

New-Year's Day.

By Miss Catherine M. Sedgwick

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In the year 183-- , when speculation—that black art evasion of the laws God has instituted between labor and property, laws for the protection of human virtue—was at its fever height in the city of New York, Mr. Lyell, a gentleman whose years and position seemed to have moored him in one of those bays past which the stream might rush without dragging him with the torrent, returned to his home much excited. He was too much occupied with his own thoughts to observe that two young persons, whom his entrance disconcerted, were at that moment threading together one of those tangled paths that but for his ill-timed appearance might have led them into the bright world of their hopes. Ellen Lyell threw back the curls that had fallen over her burning cheek and resumed her worsted-work, heeding neither colors nor thread, and Haskett Mercer snatched the evening paper and seemed devouring its contents.

"I am glad to find you here, Mercer," said Mr. Lyell, "it is not often I leave poor Ellen alone. Any thing new in the paper? Have you looked at the stocks? Still rising are they not?"

Mercer turned mechanically to the stock-table and read it aloud.

"Yes, up—up—up," resumed Mr. Mercer. "What is the world coming to? every body is getting rich. William and Gordon have made a matter of forty thousand dollars since last week, Ellen."

"Forty thousand since last week!" repeated Ellen without turning her eyes from her work.

"Yes, forty thousand. Is that such every day news that you answer me like a faint echo. Forty thousand is worth your lifting your bright eyes from your work, Miss Ellen. If your brothers' luck holds, they will soon be the richest men of their name."

"Will they be the happiest?"

"To be sure—that is, they will be so much the happier as they are the richer. Mercer, why don't you go out into this shower of gold? What is the use of always having your plate bottom side upward?"

"I am afraid, sir, that we are deluded by a false light and that which now seems gold will prove to be mist, and melt away."

“Nonsense, Mercer, nonsense! Don’t I tell you my boys have realized forty thousand dollars?”

“They have capital, Mr. Mercer. I have none—at least none but my regular business education and my industry. These afford no basis for speculation. Indeed that has no basis. The indolent, ignorant and unscrupulous are the most daring in these times and, for the most part, the most successful.”

“It was so in the beginning, I admit,” said Mr. Lyell, “but now everybody sees the times are peculiar and all are putting into the lottery. Town and country are alive! Prudent old merchants that have gone on in a jog-trot way the last thirty years are studying charts of new lots and maps of Western lands; lawyers are getting up monied in institutions; literary men are in Wall street, and widows are speculating in the stocks. Common rules wont do now, Mercer. Every thing goes by a succession of accidents. I am sure nobody can explain why property, real property, should be worth fifty per cent more than it was two or three years ago?”

“Perhaps, sir, if you were to say why it should *sell* for fifty per cent more, next year may solve the riddle. The present prices cannot be sustained. Land is at this moment selling upon a hypothesis of our having in a few years some millions of population on this island.”

“Well, if it be a delusion, why not take advantage of it, Mercer? My sons offered me a share in a purchase they are to make to-morrow. I promised them to consider of it. I have done so during my cool walk home this evening and come to the conclusion to follow the good old rule and let well enough alone. At my age the care of new riches would be burdensome. I have been just as I am all my life, which, in this up and down city, few can say. I am not far from the end and I had rather finish as I began. I have enough for Ellen and me, and my sons are getting rich on their own account. But you, Mercer—you are a young man; without a money capital, you will have a long struggle of it. You will grow gray before you will dare ask a woman to marry you, if instead of taking advantage of this strange state of thing, you plod on?”

“But what am I to do, Mr. Lyell?” replied Mercer, whose pulses were quickened by some of Mr. Lyell’s suggestions. “I have no money for the venture, and if I could obtain credit I would not without property to sustain it. There is quite too much of this dishonorable mode of business carried on among us.”

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Ellen for the first time put in her word to say: “It seems to me this universal passion for riches is vulgar. Surely there is something better and nobler in this world to struggle for.”

