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Half a Century

Chapter 1—I Find Life

Those soft pink circles which fell upon my face and hands, caught in my hair, danced around my feet, and frolicked over the billowy waves of bright, green grass—did I know they were apple blossoms? Did I know it was an apple tree through which I looked up to the blue sky, over which white clouds scudded away toward the great hills? Had I slept and been awakened by the wind to find myself in the world?

It is probable that I had for some time been familiar with that tree, and all my surroundings, for I had been breathing two and a half years, and had made some progress in the art of reading and sewing, saying catechism and prayers. I knew the gray kitten which walked away; knew that the girl who brought it back and reproved me for not holding it was Adaline, my nurse; knew that the young lady who stood near was cousin Sarah Alexander, and that the girl to whom she gave directions about putting bread into a brick oven was Big Jane; that I was Little Jane, and that the white house across the common was Squire Horner's. There was no surprise in anything save the loveliness of blossom and tree; of the grass beneath and the sky above; and this first indelible imprint on my memory seems to have found this inner something I call me, as capable of reasoning as it has ever been.

While I sat and wondered, father came, took me in his loving arms and carried me to mother's room, where she lay in a tent-bed, with blue foliage and blue birds outlined on the white ground of the curtains, like the apple-boughs on the blue and white sky. The cover was turned down, and I was permitted to kiss a baby-sister, and warned to be good, lest Mrs. Dampster, who had brought the

baby, should come and take it away. This autocrat was pointed out, as she sat in a gray dress, white kerchief and cap, and no other potentate has ever inspired me with such reverential awe.

My second memory is of a "great awakening" to a sense of sin, and of my lost and undone condition. On a warm summer day, while walking alone on the common which lay between home and Squire Horner's house, I was struck motionless by the thought that I had forgotten God. It seemed probable, considering the total depravity of my nature, that I had been thinking bad thoughts, and these I labored to recall. that I might repent and pleaded with Divine mercy for forgiveness. But alas! I could remember nothing save the crowning crime — forgetfulness of God.

I seemed to stand outside, and see myself a mere mite, in a pink sun-bonnet and white bib, the very chief of sinners, for the probability was I had been thinking of that bonnet and bib. It was quite certain that God knew my sin; and ah, the crushing horror that I could, by no possibility conceal aught from the All-seeing Eye, while it was equally impossible to win its approval. The Divine Law was so perfect that I could not hope to meet its requirements—the Divine Law-giver so alert that no sin could escape detection.

Under that cloud of doom the sunshine grew dark, and I did not dare to move until a cheery voice called out something about my pretty bonnet, and gave me a sense of companionship in this dreadful, dreadful world. Rose, a large native African, had spoken to me from her place in Squire Horner's kitchen, and I went home full of solemn resolves and sad forebodings.

This is probably what evangelists would call my conversion, and it came in my third summer. There was a fire in the grate when mother showed Dr. Robt. Wilson, our family physician, a pair of wristbands and collar I had stitched for father, and when they spoke of me as not being three years old — but then I had in my mind the marks of that "great awakening."

To me, no childhood was possible under the training this indicates, yet in giving that training, my parents were loving and gentle as they were faithful. Believing in the danger of eternal death, they could but guard me from it, by the only means of which they had any knowledge.

Before the completion of that momentous third year of life, I had learned to read the New Testament readily, and was deeply grieved that our pastor played "patty cake" with my hands, instead of hearing me recite my catechism, and talking of original sin. During that winter I went regularly to school, where I was kept at the head of a spelling-class, in which were young men and women. One of these, Wilkins McNair, used to carry me home, much amused, no doubt, by my supremacy. His father, Col. Dunning McNair, was proprietor of the village, and had been ridiculed for predicting that, in the course of human events, there would be a graded, McAdamized road, all the way from Philadelphia to Pittsburg, and that if he did not live to see it his children would. He was a neighbor and friend of Wm. Wilkins, afterwards Judge, Secretary of War, and Minister to Russia, and had named his son for him. When his prediction was fulfilled and the road made, it ran through his land, and on it he laid out the village and called it Wilkinsburg. Mr. McNair lived south of it in a rough stone house—the manor of the neighborhood—with half a dozen slave huts ranged before the kitchen door, and the gateway between his grounds and the village, as seen from the upper windows of our house, was, to me, the boundary between the known and the unknown, the dread portal through which came Adam, the poor old ragged slave, with whom my nurse threatened me when I did not do as she wished. He was a wretched creature, who made and sold hickory brooms, as he dragged his rheumatic limbs on the down grade of life, until he found rest by freezing to death in the woods, where he had gone for saplings.

