



ANNE SULLIVAN MACY AND HELEN KELLER,
1893

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Anne Sullivan Macy

THE STORY BEHIND HELEN KELLER

BY NELLA BRADDY



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CHAPTER II

Two Castaways

IN THE unhappy year 1876 Grant had been President of the United States for seven years, and the tide of popular approval that had swept him into an office for which he was not fitted had nearly ebbed out. Scandals had broken in Congress, in the Navy Department, in the War Department, and in the Department of the Interior on a scale comparable only to the gigantic frauds perpetrated many years later during the Harding régime. Other idols besides Grant had fallen, and no man was above suspicion. The general taint of corruption lay over everything—business, banks, and government. Nothing escaped. Ancient beliefs were thrown into the trash heap, and the simple vulgar folk took Grant for a symbol of their woes and sullenly determined to free themselves from him.

For the purposes of this book we are concerned with this shameful chapter in American history only as it affects a small person ten years old on her way to an isolated colony in a pile of shabby buildings in a remote Massachusetts hamlet by the name of Tewksbury. This was the state infirmary; less euphoniously, this was the state poorhouse. It was a populous year for the colony, for hard times had made a number of able-bodied men and women seek shelter here. The superintendent complained that his buildings were not adequate. The average weekly number was seventy-four more than the year before. Yet, he was glad to say, there were fewer deaths except among the foundlings, a happy state due not to increased care on the part of the attendants but to the presence of the afore-mentioned able-bodied persons. Among the foundlings the record was

Two Castaways

bad. Out of the eighty received the year before only seventy had died, whereas out of the twenty-seven received this year not one had survived.

The superintendent made it clear in his reports that he was aware that all was not well at the colony. There was pressing need in those times of economic distress for a temporary building to house the increase, and if by any chance after a year or two when prosperity returned there should be no increase, the building could be used for a chapel. At that time the only chapel he had was a hall in the insane asylum which with great inconvenience could be cleared out and used when it was necessary. All of the buildings needed painting, and the porches were insecure. Spouts and gutters needed repair. There was desperate need for suitable quarters for delirium tremens cases, "absolutely required for their own safety and for the comfort of the sick and infirm who are liable to be seriously disturbed by their outcries." Noisy and offensive patients, patients with loathsome and contagious diseases, and patients subject to maniacal attacks should be isolated. At that time it was not possible. The ventilation in the hospital was not sufficient, and there were no screens to keep out flies and mosquitoes. Water closets were needed. In many places there were only movable vessels, the disadvantages of which in an open ward the superintendent felt that he did not need to enlarge upon. He begged for a barn. He had been begging for a barn for ten years. If he had one, he explained, he could keep his cows in it, and the infirmary could have its own milk and perhaps save a few of the foundlings. He could store the harvest which he was now obliged to leave on the ground to rot. The legislature had provided extra doctors and nurses, but after the careless fashion of legislatures had failed to provide an appropriation to pay them. He hoped they would not overlook this at the next session.

It was on the day that Charlotte Cushman was buried in Boston that Annie and Jimmie passed through the city, guarded

like two little convicts, on their way to Tewksbury. By this time they were worn out with the excitement of riding on a train—the first train they had ever seen—but the journey was not over. An hour or two later they reached Tewksbury, where they were met by a Black Maria. Tired, battered, and peevish, they were huddled into the ugly conveyance and carried off to the house of derelicts, where they need no longer trouble the hearts of healthy people. They waited forlornly in the hall while a man made a record of them—the little blind girl, “virtually blind” she was at this time, and the little lame boy with a bunch on his hip.

“The girl,” said the man, “must go to the women’s part, and the boy to the men’s.” There were no private rooms in the infirmary: only wards. People supported at the expense of the commonwealth could hardly expect privacy. They were already costing the state every week \$1.88 apiece, as the superintendent somewhat apologetically remarked in his report for that year. The administration was used to heartbreaking scenes, but the man who put Annie and Jimmie into the record was not entirely callous, for as soon as Annie began to cry because of what he had said and Jimmie began to cry because Annie was crying, he jumped to his feet and ran out to pat them on their heads and shoulders. The administration was not either now or later unkind. Their policy, in so far as they had one, was apparently that recommended by Grant: Let us have peace. Peace at any price.