“Whew, Miss Ellen! ‘Love in a cottage,’ is it? ‘That is bon pour la campagne,’ as the French say; ‘very well out in the bush,’ as your old Dutch granddame would have had it, but in town (and Mr. Lyell winked at Mercer) love can’t live in a cottage. It must have

at least a neat two story house, with money enough to go to market in the morning and pay the servants on Saturday night.

“Now, Mercer, I am a prudent man and have no fears. I will endorse your note. You shall go into this speculation with the boys, and, as matters are going, you may sell out at the end of a month with a very decent little fortune. Your share of the purchase will be about twenty thousand dollars.”

“Enter not into temptation, Mr. Mercer,” said Ellen, with an arch smile. But Mercer had already entered in. His castle was already built in the shape of the neat two story house, and the conviction that Mr. Lyell had discerned his hopes and had presented the only mode of attaining them took possession of him. After a short silence and a stolen glance at Ellen, which conjured up intoxicating images in his brain, he snatched his hat, saying, “I will see your sons this evening, Mr. Lyell, and if they are disposed to let me into this partnership I will accept your very kind offer.”

“Not so very kind; no, if there were the slightest risk I would not make it—for twenty thousand dollars is nearly two thirds of all I am worth in world.”

“And if there be risk, I would sooner cut off my right hand than take it, be assured of that, Mr. Lyell.”

And never was there a more conscientious assurance, but unfortunately Mercer was beginning to feel the general intoxication. He found the young Lyells eager to admit him an equal partner in their speculation. They particularly liked him. They suspected their sister was not indifferent to him. They knew he was not to her. They were elated with their recent success, and fancied Mercer had only to embark with them to launch on the flood that led to certain fortune. But, alas! the ebb-tide had even then, unperceived, begun.

The purchase was made, all the late gains of the brothers invested and the father’s name pledged for Haskett Mercer.

Shortly after Mercer was employed by a company in New York to go to Illinois to examine some recent purchases of “fancy lots” made there. Before leaving the city he went to Mr. Lyell’s to take leave of Ellen. It was four o’clock—the steamer left the wharf at five. He had but fifteen minutes to spare. He had no purpose what to say, but he was in that excited state of mind when fifteen minutes gives the color to one’s life. Nature is in some minds more rapid than the magnetic telegraph.

“Miss Ellen is not home,” said the servant who answered to Mercer’s ring. “She and the old gentleman have gone down to Mr. Gordon’s.”

Poor Mercer turned away thinking how interminable the four weeks of his absence would seem, but vainly casting the fashion of the uncertain future, he little thought that was the last time his foot would be upon Mr. Lyell’s door step.

As he hastened up the street he met an old mercantile friend of Mr. Lyells, one of those men infallibly weather-wise in the trading world.

“I hope,” he said, “the Lyells have not made the purchase they were talking of?”

“They have.”

“I am sorry for it. It will be a bad concern. I am glad, at any rate, that my old friend’s neck is out of the scrape. It may prove a good lesson to the young men.”

Mercer had no time to hear further. He went on his way, and carried with him a load of remorse and anxiety.

His journey was long and painful. Wherever he went the demon of speculation had been before him and ruin was following in his train. His business was perplexing and detained him through the sickly season. He took the fever of the country, bad enough under any circumstances, but alarmingly aggravated by his complicated anxieties. Happily his ravings of Ellen Lyell, of angry father, and of bankruptcy fell on the ears of strangers. His discrete physician withheld the letters that came for him. Till, though still staggering debility, he was on the eve of beginning his homeward journey. There were several from the brothers Lyell, one from their father, and one from Ellen. This last was first read and ran as follows. “My dear friend, my father told me yesterday that he had written you. I fear his letter is filled with reproaches. You will not be surprised that disappointment and loss should irritate his too susceptible temper. Your agency in this unhappy affair will, I know, grieve you, but you should be consoled by remembering that you embarked in it at my father’s urgent request, and with expressed reluctance.

“For myself I have nothing to regret, our condition is yet far above want. The wise people tell us that fortune and ease are not the best ministers to the human character, and I already find that enforced occupation, if it does not end the evils it opposes, at least furnishes a panoply divine against ennui and repining.