I was born on the 6th of December, 1815, in Pittsburg, on the bank of the Monongahela, near its confluence with the Allegheny. My father was Thomas Cannon, and my mother Mary Scott. They were both Scotch-Irish and descended from the Scotch Reformers. On my mother's side were several men and women who signed the "Solemn League and Covenant," and defended it to the loss of livings, lands and life. Her mother, Jane Grey, was of that family which was allied to royalty, and gave to England her nine day's queen.

This grandmother I remember as a stately old lady, quaintly and

plainly dressed, reading a large Bible or answering questions by quotations from its pages. She was unsuspicious as an infant, always doubtful about "actual transgressions" of any, while believing in the total depravity of all. Educated in Ireland as an heiress, she had not been taught to write, lest she should marry without the consent of her elder brother guardian. She felt that we owed her undying gratitude for bestowing her hand and fortune on our grandfather, who was but a yoeman, even if "he did have a good leasehold, ride a high horse, wear spurs, and have Hamilton blood in his veins." She made us familiar with the battle of the Boyne and the sufferings in Londonderry, in both of which her great-grandfather had shared, but was incapable of that sectarian rancor, which marks so many descendents of the men who met on those fields of blood and fought for their convictions.

In April, 1816, father moved from Pittsburg out to the new village of Wilkinsburg; took with him a large stock of goods, bought property, built the house in which I first remember him, and planted the apple tree which imprinted the first picture on my memory. But the crash which followed the last war with England brought general bankruptcy; the mortgages on Col. McNair's estate made the titles valueless, and this, with the fall of his real estate in Pittsbnrg, reduced father to poverty, from which he never recovered.

Chapter 2—Progress in Calvinism

My parents were members of the Covenanter Congregation, of which Dr. John Black was pastor for forty-five years. He was a man of power, a profound logician, with great facility in conveying ideas. To his pulpit ministrations I am largely indebted for whatever ability I have to discriminate between truth and falsehood; but the church was in Pittsburg, and our home seven miles away, so we seldom went to meeting. The rules of the denomination forbade "occasional hearing." Father and mother had once been "sessioned" for stopping on their way home to hear the conclusion of a communion service in Dr. Bruce's church, which was Seceder.

So our Sabbaths were usually spent in religious services at home. These I enjoyed, as it aided my life-work of loving and thinking about God, who seemed, to my mind, to have some special need of my attention. Nothing was done on that day which could have been done the day before, or could be postponed till the day after. Coffee grinding was not thought of, and once, when we had no flour for Saturday's baking, and the buckwheat cakes were baked the evening before and warmed on Sabbath morning, we were all troubled about the violation of the day.

There was a Presbyterian "meeting-house" two miles east of Wilkinsburg, where a large, wealthy congregation worshipped. Rev. James Graham was pastor, and unlike other Presbyterians, they never "profaned the sanctuary" by singing "human compositions," but confined themselves to Rouse's version of David's Psalms, as did our own denomination. This aided that laxness of discipline which permitted Big Jane, Adaline and brother William to attend sometimes, under care of neighbors. Once I was allowed to accompany them.

I was the proud possessor of a pair of red shoes, which I carried rolled up in my 'kerchief while we walked the two miles. We stopped in the woods; my feet were denuded of their commonplace attire and arrayed in white hose, beautifully clocked, and those precious shoes, and my poor conscience tortured about my vanity. The girls also exchanged theirs for morocco slippers. We concealed our walking shoes under a mossy log and proceeded to the meeting-house.

It was built in the form of a T, of hewn logs, and the whole structure, both inside and out, was a combination of those soft grays and browns with which nature colors wood, and in its close setting of primeval forest, made a harmonious picture. Atone side lay a graveyard; birds sang in the surrounding trees, some of which reached out their giant arms and touched the log walls. Swallows had built nests under the eaves outside, and some on the rough projections inside, and joined their twitter to the songs of other birds and the rich organ accompaniment of wind and trees.

There were two sermons, and in the intermission, a church sociable, in fact if not in name. Friends who lived twenty miles apart,

met here, exchanged greetings and news, gave notices and invitations, and obeyed the higher law of kindness under protest of their Calvinistic consciences. In this breathing-time we ate our lunch, went to the nearest house and had a drink from the spring which ran through the stone milk-house. It was a day full of sight-seeing and of solemn, grand impressions.