A significant change took place in Annie during those moments. All the dormant emotion within her woke to life. She knew now what love was. She loved Jimmie. Loved him deeply, passionately, tragically, so that it seems sometimes to her to-day, after almost a lifetime of devotion to Helen Keller, that she has never loved anyone since.

The two children spent the first night in a small dark enclosure at one end of the ward. There was one bed in it, a table, and an altar. This enclosure, though they did not know it

and would not have been troubled if they had, was the “dead house” into which corpses were wheeled to wait for burial. They slept together, unhaunted by the shades of the old women who had spent their last moments above the sod lying, just as they were lying, with their faces to the ceiling. But perhaps the ghosts were not there. With the wide world to choose from it is not likely that any of them had lingered in this sad, drab, dreary little cell.

In the morning they were both assigned, after one can only guess how many conferences, to the women’s ward, and Jimmie was given a girl’s apron, which broke his heart, he having so recently been promoted to regular breeches, but it was the price of their staying together. They grudged it but they paid it. Besides, there was nothing else they could do.

Except for Jimmie’s humiliation, the children had no great sense of change in coming to Tewksbury. The background here was not unlike the background they had always known. The ward was filled with old women, grotesque, misshapen, diseased, and dying, but most of them were Irish like the women they had known in Feeding Hills. The oldest were born in Ireland, the parents of the younger ones had come from there.

“The typical murderer of any period comes from that race which is making a place for itself in a new environment,” says Warden Lawes of Sing Sing prison, citing the Irish immigrants who led all others in this reprehensible business between 1850 and 1870, and the native-born Irish who led between 1870 and 1900, to be replaced by the Italians around 1890, with the Negroes gaining upon them as the century came to an end. The warden might have widened his statement, it seems, to include the “typical public charge,” for this was the time when the almshouses had more than their share of Irish and more Irish than anything. It was all very homelike for the little Sullivans.

Nothing had given them an idea that their surroundings

Anne Sullivan Macy

were shameful; indeed, they felt happier and freer than they ever had before. Jimmie's hip pained him a good deal, but it had always done that.

They had a cot apiece in the ward, and they had the dead house to play in. Much of the time they spent sitting on the floor cutting pictures out of the *Police Gazette* and coloured fashion plates out of *Godey's Lady's Book*, helping themselves to the doctors' instruments for the purpose, until a doctor caught them one day and threatened to slice off their ears if they ever did it again. Greatly to the diversion of the doctors and nurses, the children pasted these pictures, lively symbols of the world of fashion and crime, on the walls of the dead house. No one bothered to take them off.

Annie's eyes were not so good as they had been. Not infrequently she clipped off some vital part of a doll, like a head. After a while she turned all the fine cutting over to Jimmie. At one period or another, perhaps very soon after she came to the infirmary, two operations were performed upon her eyes, but she has no recollection of when they took place. Neither, so far as she could tell, made any difference in her sight.

The children were, on the whole, left to themselves. Most of the women were too near dead to care for anything. Most of them wanted to die and most of them did not have to wait long. Death was the most casual and the most common of occurrences. Nobody cared when it came. In the intervals there was no light badinage, no talking for the sake of conversation. The women had nothing to bind them together but the tie of common misery, and such misery as theirs is not voluble. When they talked it was of the Great Famine in Ireland, the details of which were recited so many times that Annie could see as vividly as if she had been present, the mothers dead in their cabins with dead children at their sides, groups of dead lying by the roadside waiting to be buried, and the hinged coffins in which they were gathered up and carried to the cemetery

Two Castaways

and through the bottoms of which they were dropped into the grave.

Even the death of one of their number brought little comment, if any, from her neighbours. It evoked no fluttering of nurses, no calling the doctor, no fuss at all except what the patient made—the death rattle, a cry, or a groan, and often not even so much as this. The one friend still left to all of them was death. In a little while the cot would be wheeled into the dead house, the metal wheels clattering ominously over the wooden floor. The sound of the wheels was not so horrible to Annie during her first days at the almshouse, for she gave it no special meaning, but it made an indelible impression, and to-day, after she has been away from it more than fifty years, she can still sometimes at night hear its hollow and remorseless echo.