“My brothers have waked from their dream of illimitable fortunes and have entered upon a career of patient industry. This early check is like to prove a great blessing to them. Already they

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have time and tranquility for domestic enjoyment. We have heard of your illness. Do not let your friends continue in ignorance of your precise condition.

This letter was four weeks old. If the tears were unmanly that fell upon it they must be divided between the weakness of Mercer’s body and the weakness of his heart. Its generous tone fortified for the shock that was to follow.

The father's letter began: "Your scoundrelly conduct, Mercer, in sneaking out of town and hiding yourself in the Western woods, while I was left to hear the brunt of this ruinous business is not to be forgotten. Never presume to come into my presence again, nor any presence, to speak to my daughter. Past friendships are forgotten—past injuries, which have involved me in remediless ruin can never be."

The brothers' letters were filled with details of mercantile disasters. They informed Mercer that in default of his payment of his portion of the purchase money, their father, at a great sacrifice of his property, had met his engagements, and that, after satisfying the debt, nothing remained to him but his house and a few thousand dollars. They absolved Mercer from blame and wrote with the courageous hope of youth.

But Mercer could not absolve himself. He had weakly yielded to the first temptation to join the rash and wicked throng who 'make haste to be rich.' He had departed from the principles which he had adopted as the rule of his life—the principle that fortune is the legitimate result of labor and that it stands low in the scale of human felicities.

Expiation of his faults was all that now remained to him, and he determined to waste no time in weak inaction and vain repairing. "I have lost," he said, as his thoughts reverted to Ellen, with an anguish that cut through his heart, "the greatest blessing ever within the grasp of man. I will not too lose true honor."

It was a brilliant new-Year's morning in the year 184--. Many may still remember it. Ellen Lyell was still Ellen Lyell, but how changed since that memorable evening five years before, when love and its bright train filled the imagination of the young woman of nineteen! Sudden and sharp disappointment had followed, and to that a softened, thoughtful regret, which gave rather a pensive aspect to a life filled with rigorous duty. She occupied with her father a very small house in Madison street, where by the rent of their nice house in Chamber street, the income of the wreck of her father's property and her own earnings she contrived to continue to him the ease and comfort of his more prosperous days. She had risen early to arrange her household for the day and make her preparations for this pleasant gift season. She and her little German housemaid, her maid of all work, had before the day dawned put the last polishing touch of studious neatness, that adornment of a modest condition, to her two small communicating parlors.

"Now, Miss Ellen," said Gretchen, "every thing is ready and right."

"Not quite, Gretchen; this window curtain has been pulled out of place. There, now the folds are even; do you hold it while I tie it."

This was done, and both mistress and maid turning their eyes towards the sky at the same moment saw the moon still shining through the immeasurable depths of a clear winter sky.

“There!” exclaimed Gretchen, “is the waning moon seen over the right shoulder of us both on a New-Year’s morning: the best token of all the year, and sent not sought—for no eye but your’s, Miss Ellen, would have seen the curtain was not straight, and but for your seeing that we should have seen the moon.”

“Well, dear Gretchen, what particular happiness of the happy New-Year does this lucky sight betoken?”

“Ah, that the day must show, Miss Ellen. If you have a betrothed he will bring you the gifts you desire, or if you have not one, the day will show him to you. Something will chance concerning what maidens think most of. I see you don’t believe a word of it, Miss Ellen, but it is so in my country. Among my people there are signs and omens for every day in the year, and unseen spirits for every dark hour, but here you only see and hear with the eye and ear of flesh; not even the blessed Christchild, that comes to prince and peasant in my country, comes to this dreary land.”

“Dreary and disenchanted it seems to you, Gretchen, but our matter of fact lives save us from idle expectations. Now, for instance, if you and I, believing in this sign of your’s, were looking out for our betrothed or his gifts to-day, it would be all moonshine.”

“Oh, as to me, Miss Ellen, I am away from my people, and I have left my luck behind me; but you, what does Mr. Lawrence come every day for? And why is it that one launch of flowers has never time to fade before another comes in the place of it?”

“Nonsense, Gretchen, we are wasting time; bring me down the covered basket from my bureau.”

