

Sedgwick, Catharine Maria [by the author of "The Linwoods," "Poor Rich Man," "Love Token," "Live & Let Live," &c.]. "Eighteen Hundred Thirty-Eight's Farewell," in *Stories for Young Persons*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940, pp. 39-51.

EIGHTEEN HUNDRED THIRTY-EIGHT'S
FAREWELL

TO THE GIRLS AT THE L**** SCHOOL.

"A garland shall be framed
By art and nature's skill,
Of sundry coloured flowers,
In token of good-will—
The blessed crown of glory,
And the hopes which us do fill."

It is not necessary to remind you, my dear girls, of the circumstances under which this "Farewell" was written; but a word to those to whom it might otherwise be incomprehensible. All my young readers know that the time that elapses between being ready for a pleasure and the actual arrival of the pleasure, is tedious, and seems never-ending. To fill up this chasm the Farewell was written. As it is the vocation of an old lady to advise, and (as you think, doubtless) the destiny of school girls to be advised, I ventured to infuse a little of this medicinal quality into my evening's entertainment. The girls gathered round me, and I began the reading with fear and trembling, lest, on this occasion, consecrated to festivity, I should offend some one's self-love, awake some discordant note. Never shall I forget the animation, the sweetness, and, I may add, the gratitude with which my little essay was received. Could there be a stronger proof of the candour and magnanimity of the circle whose merry voices still ring in my ears? If any were wanted, it is afforded in the wish expressed by one and all, that the "Farewell" should be printed in their book.

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It was Newyear's eve, and the girls of a certain school somewhere between Georgia and Maine had put the last stroke and stitch to their gifts for the next day's fête. How many bright thoughts, kind thoughts, and hours of patient labour had been bestowed on them! how many hard-earned and more hardly-husbanded shillings had been expended on them !*[¹] how many pleasures had been foregone for other's pleasures on that happy fête-day!

The celebration was to be held on the evening of Newyear's day. The beautiful custom of the German evergreen tree, with some little modification (an exotic must undergo some changes in a new soil and climate), has been planted in our home- ground for some four or five years, so that it has fairly taken root, and has its associations and fond memories. The Italians have a superstition that a transplanted tree will not thrive till it has been danced around. This acclimating process has not been neglected with our evergreen.

The girls had planted their tree for 1839. Their preparations, as I have said, were finished. They were assembled round the iron stove. The fire had been replenished for the last time by a certain little vestal, who supplies it as eagerly as any vestal ever fed the sacred fire. The howling winds

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swept over the hills, and the lights were burning dimly, when a singular knocking was heard at the door that opened into the hall. The strokes were three times three, distinctly repeated. Every voice was hushed, every sleepy eye wide opened. Our girls were good and rational, and not more addicted than other girls of the nineteenth century to reading and believing ghost stories; but there was something new and ominous in the sound, and they very naturally hesitated to move, and probably would not have stirred till daylight, if Ariel, the youngest among them, "a dainty spirit," who never hesitated long, had not sprang forward and opened the door.

A woman (an old woman, as it seemed, from her tremulous voice and faltering step) entered. Her person was completely enveloped in a long gray serge cloak, and her head and face hidden by a little black bonnet and an impenetrable veil. Ariel started back. "You wish to see Mrs. ____?" she said.

"No."

"Mr. _____, then?"

"No; my visit is to you, young ladies. Shut the door, my child, and take your station among the rest." The girls were confounded; but, obeying the impulse of their habitual courtesy, several rose at the same moment to offer the stranger a chair. She declined the civility; and, leaning on a staff which she held in her right hand, and by the aid of which she seemed, with much difficulty, to sustain her tottering person, she began: "You see in me, my young friends, the dying year. The time of my departure is at hand. When the clock

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strikes twelve I shall be no more. But I did not come here to sigh over my own mortality, but to prepare you to receive my successors in such a spirit that you will part with them without regret or remorse."

"I have watched over you through our twelve months' acquaintance. The knowledge you have acquired and the good you have done will survive my death. I carry with me the account of these your imperishable riches.

"Some among you have diligently used the opportunities I have afforded you. You have heaped treasures on treasures as the months passed on. There are others who have not seemed to realize that these opportunities were passing by, and that they and I should vanish together. But you have all, I say it with pride and pleasure, profited in some degree by my existence. So much

have I become attached to you, that I could not quit the world without bidding you farewell, giving you my dying advice, and telling you a secret."