A number of the ancient crones with their minds wandering used to talk unintelligibly to themselves, and Jimmie, like a pale, thoughtful little old man, trying to puzzle out their meaning, used to imitate them. When they turned on him he used to amuse himself by throwing spit balls at them.

The woman on the cot next to his was half crazy and bed-ridden. Part of her body was paralyzed. She used to sing in a crying, mournful voice, "Oh, mother, oh, mother, why did you leave me alone with no one to love me . . . no friend and no home? . . . God pity the drunkard's lone child. . . . God pity . . . God pity . . . oh mother . . ." Another was a tall thin woman with white hair and dignified mien who slept little. Anyone who happened to wake at night could see her pacing back and forth like a tormented ghost. Every few turns she would stop to see if the door was locked. It was not, and there was no key, but she would pretend to lock it and then resume her ghostly walk. She never spoke directly to anyone, but mumbled continually to herself. Annie listened closely but could never make anything out of it. Somebody had called her "Lost," and that was the only name she had.

Night was, on the whole, more exciting than day. Over near the dead house a kerosene lamp gave out a wan and discouraged light edged with flickering shadows. The tenants were restless and so were the big grey rats and the mice and the cockroaches. Jimmie used to tease the rats with long spills of paper made from the pages of the *Police Gazette* and used to shriek with delight when one of them leapt into the room and frightened the patients. Both he and his sister were without fear. Rats, maniacs, sexual perversions, delirium tremens, epilepsy, corpses—it was ever so entertaining.

They had few resources other than those offered by the ward, but once at least some callers came to cheer the patients, professional sunbeams eager to shed happiness. Came with tight little bunches of pansies and daisies, and were tactless enough to sing Protestant hymns to that Catholic gathering! Annie and Jimmie enjoyed it, but the other patients resented it. The gifts were accepted as graciously as they were offered, but the callers had hardly got outside the door before the flowers were dashed to the floor and the air grew thick with insults hurled at the retreating backs. Once their father came with his brother and brought candy. They were going to Chicago. Canals and railroads were building out that way. That was the last time that Annie ever saw him, the last time, so far as she knew, until nearly fifty years later, that any member of her family took an interest in her.

Jimmie never saw clear daylight again after he entered the ward, but Annie, when the weather grew warmer, sometimes ran out into the yard and rolled herself up and down the cement walks in an invalid's chair, often stopping to gossip with the old men from another ward on their way to the dining room.

When the bell rang they assembled. Tramps, petty thieves, pickpockets, professional beggars, men out of work and in those times of depression unable to find employment, drunkards, blind men, lame men, hunchbacked men, bedraggled

and slovenly, with shamed furtive eyes, cunning sharp eyes, the strange horrible procession shuffled past, reeking with filth and profanity. Knights of the Road, Poet Tramps, Free Spirits: they were not here.

Once in a great while one of the men would start a song in a quavering voice and some of the others would join in. Some of the songs were reminiscent of the Irish Famine. "Oh, potatoes they grow small over there" (Annie wondered why), "The Wearing of the Green," and "You'll Never Miss the Water Till the Well Runs Dry." "The Girl I Left Behind Me" and "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep" were favourites. This last one puzzled Annie. She did not know that the "deep" was the ocean, and anyway she did not know what the ocean was.

But she did know—she learned from these men—that a man by the name of Grant was President of the United States. She did not know that he was a famous general, did not even know that there had been a war in the United States, though it was only eleven years since its close. But if what these men said was true, it was Grant who was responsible for their presence in the almshouse. Grant was corrupt. He ought to be impeached and maybe hanged. Not one of the men ever blamed himself, always someone else, and nearly always the government. Grant was the government.