“Miss Ellen,” thought Gretchen, as she proceeded to obey her, “thinks I don’t know, but I can tell her there are some things that speak the same in all languages. I can tell what that look in the eye and that melt in the voice means as well as

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another. Well, Mr. Lawrence is a nice man; good, every body says, young and rich, and that is what few ladies despise, and Miss Ellen knows the worth of it by the want of it. It’s only by working and sparing from year’s end to year’s end, that she gets wine for her father’s table and cigars for him to smoke. It’s strange how some people do all the work in this world and others all the play. The old man is often fretting and Miss Ellen never is. The workers are the happiest may be after all?”

We did not get at Gretchen’s thoughts by any necromancy. She was one of those liberal people who inflict the reveries of their solitary moments upon the first doomed ears they encountered, beginning their social chats with “I was thinking.”

The basket was brought and Ellen arranged the gifts she had prepared for her brother’s children on her beautiful lauristina whose top, as it stood in the corner of the

room, brushed the ceiling. Net purses, gay colored bags, embroidered suspenders for a favorite little nephew, and dainty little bright slippers peeped from among the rich clusters of white flowers.

Skill and love were inwrought in all these pretty gifts. Every stitch in them had been set by Aunt Ellen's kind hand: every flower upon them was an emblem of her unwearied love. Money could not buy gifts so rich.

"There is something for you, my good Gretchen," said Ellen. Gretchen's eyes sparkled as she took from her mistress' hand a small, pretty plaid silk shawl. A shower of thanks were pouring from her lips when Ellen said, "do not you see there is something within the shawl." Gretchen unpinned and opened it. It was a picture, a colored view of a small town on the Rhine, done with great exactness of coloring and drawing, by a young artist friend of Ellen Lyell, at her request. Gretchen's words were checked for a moment, but tears, far more eloquent than words, gushed from her eyes as she turned from the picture to Ellen?

"Oh, dear Miss Ellen," she said, "who but you would have ever thought of this? And now don't you believe the blessed moon this morning, was a true token. Ah, Branbach! My dear old home! Ah, Miss Ellen, look here, look here just under that part of the castle. There is where we lived; there all the Wepels lived back and back in the ages, when the old castle that stands there now, on the very top of the rocks on that high hill—Oh, many's the time Brant and Hildergund and I have climbed to it—What was I saying? Yes, when the castle that's as old as St. Mark, had its jolly knights, the Wepels lived in the cottage below it, and when it was a prison of state it was one of my forefathers that kept the keys of the discarded room of torture, and when it was turned into a hospital it was my grandmother's mother that tended the sick. There is the old chateau, too, and there the chapel, and there the old stone bench, and those parings; and there the very pile of dirt always before old Weisen's door; and there, where you can almost touch the boats as they pass up and down the terrace garden to the old chateau, and there you turn and go up to the vineyard planted among the rocks, and so steep that they go on ladders to the vines. Oh, my beautiful land!—my home!—dear old Branbach!" Poor Gretchen had forgotten herself—the picture of her home had worked a spell upon her imagination, and her last exclamations were in German.

"What is all this lingo about?" exclaimed Mr. Lyell, entering the room and effectually breaking the spell. "The little dirty village of Branbach," he added, turning his eyes on the picture. "I remember it well, and the greasy dinner I got there. I see no sign of breakfast, Ellen. Do you think I can eat your New-Year's gifts?"

"Not eat the, but wear them, sir," replied Ellen, placing at his feet a pair of new slippers. "We have set the breakfast table in the next room; it is quite ready. Bring up the coffee and cakes, Gretchen."

"It will be cold there; it's always cold there in the morning. What did you put in there for?"

“The children begged to have their presents hung on a tree, and I could not move my lauristina!”

“And they must have it their own way. It used to be ‘first come first served,’ but now the very last come is first and best served; the brat of a baby before its grandfather.”