"A secret? a secret?" exclaimed the girls in a breath; and they all drew nearer to the old lady, who thus proceeded: "Dying people may be sincere without giving offence, and therefore I do not hesitate to tell you that your progress is hindered by certain faults, to which you are yourselves quite blind. These faults operate like weights or clogs, holding you back, and in every way impeding your advancement. It is your blindness to them that I beg you to cure before the coronation of my successor, her majesty Eighteen hundred thirty-nine."

"But how can we," asked little Ariel, "if we are unconscious of our faults? I am sure I can't, for one."

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"I foresaw that answer from you, my Ariel," replied the old lady, in a voice that indicated a smile; "a strange word, that ever-ready *can't* of yours, for a little girl whose actions all say *can*. But, to proceed, I have provided against the difficulty you suggest, Ariel. I have brought in this vial a precious extract, which, if you will swallow it, will instantaneously remove the blindness to which I have alluded, and will, besides, have the marvellous effect of inciting you to rid yourselves of your faults, to detach those weights that so embarrass you." She placed a vial on the table. "Now for my secret," she resumed; "I have yet other visits to pay, and no time for delay.

"To-morrow evening (if you have before swallowed my extract), previous to your meeting round the evergreen tree, assemble in the southwest chamber of this mansion. In the centre of the apartment you will see a miraculous shrub, called *pro omnibus vera*, bearing flowers of all hues and all seasons. On their stems you will perceive to be written the names of the virtues of which each flower is the symbol. Pluck the flower which typifies the virtues most opposed to the fault my extract has revealed to you; place it in your bosom, and from it will distil a juice of such marvellous properties, that it will as surely (though more slowly) remove the fault as my extract will cure your blindness. One thing I have omitted. After you have plucked the flower, look steadfastly at the stem; if buds or blossoms unfold upon it, remember what they typify, and take them at their word. They may praise, but they will not flatter. Farewell, my dear girls," her voice faltered. "You

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have been a garland of sweet, beautiful blossoms around my brow, may my successors hail the fruit. I grieve to say farewell!"

"Farewell!" responded the girls, as if they felt the solemnity of parting, but not the grief; this the young cannot feel at the departure of the old year. The door opened and shut, and the figure vanished for ever. The girls eagerly grasped the vial, and read the label, "*Extract of religion, for the conscience.*"

"Extract for the conscience!" exclaimed Laura. "I don't need that. I see my own faults plain enough, or weights, as the old lady called them."

"It will be safest, Laura, for each to take her share," said Livia, dryly.

"Pray don't take more than your share, Laura," interposed Leila, "for I shall need all mine."

"I rather guess you will to see your faults, Leila," said Belinda. "We want no extract to see the faults of others, and none of us ever saw yours, unless it be lipping, and some such trifles that it needs no miracle to cure."

"Oh, Belinda, the old lady didn't make any exceptions, and I am sure she was right not to except me: so let me swallow my share and done with it."

"I should like to prove the virtue of good Madam Eighteen hundred thirty-eight's prescription," said Belinda; "anything to help me on; 'go-ahead' is my motto, you know;" and Belinda boldly swallowed her portion.

Maria humbly said, "I think I feel my weights; but give me the vial; if I can get rid of them, I shall bless the old lady as long as I live."

"There's always something new going on in

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this house!" cried Ariel; "something for all—us —girls to do. I wish the time would come when I shall go home, and have nothing to learn, and no more faults to cure."

"Amen!" cried Belinda, and "amen!" responded all the girls, none louder and none so merrily laughing at her own characteristic exclamations as little Ariel, who ended the joke by swallowing unfalteringly a double portion of the extract.

"You may give me my dose too," said Eloise, advancing timidly and shrinkingly, "though I know *perfectly well* it won't do me any good."

"And give me mine too," said Sabina, "for we ought all to do what the poor old woman requested."

"Livia," cried Belinda, "why don't you come forward? Come—here's your portion."

Livia approached reluctantly. "I know I need it as much as any of you," she said; "but I hate to take it, it makes me feel so horridly to be convinced of my faults; but it's 'no song, no supper'—no extract, no cure—so I'll take it."

"And so will I," said Julia. "I had as lief try it as not, though I am sure I have no need of it."

All now had honestly taken their portions, and they retired, but not for a long while to sleep. Their emotions and meditations must not be revealed. It is enough to say that those who had swallowed the extract boldly, and those who had taken it timidly, were equally surprised by the discoveries they made. The most humble and fearful had least reason to be shocked. Through the following day they were serious, but tranquil and happy; for, though assured of the

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existence of the evil, they were also assured of the cure.