Most of the fun that Annie had came from pretending. One day when a blind woman asked her to describe herself she gave an exquisitely embroidered picture of the blonde doll at John Sullivan's. "I'm very beautiful," she said, and not without satisfaction, for by that time she had convinced herself that she was. The old woman asked her how she knew, she being blind. "Oh, everybody tells me so. The doctors, the nurses, everybody." The old woman asked about Jimmie. Jimmie's sister said he was very handsome but nothing to compare with her. But our young Cinderella had not taken her step-sisters into account. They told the old woman that the child's

hair was not golden but brown, not curly but straight. "Holy Mother of God, child, how could you deceive a poor blind woman!" Annie perversely felt aggrieved and abused. The woman might at least have pretended that she was beautiful.

It was this woman who first told her that there were schools where the blind could be educated, but a young woman, the youngest in the ward except Annie, told her that education would not make any difference. She herself had gone to school on money which her mother, an Irishwoman, had made by taking in washing. Now she was dying of tuberculosis, alone and unbefriended. "Education doesn't make any difference if God wills otherwise, Our life is the Lord's and death's."

"I don't see what the Lord has to do with it," Annie replied. "And all the same, I'm going to school when I grow up. My cousin Anastatia wouldn't let me, but I'm going."

"It won't do any good."

"I'm going just the same."

Jimmie's voice broke in.

"No, you ain't either. You are going to stay here with me forever and ever."

It seemed that the women who were most hopelessly struck down (if there could be degrees of hopelessness where everything was hopeless) were the ones who complained least. There was Maggie Carroll, for example, who stood out from all the other women as a centre of radiance. It is not possible to tell just how much Annie could see at this time. She was classified as blind, and she could not make out the separate letters on a printed page, but she carries in her mind still a distinct picture of the delicate features and clear grey eyes of this saintly woman. This may be because she spent so much time with Maggie. And it may be also that there were days when her vision was better than usual.

Maggie was a cripple whose poor body was so warped and twisted that she had to be strapped to a wooden frame. She had been in this condition for a number of years, and bedsores

were gnawing at her flesh. She could not move herself without the help of one of the attendants, and her hands were so knotted and drawn together that she could not hold a book in them. But because no one could come near her without loving her she received more attention than the other women in the ward, and because she could read someone had provided her with a rack on which her books could rest. She could not lift them to the rack herself, but when someone else did it for her she could turn the pages. Her books were nearly all lives of the saints, and she used to read aloud from them to Annie and Jimmie and talk with them about God. Annie was fascinated by the saints, but thought then, and thinks now, that none of them surpassed Maggie herself.

The Catholic priest who came from time to time kept his robe and candles and holy unctions in a box on a table by the side of Maggie's bed. Maggie explained the meaning of these properties to Annie and tried to give the little girl something of her own gentle philosophy of life. It apparently did not occur to her that a different future might be waiting for Annie outside the walls of the infirmary, and she saw no reason why the child should rebel against spending the rest of her days where she was. She was in the almshouse, as Maggie was, because God had put her there. It was presumptuous and unholy to complain. Even as a child Annie despised this belief, but she adored Maggie, and it was to her and not to her God that she turned when Jimmie died.

Of this she herself has written:

I remember very little about Jimmie's last illness. One morning when I was helping him to dress he began to cry. The old woman in the next bed said, "He was bad in the night and kept me awake. Why didn't you get him a drink when he asked for it?" We both disliked the creature. I answered rudely, I suppose, because she said, "You are both imps of Satan." Jimmie began to make faces at her and put out his tongue. The toothless old woman made a horrid sound with her lips and said, "The devil will get you for that, sonny."

It seems to me that Jimmie tried to stand up by his bed but couldn't. He fell backward and screamed terribly. The matron, or someone else, came and took off his clothes. He pointed to the bunch on his thigh, which seemed larger than I had ever seen it. He kept saying over and over, "It hurts, it hurts." The next thing I remember is the doctor bending over him. I haven't the slightest idea how long Jimmie was sick. I think only a day or two, judging from the doctor's visits. Once he put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Little girl, your brother will be going on a journey soon." I sensed his meaning more from the sound of his voice than from the words. I was perfectly familiar with the idea of death. I had seen my mother lying cold and still and strangely white, and I had seen women die in the ward where we were. I had watched the attendants roll their beds into the dead house. Afterwards strange men came in, carrying big wooden boxes and took them away. An indescribable feeling of terror swept over me. It was as if sharp cruel fingers gripped my heart. The pain made me beat out at the doctor like a little child in a rage. He seized my arms roughly and threatened to send me out of the ward. I controlled myself instantly. I knew that he would take me away from Jimmie. They had held that club over my head before, and I had always capitulated and surrendered on their terms.