Of the two sermons I remember but one, and this from the text "Many are called but few are chosen," and the comments were Calvinism of the most rigid school. On our way home, my brother William—three years older than I—was very silent and thoughtful for some time, then spoke of the sermon, of which I entirely approved, but he stoutly declared that he did not believe it; did not believe God called people to come to him while he did not choose to have them come. It would not be fair, indeed, he thought it would be mean.

That evening, when we were saying the shorter catechism, the question, "What are the decrees of God?", came to me, and after repeating the answer, I asked father to explain it — not that I needed any explanation, but that William might be enlightened; for I was anxious about his soul, on account of his skepticism. Enlightened he could not be, and even to father expressed his doubts and disapprobation. We renewed the discussion when alone, and during all his life I labored with him; but soon found the common refuge of orthodox minds, in feeling that those especially loved by them will be made exceptions in the general distribution of wrath due to unbelief.

One day I went with him to hunt the cow. We came to a wood just north of the village, where the wind roared and shook the trees so that I was quite awe-stricken; but he held my hand and assured me there was no danger, until he suddenly drew me back, then exclaiming:

"Oh see!" as a great tree came crashing down across the path before us, and so near that it must have fallen on us if he had not seen it and stepped back. Even then he refused to go home without the cow, and taking up a daddy-long-legs, he inquired of it where she was, and started in the direction indicated, when we were arrested by the voice of Big Jane, who had come to search for us.

On reaching home, we found a new baby-sister, Elizabeth. Soon after her birth, in April, 1891, father moved back to Pittsburg, and lived on Sixth street, opposite Trinity Church, on property belonging to my maternal grandfather. There was no church there at that time, but a thickly peopled graveyard, which adjoined that of the First Presbyterian Church, on the corner of Sixth and Wood. These were above the level of the street, and were protected by a worm-fence that ran along the top of a green bank on which we played and gathered flowers.

Grandmother took me sometimes to walk in these graveyards at night, and there talked to me about God and heaven and the angels. I was sufficiently interested in these, but especially longed to see the ghosts, and often went to look for them. We had a bachelor uncle who delighted in telling us tales of the supernatural, and he peopled these graveyards with ghosts, in which I believed as implicitly as in the Revelations made to John on the Isle of Patmos, which were my favorite literature.

When the congregation concluded to abandon the "Round Church," which stood on the triangle between Liberty, Wood and Sixth streets, and began to dig for a foundation for Trinity, where it now stands, there was great desecration of graves. One day a thrill of excitement and stream of talk ran through the neighborhood, about a Mrs. Cooper, whose body had been buried three years, and was found in a wonderful state of preservation, when the coffin was laid open by the diggers. It was left that the friends might remove it, and that night I felt would be the time for ghosts. So I went over alone, and while I crouched by the open grave, peering in, a cloud passed, and the moon poured down a flood of light, by which I could see the quiet sleeper, with folded hands, taking her last, long rest.

It was inexpressibly grand, solemn and sad. There were no gas-lights, no paved street near, no one stirring. Earth was far away and heaven near at hand, but no ghost came, and I went home disappointed. Afterwards I had a still more disheartening adventure.

I had gone an errand to cousin Alexander's, on Fifth street, stayed late, and coming home, found Wood Street deserted. The

moon shone brightly, but on the graveyard side were heavy shadows, except in the open space opposite the church. I was on the other side, and there was the office of the Democratic paper, and over the door the motto "Our country, right or wrong." This had long appeared to be an uncanny spot, owing to the wickedness of this sentiment, and I was thinking of the possibility of seeing Auld Nick guarding his property, when my attention was attracted to a tall, white figure in the moonlight, outside the graveyard fence.

I stopped an instant, in great surprise, and listened for footsteps, but no sound accompanied the motion. It did not walk, but glided, and must have risen out of the ground, for only a moment before there was nothing visible. I clasped my hands in mute wonder, but my ghost was getting away, and to make its acquaintance I must hurry. Crossing the street I ran after and gained on it. It passed into the shadow of the engine house, on across Sixth street, into the moonlight, then into the shadow, before I overtook it, when it was a mortal woman, barefoot, in a dress which was probably a faded print. Most prints faded then, and this was white, long and scant, making a very ghostly robe, while on her head she carried a bundle tied up in a sheet. She had, of course, come out of Virgin alley, where many laundresses lived, and had just passed out of the shadow when I saw her. We exchanged salutations, and I went home to lie and brood over the unreliable nature of ghosts.