As evening approached there were whisperings and perturbations among them; but this, as the whole house was in a bustle, passed without observation.

The girls were dressed, the candles lighted, and some fancied they already heard the gingling bells of the sleighs that were to bring the dear friends from S*****. The moment for visiting the mysterious shrub must not be delayed, and with beating hearts the girls met in the passage that led to the southwest apartment. A brilliant light streamed through the crevices of the door. The most timid among them started back, shrinking from what they deemed supernatural. "Why are you afraid?" said Belinda, in a low, firm voice; "the flowers, you know, are the symbols of the virtues; light should come from them."

"Stop one moment, Belinda," cried Leila; "let me go in with you." "And me too, pray," said Livia; and each clung to her as Belinda slowly opened the door.

What a brilliant sight was that now before their eyes! A porcelain vase, as beautiful as Sévres china, stood in the centre of the room, bearing the miraculous shrub, whose branches were all blooming with different flowers, having their own peculiar hues, and sweet as if they were growing in the garden mould, and were wet with the dews of a June morning; from their leaves emanated a light soft as the light of the firefly; and along the stems ran a brilliant spiral flame that emitted no heat. The girls arranged themselves around, silent and almost breathless with admiration.

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The true, fearless, and prompt Belinda was the first to speak. "Pro—omnibus—vera!" she said. "'Truth for all'—and here is *truth* for me;" and she plucked a *fringed gentian*.

"Oh, Belinda! that can't be yours," cried Leila. "Why, you know the gentian is the emblem of modesty—it certainly is—because, you know, it lingers behind the other flowers, and opens its eye so timidly."

Belinda shook her head. "I know very well what it means," she said. "Then why take it?" insisted her fond friend. "I am sure no one will dare to say you want modesty."

"No, dear Belinda, indeed you do not," said Livia. "And I don't think you do!" "And I am sure you do not!" reiterated all the girls.

"I am very glad you think so, girls; but I certainly do want *deference*, which is first cousin to modesty; and here you may see the word written in tiny letters on the stem. The moment I swallowed that infallible extract, I perceived that I had the habit of taking the lead on all occasions, and of too loudly asserting my opinions. Blessed little blue-eyed flower, I thank you! You shall be *my flower*, the emblem of the grace I need. But what is this?" she exclaimed, as a little stalk shot from the stem of the gentian, and from it unfolded the fragrant blossoms of the white jasmine.

"Oh, it's candour!" cried Leila, clapping her hands. "Do not you remember what the old lady said? 'Look steadfastly at the stem; if buds or blossoms unfold upon it, remember what they typify, and take them at their word. They may praise,

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but they will not flatter.' The jasmine praises, but does not flatter you, Belinda; you are candid, and everything that is 'first cousin' to truth."

Little Ariel now sprang forward, her chameleon eyes becoming almost black, and absolutely glowing: "I may as well take my flowers first as last," she said.

"*Flowers!* Do you take two, Ariel?" asked Laura.

"Yes, I must have a double portion—it's too bad! Here is the violet; *disinterestedness* you see it means. There is no doubt of the goodness of the extract, girls." The girls might have thought it did not err in Ariel's case, but they did not say so. It is marvellous to see how gentle it makes us to others' faults to have our eyes opened to our own. "I *hate* to take this," resumed Ariel, breaking off a sprig of *lavender*, under whose green leaves was written *gratitude*. "I never suspected I wanted gratitude till I used the old lady's extract; and I do not, only when I am out of patience with my lessons, or break some rule, and throw the blame on Mrs. _____, who is always so patient and kind; but I hope I shall be cured!"^[2] A sweet smile played over her lips, and forth from the lavender stem sprang the delicious flowers of the *trailing arbutus*, interspersed with small leaves of *live-for-ever*.

"You have come off very well, Ariel, after all," said Livia; "you have a double portion of virtues to match your double portion of faults."

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"So I have!" replied Ariel, clapping her hands. "I know the arbutus means *resolution*, for it flowers amid snows; but what do these pretty little live-for-ever leaves mean?"

"Live-for-ever! Why, is that not another name for *truth*, Ariel?"

"Ah, Ariel," said Eloise, as she gently broke off her flower (also the arbutus), "the arbutus praises you, but me it admonishes. As soon as I swallowed the extract, I saw that in everything I wanted *resolution*."