I must have been sound asleep when Jimmie died, for I didn't hear them roll his bed into the dead house. When I waked, it was dark. The night-lamps in the ward were still burning. Suddenly I missed Jimmie's bed. The black, empty space where it had been filled me with wild fear. I couldn't get out of bed, my body shook so violently. I knew the dead house was behind that partition at the end of the ward, and I knew that Jimmie was dead. I can't tell how long that terrible trembling lasted; but it must have lessened; for I got up and ran to the dead house. I lifted the latch and opened the door. Nobody was awake. The sound of the latch started the trembling again. It was all dark inside. I couldn't see the bed at first. I reached out my hand and touched the iron rail, and clung to it with all my strength until I could balance myself on my feet. Then I crept to the side of the bed—and touched him! Under the sheet I felt the little cold body, and something in me broke. My screams waked everyone in the hospital. Someone rushed in and tried to pull me away; but I clutched the little body and held it with all my might. Another person came, and the two separated us. They dragged me back to the ward and tried to put me in bed; but I kicked and scratched and bit them until they dropped me upon the floor, and left me there, a

heap of pain beyond words. After a while the first paroxysm subsided, and I lay quite still. One of the women—a poor cripple—hobbled to me, and bent down as far as she could to lift me up; but the effort hurt her so that she groaned. I got up and helped her back to her bed. She made me sit beside her, and she petted me and spoke tender words of comfort to me. Then I knew the relief of passionate tears.

When it was light, I went to the dead house again; but the attendant wouldn't let me in. She told me to dress myself, and said she would let me see Jimmie. I dressed quickly; but when I reached the door, I was sent to the washroom to wash my face and hands. Then I was made to promise that I would behave myself if I was permitted to see Jimmie. I was put in a chair beside the bed, and they lifted the sheet. The light from the half-window fell upon the bed, and Jimmie's little white face, framed in dark curls, seemed to lift from the pillow. Before they could stop me, I jumped up and put my arms around him and kissed and kissed and kissed his face—the dearest thing in the world—the only thing I had ever loved. I heard a voice saying, "Come away now. You can see him again after breakfast. You must control yourself. It doesn't do any good to make such a fuss." I believe I hated that voice as I have not hated anything else in the world. I went out quietly, I sat down beside my bed and wished to die with an intensity that I have never wished for anything else.

After a while the day matron came and asked me if I wouldn't like to go with her and pick some lilacs for Jimmie. I jumped up and followed her out into the grounds. It was a lovely morning, full of the fragrance of spring and lilacs. I was given permission to pick as many as I wanted. I picked an armful of flowers, carried them to the dead house and covered Jimmie with them.

When I saw the men come in with the box, I sat perfectly still. My body was cold, and the thought came into my mind that I must be going to die. They wouldn't let me see them put Jimmie in the box; but they let me see him. The upper part of the box was open, and I could see his little white face and the lilacs against his cheek. Then they closed the box, lifted it up very gently, and carried it out. When I realized that they were taking Jimmie away and that I should never see him again, I rushed after the men. The doctor stopped me before I reached the gate. He asked if I would like to go to the burying-ground. I begged him to let me go, and he led me to the gate. I had never been out of it since the night when Jimmie and I came to