I was trying to get into a proper frame of mind for saying my prayers, but I doubt if they were said that night, as we were soon aroused by the cries of fire. Henry Clay was being burned, in effigy, on the corner of Sixth and Wood streets, to show somebody's disapproval of his course in the election of John Quincy Adams. The Democratic editor, McFarland, was tried and found guilty of the offense, and took revenge in ridiculing his opponents. Charles Glenn, a fussy old gentleman, member of our church, was an important witness for the prosecution, and in the long, rhyming account published by the defendant, he was thus remembered:

"Then in came Glenn, that man of peace,
And swore to facts as sleek as grease;
By all his Uncle Aleck's geese,
McFarland burnt the tar-barrel."

It was before this time that Lafayette revisited Pittsburg, and people went wild to do him honor. The schools paraded for his inspection, and ours was ranged along the pavement in front of the First Presbyterian church, the boys next the curb, the girls next the fence, all in holiday attire, and wearing blue badges. The distinguished visitor passed up between them, leaning on the arm of another gentleman, bowing and smiling as he went. When he came to where I stood, he stepped aside, laid his hand on my head, turned up my face and spoke to me.

I was too happy to know what he said, and in all the years since that day, that hand has lain on my brow as a consecration.

Chapter 3—Father's Death

In the city we went regularly to meeting, and Dr. Black seemed always to talk to *me*, and I had no more difficulty in understanding his sermons, than in mastering the details of the most simple duty. The first of which I preserve the memory was about Peter, who was made to illustrate the growth of crime. He began with boasting; then came its natural fruit, cowardice, in following his master afar off; next falsehood, and from this he proceeded to perjury. It did seem that a disciple of Christ could go no further; but for falsehood and perjury there might be excuse in the hope of reward, and Peter found a lower deep, for "he began to curse and to swear." A profane swearer is without temptation, and serves the devil for the pure love of the service. What more could Peter do to prove that he knew not Jesus?

In the communion service is a ceremony called "fencing the tables," which consists of an appeal to the consciences of intended communicants. Dr. Black began with the first commandment and forbade those living in its violation to come to the table, and so proceeded through the decalogue. When he came to the eighth, he straightened himself, placed his hands behind him, and with thrilling emphasis said, "I debar from this holy table of the Lord, all slave-holders and horse-thieves, and other dishonest persons," and without another word passed to the ninth commandment.

Soon after we returned to the city, sister Mary died of consumption, and father's health began to fail. I have preserved the spinning wheel on which mother converted flax yarn into thread, which she sold to aid in the support of the family, but soon the entire burden fell on her, for father's illness developed into consumption, from which he died in March, 1823.

In spite of all the testamentary precautions he could take, whatever of his estate might have been available for present support, was in the hands of lawyers, and mother was left with her children and the debts. There were the contents of his shop and warehouse, some valuable real estate in Pittsburg, which had passed out of his possession on a claim of ground-rent, and a village home minus a title.

William was a mechanical genius, so mother set him to making little chairs, which he readily sold, but he liked better to construct fire engines, which were quite wonderful but brought no money. He had a splendid physique, was honorable and faithful, and if mother had been guided by natural instinct in governing him, all would have been well; but he never met the requirements of the elders of the church, who felt it their duty to manage our family affairs. So he was often in trouble, and I, who gloried in him, contrived to shield him from many a storm.

At this time there was a fashionable *furor* for lace work. Mother sent me to learn it, and then procured me pupils, whom I taught, usually sitting on their knee. But lace work soon gave way to painting on velvet. This, too, I learned, and found profit in selling pictures. All, what pictures I did make.

I reached the culminating glory of artist life,, when Judge Braden, of Butler, gave me a new crisp five dollar bill for a Goddess of Liberty.

Indeed, he wanted me to be educated for an artist, and was farseeing and generous enough to have been my permanent patron, had an artistic education, or any other education, been possible for a Western Pennsylvania girl in that dark age—the first half of the nineteenth century.

Mother made a discovery in the art of coloring leghorn and straw bonnets, which brought her plenty of work, so we never

lacked comforts of life, although grandfather's executors made us pay rent for the house we occupied.

Chapter 4—Go to Boarding-School

During my childhood there were no public schools in Pennsylvania. The State was pretty well supplied with colleges for boys, while girls were permitted to go to subscription schools. To these we were sent part of the time, and in one of them Joseph Caldwell. afterwards a prominent missionary to India, was a schoolmate. But we had Dr. Black's sermons, full of grand morals, science and history.