Ellen made no reply, but opened the door into the next room where the fire having been kindled long before day-light, the air was genially warm, the coals glowed in the full grate, the coffee sent up its aromatic perfume—incense fit for the gods—and the lightest buckwheats were smoking on the table. There was a sausage too, (Mr. Lyell’s *sine qua non*,) and fresh honey and Scotch marmalade, his favorite dainties, got by Ellen with some trouble by way of a New-Year’s treat to her father. His frosty humor melted; the slippers he said “were a nice fit, the room was warm, and, the whole, he did not care if the children for once had it their own way, and it was thoughtful of you, Ellen, to get this delicious honey for me.”

Ellen was not hardened to the caprices of her father’s temper. She was fortified by the resolution not to resist but endure. She had long ago made up her mind that it was an infirmity not to be cured, but that patience was armor of proof against it. Patient continuance in well-doing is a sovereign remedy against most of the evils of life and a certain salvation from its worst remorse.

“Where is the morning paper, Gretchen, asked Mr. Lyell. Can’t you remember to put it on the table? You know I always want it.”

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There is no morning paper on New-Year’s Mr. Lyell.”

“Ah, true! Give me last evening’s paper then.”

“The old gentleman must have his morning and his evening paper,” said Gretchen to a visitor in the kitchen,” though Miss Ellen would not even buy herself one new gown this New-Year’s; well, she looked pretty enough in her old ones. It seems as if her beautiful soul came out more and more every day into her face.”

Mr. Lyell’s eyes ran over the paper carelessly. Suddenly his attention was arrested, as Ellen observed, by something keenly interesting. He knit his brows, bit his lips, threw down the paper, lighted his cigar, smoked a few whiffs, then threw it away, walked up and down the room biting his nails according to his habit when excessively vexed, and was leaving the room when at the door he met Gretchen, all smiles, bringing in a very beautiful lady’s writing-desk of ivory inlaid in ebony.

“Where did that come from?” he asked.

“It is for Miss Ellen, sir, and the servant that brings all Mr. Lawrence’s flowers and things brought it.”

“John, from the Astor house; was there no message?”

“None, sir.”

“It is from Lawrence, of course, Ellen; splendid, is it not? Do you hear, Ellen? Do you see?”

“Yes, sir, replied Ellen, looking cold and impassive.

“I would not advise him to waste his gifts here. Strange—strange,” he muttered “that the only man you ever cared for should have been that rascal!”

“I do not deserve that, nor does Mercer,” she thought. “I wish Lawrence would send no more of his gifts here; they ruffle my father, and are embarrassing to me; my father was just getting into the spirit of the day. But it was something in the paper that turned the current. Stocks have fallen, I suppose; but what is that to us?” She was familiar with the stock-table for she read it every evening with her father. She looked it over. Stocks were rising, and she came to the natural conclusion that her father was vexed that he no longer had any interest in the prosperous turn the affairs of the city had taken.

That an old age which should have been serene and grateful should be chafed by sordid cares—that all her pains to soften it with the luxuries that habit had made necessary should be unfelt, filled Ellen’s bosom for a moment with sadness and a sense of injustice. It was but for a moment; she wiped away the gathering tears and turned to receive with smiles and caresses the children who were bursting into the room with their clamorous happy New-Year’s to Aunt Ellen. The stream must deposit a portion of the golden sands its channel is bearing onward. Ellen Lyell could not be unhappy while she was the source of happiness or cheerfulness. There are those who would have reckoned it a hard fate to minister to a thankless, fretful, exacting old man; to have been cut off in the prime of youth from the dearest expectations; to receive, as Ellen did at first, employment as favor and patronage; to see her gay young friends and fashionable acquaintance falling away from her; to be obliged to contract the circle of her wants, and to cut off the accustomed gratifications of her past position and the pleasures natural to her time of life. In all this there were elements enough of discontent to a common character.

But my friend Ellen’s was not a common character. She began with the great truth that it matters not so much how we are, as what we are—that is not our circumstances, but what we make of them, that is our great concern; not the agreeable sensations of to-day that are of most import to us, but the retrospect of to-morrow. If her father was more than usually unreasonable, she redoubled her patience. She smiled at the supercilious of late friends (friends after common parlance) become patrons, and she received gratefully employment from those whose respect was enhanced by the

manifestation of virtues which the change of her condition brought into action. If her gay friends fell away from her she felt no asperity towards them; they had their pleasures, she her duties; there were few points of real sympathy between them, and in her secret heart she might well have thought she was rather the gainer than loser by the change in their relations.

