different; a marriage would be an agreeable surprise to us all. It is that he is going West in the spring." For a minute no one spoke, each one waited for the other; finally Ruth, who was looked up to by the other girls as superior in judgment, addressing her mother, said, "Don't permit it mother, he musn't go; he'll die of fever and ague; he can never stand the climate."

"Unfortunately it is quite impossible to prevent him, and we shall be obliged to break up the home, and therefore I am more than glad Christmas is upon us and the company invited and we can enjoy ourselves with our friends once again before we say good bye."

"But mother, we're not going, we'll keep the home all right, and George will be glad to bring you back and Elsie too, for of course she'll go if you do, though why either of you need to be more than I can see," said Ruth persistently and speaking for her sisters.

"But you forget my dears, this is the Fleming house, and that in your father's lifetime we lived at the rectory where all of you were born except George and Elsie." "No mother," Ruth continued I don't forget nor that we paid our money and your money to rebuild and furnish the house when it was going to rack and ruin, and that we built a new barn and carriage house and ever so many fences that were needed, and that it was some of our money too that helped George to go away to school and get ready for college; and now he's given up the idea and wants to buy prairie land in the Far West."

It was all quite true and the girls simply adored their only brother, even if he was not of the same paternal ancestor, but they would not let their mother forget or ignore their claims upon the home. All this would not have availed in a court of law for single women had no rights in that day that could not be set aside unless there were legal papers drawn up; however, George Fleming was too fond of his spinster sisters not to be magnanimous with them, and he had no intention of selling the home. Dr. Collins Fleming, his uncle, had died recently and left him a snug little sum, and his brother, who had been born abroad, was also dead, so that the money all came to him; a small legacy from his Aunt Eunice had also been left. She had never married, and at her death divided her income between her sister Abbie and her nephew George, who was a general favorite.

After the discussion of money matters, Mrs. Fleming and the girls talked of the preparations for Christmas, which sort of drove away the gloomy feeling, and when George came in late the usual good humor was restored. Coming in abruptly and not knowing of the conversation, George said, "It's snowing like blazes outside, we're going to have fine sleighing for Christmas. I'll be bound, I hope it won't hinder the folks coming from down country," he added apologetically. "I should hope not" put in Hannah, who spoke now for the first time since the colloquy begun about the West, she had been listening attentively, as quiet people do, and so had Mercy, the youngest of the five. The minister had named her Mercy for his mother, who had been a model woman in her way and