"But see, Eloise," interrupted Belinda, "that *mignonette* coming out all over the coarse stem of the arbutus. The mignonette, you know, typifies *tenderness* and *refinement*: how well it suits you!"

Maria broke off a *white rose*, that had so perfectly unfolded every one of its pure leaves, that it scarcely needed the word *frankness* on its stem to interpret its meaning.

"Surely, Maria, that is not your flower!" cried Laura; "well, perhaps you are a little too shy— too reserved; but it is a reserve that springs from modesty."

"My extract did not tell me that, Laura," replied Maria; and, while she spoke, all along the rose's stem unfolded the fragrant flowers of the lily of the valley, emblem of *humility*.

"You see, girls, I did need the extract as well as the rest of you," said Leila, breaking off a *golden amaranth*.

"What does it mean?" "what does it mean?" exclaimed the girls in a breath; "I am sure we cannot guess." Leila held up the flower, and they, seeing the word *hardiness*, exclaimed, "The ex-

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tract is true: Leila is a little over-sensitive—and there, see!" they added, " the flowers of the sensitive plant budding out, which signifies how quick she feels for others; and, bless us! there too is an arbutus: a fit companion for her sensitive flowers; for with you, Leila, feeling and action go together."

"None of you will doubt this belongs to me," said sweet Sabina, with a smile, as she broke off a *crocus*; "a flower that ventures into the still frosty air should typify the very opposite of '*chicken-heartedness*.'"

"We need no voice from poor dear eighteen hundred thirty-eight," said Livia, "to tell us this is your flower, Sabina; no extract to reveal it. But what is this winding round the stem? How true, too! *Honeysuckle*, type of *lovingness*."

Julia now languidly approached to select her flower. It was the beautiful *clematis*, symbol of *elevation*. "I knew, before I swallowed the extract," said Julia, "that I am content to be just what I am."

"Strange!" said Livia; "for here are the purple flowers of the bee-larkspur, symbol of diligence; strange, Julia, that you should be like the squirrel in a cage, content always to be at work, and never to go forward."

Two only were now left, and on these two, conspicuous among their companions, all eyes were fixed. Livia made a difficult effort, and broke off a *careopsis*, which, steadily blossoming as it does through the heats and showers of summer, the cold winds of autumn, and on the frosty borders of winter, is a fit type of *imperturbableness*. "A pretty

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long word," said Livia, laughing, as she held up the stalk; "but you need not take the trouble to read it, girls; you are all acquainted with my *irritableness*." Before she had finished speaking the stalk of her *careopsis* was gemmed with *daisies*, and wound round and round with the pink *convolvulis*, types of *generosity* and *affection*.

"Never mind, Livia," said Belinda, kissing her, "we do not care for the *careopsis*; hut we all love the *daisies* and *convolvulis*."

A stalk of *sweet-peas* was the only flower left. Laura broke it off, slightly blushing, and courageously held it up, that all might see the word *simplicity*. As she did so, the bee-flower opened on the stem, and with it the *rosemary*, ancient type of that noble virtue, *fidelity*.

Their task was done, and they were all satisfied. They pressed the flowers to their bosoms, and one and all asked a leaf of Laura's *rosemary*, to remind them of their duty. Laura needed not to rob her flower of praise (so the girls called them) of a single leaf; for, at the wish expressed, *rosemary* was added to each bouquet.

"Now," said Livia, " quick, before the bell rings, for the evergreen tree; let us all go down and tell our story to Mrs. _____, and show our flowers."

"Yes, yes, we will, we will," was the general exclamation; and suddenly appeared in each bouquet, overtopping every flower, the queenly *white lily*, type of *magnanimity*.

[Sedgwick's notes]

¹ * It is the custom at the school to which I allude to allow to each girl, on the 1st of November, a certain sum, to be appropriated to Newyear's gifts. After that time, for every defective lesson, for every failure in the observance of the rules of the school and the social morals of the little community, a penny is forfeited. The young ladies are trusted with the keeping of their own accounts: but sometimes doubtful cases would occur; and I recollect, with much pleasure, to have oftener heard, in a deprecating voice, the appeal, "Must" L. or S. "lose a penny?" than "Must I?"

² * And in a rapid process of cure is our little favourite, for that favourite she is we cannot deny. Faults that consort with great energy, and are accompanied with perfect truth, we may

confidently hope (if the subject is in good hands) will pass away with the impulsiveness of childhood.