One evil there was in her condition which was a serious unhappiness to her. The Mr. Lawrence to whom we have adverted, was her preserving lover. His sister was her favorite friend. He had an immense fortune. He was a young man of good principles and good feelings. The world said “a splendid match for Ellen Lyell,” “You know the most fervent wish of my heart,” Margaret Lawrence had once said to her, and she said no more.

“You must do as you choose; all young people do so now-a-days,” said her father, “but I would lay any wager you are the only woman in the United States who would not snap at Arthur Lawrence.”

“Do as you think best, my dear sister,” said her brother Gordon,” but I must say there are few worthier men than Arthur Lawrence.”

“You would marry Arthur Lawrence, Ellen,” said her brother William, “if you could forget—and those should forget who are forgotten!”

“You misunderstood me, William,” she replied, provoked to express the feelings her delicacy had restrained, “I would not marry Arthur Lawrence were he the only man in the world. I do not

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love him, that should be reason enough. I cannot love a man whose character is no sense accords with mine. Arthur Lawrence is, you know it, William, a common man—nothing more nor less; of virtuous habits, no doubt; amiable and well disposed; but would you, would my father, would Gordon, would any of my friends esteem him a suitable match for me were he stripped of his fortune! I may seem to you proud or vain, or both; but I should require in my husband some correspondence of endowment, of cultivation, of capability, of taste to my own, and I hold that only to be a pure marriage where this exists. “I have *not* forgotten,” she added, blushing to her temples, “that such a marriage was once within the circle of my hope; nor do I forget that it no longer is. I cherish no vain wishes no vain regrets. I see no danger of uselessness of dreariness in single life; no danger of wanting objects for my affections while yours and Gordon’s families are multiplying every year.”

“Forgive my, dear sister,” said her brother, “we have erred in measuring you by common women.”

“That is not quite all your mistake, William; women are not allowed to use their powers of independence. The vulgar world has made marriage a necessity to them, and they dare not follow the true impulses of their hearts—the honest demands of their nature; and thus it comes that marriage, God’s own most blessed institution, is so often perverted to what it is.”

But we have left too long the conclusion of our short story. The day went on; Ellen’s visitors were not numerous, but they were old and well tried friends, with a sprinkling of young ones, who were attracted out of the fashionable beat by Ellen Lyell’s charms and graces, which, if they had lost the effect of novelty at twenty-four, in our world of Spring blossoms, had gained by their maturity, expression and force.

Arthur Lawrence came with the first and lingered to the last.

“I have not seen your father to-day,” he said to Ellen.

“You can see him,” said little Nelly Lyell, “for I saw him take a big parcel of papers off the entry table, and go up stairs with it, and I went to show him Aunt Ellen’s new desk; I could not make him look up from his papers; but he did not look cross, and he did not scold me, though I spoke twice to him.”

“Have you see Aunt Ellen’s new desk, Mr. Lawrence?”

“No, Nelly, I did not know your aunt had a new one.”

Ellen looked at him with surprise; but as Lawrence was one of those people who never ambush their actions, she was convinced he was innocent of the gift.

“Don’t you know, Aunt Ellen, who sent you the desk;” pursued the little girl.

“No, Nelly, I cannot even guess.”

“Oh, she does know, she does know,” insisted the child, mischievously, “ she knows it’s you—because you know you send her every thing; lots of flowers, and lots of books. I should love you if you gave me so many things; don’t you love him, Aunt Ellen?”

To Ellen’s infinite relief the door opened and her father appeared at it, not lowering as he had left her in the morning, but bright and smiling as a clear October sky at mid-day.

“Ellen, my dear,” he said, “I am going out to ask a friend to come home and dine with me; don’t ask any other company. You have a good dinner, I hope. Oh, Mr. Lawrence, I did not observe you; good day, sir”. He stood for a moment as if wavering, then beckoned Ellen to him and whispered—“if you want to know what company you are to have, look over the arrivals in last evening’s paper.”