In lieu of colleges for girls, there were boarding-schools, and Edgeworth was esteemed one of the best in the State. It was at Braddock's Field, and Mrs. Clever, an English woman of high culture, was its founder and principal. To it my cousin, Mary Alexander, was sent, but returned homesick, and refused to go back unless I went with her. It was arranged that I should go for a few weeks, as I was greatly in need of country air; and, highly delighted, I was at the rendezvous at the hour, one o'clock, with my box, ready for this excursion into the world of polite literature. Mary was also there, and a new scholar, but Father Olever did not come for us until four o'clock. He was a small, nervous gentleman, and lamps were already lighted in the smoky city when we started to drive twelve miles through spring mud, on a cloudy, cheerless afternoon. We knew he had no confidence in his power to manage those horses, though we also knew he would do his best to save us from harm; but as darkness closed around us, I think we felt like babes in the woods, and shuddered with vague fear as much as with cold and damp. When we reached the "Bullock Pens," half a mile west of Wilkinsburg, there were many lights and much bustle in and around the old yellow tavern, where teamsters were attending to their weary horses. Here we turned off to the old mud road, and came to a place of which I had no previous knowledge — a place of outer darkness and chattering teeth.

We met no more teams, saw no more lights, but seemed to be in

an utterly uninhabited country. Then, after an hour of wearisome jolting and plunging, we discovered that the darkness had not been total, for the line of the horizon had been visible, but now it was swallowed up. We knew we were in a wood, by the rush of the wind amid the dried white oak leaves—knew that the road grew rougher at ever step—that our driver became more nervous as he applied the brake, and we went down, down.

Still the descent grew steeper. We stopped, and Father Olever felt for the bank with his whip to be sure we were on the road. Then we heard the sound of rushing, angry waters, mingled with the roar of the wind, and he seemed to hesitate about going on, but we could not very well stay there, and he once more put his horses in motion, while we held fast and prayed silently to the great Deliverer. After stopping again and feeling for the bank, lest we should go over the precipitous hillside, which he knew was there, he proceeded until, with a great plunge, we were in the angry waters, which arose to the wagon-bed, and roared and surged all around us. The horses tried to go on, when something gave way, and our guardian concluded further progress was impossible, and began to hallo at the top of his voice.

For a long time there was no response; then came an answering call from a long distance. Next a light appeared, and that, too, was far away, but came toward us. When it reached the brink of the water, and two men with it, we felt safe. The light-bearer held it up so that we saw him quite well, and his peculiar appearance suited his surroundings. He was more an overgrown boy than a man, beardless, with a long swarthy face, black hair and keen black eyes. He wore heavy boots outside his pantaloons, a blouse and slouch hat, spoke to his companion as one having authority, and with a laugh said to our small gentleman:

"Is this where you are?" but gave no heed to the answer as he waded in and threw off the check lines, saying: "I wonder you did not drown your horses."

He next examined the wagon, paying no more attention to Father Olever's explanations than to the water in which he seemed quite at home, and when he had finished his inspection he said:

"They must go to the house," and handing the light to the driver

he took us up one by one and carried us to the wet bank as easily as a child carries her doll. He gave some directions to his companion, took the light and said to us:

"Come on," and we walked after him out into the limitless blackness, nothing doubting. We went what seemed a long way, following this brigand-looking stranger, without seeing any sign of life or hearing any sound save the roar of wind and water, but on turning a fence corner, we came in sight of a large two-story house, with a bright light streaming out through many windows, and a wide-open door. There was a large stone barn on the other side of the road, and to this our conductor turned, saying to us: "Go on to the house." This we did, and were met at the open door by a middle-aged woman, shading with one hand the candle held in the other. This threw a strong light on her face, which instantly reminded me of an eagle. She wore a double-bordered white cap over her black hair, and looked suspiciously at us through her small keen, black eyes, but kindly bade us come in to a low wainscoted hall, with broad stairway and many open doors. Through one of these and a second door we saw a great fire of logs, and I should have liked to sit by it, but she led us into a square wainscotted room on the opposite side, in which blazed a coal fire almost as large as the log heap in the kitchen.

She gave us seats, and a white-haired man who sat in the corner, spoke to us, and made me feel comfortable. Up to this time all the surroundings had had an air of enchanted castles, brigands, ghosts, witches. The alert woman with the eagle face, in spite of her kindness, made me feel myself an object of doubtful character, but this old man set me quite at ease. We were no more than well warmed when the wagon drove to the door, and the boy-man with the lantern appeared, saying,

"Come on."

We followed him again, and he lifted us into the wagon, while the mistress of the house stood on the large flag-stone door-step, shading her candle-flame, and giving directions about our wraps.

"Coming events cast their shadows before," when they are between us and the light; but that night the light must have been between them and me; for I bade good-bye to our hostess without