But last evening's paper was not to be found, and Ellen could get no solution of her father's sudden good humor and extraordinary abstraction; for more extraordinary it was that he should have remained for one minute unconscious of Mr. Lawrence's presence.

"There is no use," said Lawrence that very evening, to his sister, "in thinking any longer of Ellen Lyell; she is as cold as an icicle to me."

"You are right, my dear brother," replied his sister, "Ellen knows her own mind, and is not a woman to be won by perseverance?"

"No, that is proved—well, it will be all the same a hundred years hence!"

This veritable conclusion of Mr. Arthur Lawrence's love-tale proved that he was not matched with Ellen Lyell in heaven, where, as we honestly believe, all true matches *are* made.

All the Lyells—sons, wives and children remained, as was their custom on New-Year's day, to dine with their father. The communicating doors between the rooms were thrown open. One table was arranged for the little people and their nurses, and the other for their elders.

"You see what your Aunt Ellen has done for you, my children," said Gordon Lyell. "Mind and keep quiet, or my father will stand a chance of having rather too much of what your Aunt Ellen calls the 'music of your voices;' but why does he not come? I never knew him delay a dinner before. Who upon earth can this newly arrived friend of his be? Some old crone of an India merchant whom he knew forty years ago—oh, it's that old Harvey, who was a school-mate of his and who has been consul this hundred years at _____, what do you call the place? I heard yesterday he had come home?"

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"Whoever it may be," said Ellen, "we should be grateful to him, for his arrival seems to have made it really a happy New-Year to my father."

"He must be a special dear friend to reconcile my father to making another place at our small table. You know his notion of heaven, Ellen?—that there's plenty of elbow-room there!"

"Hush, Gordon—they are coming; ring the bell for dinner, Willie!"

"Now for a reverend white head," said Gordon, "make your best bows and curtsies, children, to grandpapa's friend, and don't speak above your breaths."

The door opened and old Mr. Lyell, his face smiling all over, ushered in—not an ‘old crone,’ but a tall young man of six-and-twenty, with his head covered with bright chestnut hair—his large dark eye brightened and moistened with mingled emotions. Gordon and William Lyell sprang forward and grasped his hand. “Is it you, Mercer? My dear fellow, welcome—most welcome!”

Ellen’s first impulse was to run out of the room but her feet refused to move. She became frightfully pale, and little Nelly, whose eye, on all occasions, first turned to her aunt exclaimed, “what is the matter, Aunt Ellen?”

The exclamation produced a reaction. She rallied and the eloquent blood rushing to her cheek expressed the welcome she could not utter; she gave Mercer her hand: neither spoke. The awkward chasm was filled by Mr. Lyell. “Mercer deserves our welcome, boys,” he said; “he is a good man and true. He has worked hard for five years, and lived out of humanity’s reach, in China. I know what it is to live there, and here is some of the fruit of his industry—here are the documents.” Mr. Lyell threw on the table a parcel of papers. “He has paid his debt to me, with interest and compound interest—God bless him!”

“A little too much of this, my dear Mr. Lyell,” said Mercer, deprecatingly.

“Not a syllable too much; my children and grandchildren shall know who, of all men living, they should most love and honor.”

“This is much more,” said Mercer, rather embarrassed by Mr. Lyell’s excessive enthusiasm, “than an act of simple honesty deserves.”

Not a bit—not a bit. Simple honesty do you call it? Well—yes, paying one’s debts is simple honesty; but I can tell you it is the rarest of virtues now-a-days. You have not heard of *repudiation* out in China, have you? our new way of paying old debts. I hate these new fangled words and doings. But come, come to dinner, my children.”

A few days after when Ellen imparted to her loving maiden Gretchen, the secret of her engagement to Haskett Mercer, “Ah, ha! Miss Ellen,” she said, “I knew when that mysterious desk came the true love would soon come after it. Remember the waning-moon of New-Year’s morning, and don’t laugh at my country signs again.”