Tewksbury, and everything seemed strange. We followed the men along a narrow path—I don't think there were any trees—and soon we came to the burying-ground. It was a bare, sandy field. There was a grave already dug. I saw the mound of sand and the hole beneath it. Quickly the men lowered the coffin into the grave and began shovelling the dirt upon it. I heard the sound of the gravel falling upon the little wooden box, I could stand no more, I fell in a heap on the sand, and lay there with my face in the weeds. The doctor stood near, talking to the men quietly. When their work was finished, they went away, and the doctor said, "Come now, we must go back to the hospital." One of the men came back, and the doctor said, "Look, little girl, Tom has brought you some flowers for Jimmie's grave." I stood up, took the flowers from the man (I think they were geraniums), and stuck them in the sand and watered them with my tears. As we walked along the doctor told me that the priest had been sent for, but was sick, and couldn't come. That was why there was no service at the grave. I didn't care. I hadn't thought of the priest or of praying. When I got back, I saw that they had put Jimmie's bed back in its place. I sat down between my bed and his empty bed, and I longed desperately to die. I believe very few children have ever been so completely left alone as I was. I felt that I was the only thing that was alive in the world. The others meant nothing to me. Not a ray of light shone in the great darkness which covered me that day.

This was in May. Annie never went into the dead house again.

CHAPTER III

A Glimpse of Freedom

FOR the third time in her life Annie knew that Christmas was coming, and though the first two had brought her nothing she expected something of this one. She was alone now, but Maggie Carroll's next neighbour had been wheeled into the dead house, and Annie had the cot beside Maggie. She had only one way of expressing her devotion to Maggie. The doctors and nurses, finding her a handy baggage to have around, had given her the privilege of distributing the trays of medicine. Certain doses, probably those with opium in them, were more popular than the others, and Annie, with an ingratiating disregard of Æsculapius, used to present the tray first to Maggie Carroll to take whatever she chose. Then she gave it to the blind woman, and after that to the others indifferently. They had to take what was left.

Annie went to sleep that Christmas Eve confident that in the morning she would wake and find a present under her pillow, and when morning came she waked early and reached for it. There was nothing. Frantically she shook the pillow and tore at the bedclothes. Still there was nothing. Her violent search waked Maggie, and Maggie asked in her sweet mournful voice what the trouble was. "My present," choked the little girl. "Where is it? Where is it?" Maggie could not turn in the bed, though she tried, and Maggie could not put her crippled arms around her, though she tried. "Yes, you have a present, dear," she said caressingly. "God sent you one. Jesus is God's Christmas present to the poor." Annie did not think much of God's present.

The Lord's Catholic ambassador to the almshouse at this time was a young French Canadian, disrespectfully called "Frenchie" by the inmates, who used to come at irregular intervals to confess the living and shrive the dying. He always came to Maggie to get his robe and candles, and Annie, though she did not like the man, always watched with interest when he put on his purple stole and lighted the candles and said Mass. It seemed somehow a part of the beautiful picture of her mother's funeral. Maggie explained to her what the priest was doing and told her about confession, adding that she must tell him everything bad she did. Annie replied, rather pertly, that she did not do anything bad, but for some time she managed to think up enough to engage his attention every time he came for a visit.

In addition to her beads—where she got the beads she does not know—she was given an Agnus Dei to wear on a cord around her neck. She was told that the tiny silken covers held the body of Jesus. This seemed so unreasonable that one quiet day she broke them open; inside was a little waxen figure of a lamb bearing a cross. She told the horrified priest what she had done. "You have wounded the body of the Lord," he cried, and tried, quite in vain, to persuade her that she had actually hurt the flesh of Jesus. This angered her, and she declared that she was through with confession.

More horrified than ever, the priest went to Maggie. Annie followed him and showed the devout old woman the broken image. Maggie put out her maimed hands to hide it. Tenderly she wrapped it in a piece of cloth without looking at it and laid it away. Annie never saw it again and never confessed to the French-Canadian priest again. She hid when she knew he was coming. Throughout the affair her mind was in a state of division. Half of it felt sensitively that she had done wrong. That was the Maggie half. Half of it knew that she had done right. That was the Frenchie half. Ever since, her feeling towards the Church has been much the same: half of her mind

absorbed with a deep-seated rebellion against it, the other half equally absorbed with a deep-seated devotion towards it.

Frenchie left not long after this, and a Jesuit priest known as Father Barbara took his place. From the moment she saw him Annie worshipped him—his rich voice, his soft hand, his kind protecting manner. He must have been a man of great wisdom, for he did not immediately bring up the subject of confession, though he surely must have known of the difficulty, but allowed her to follow him around while he talked to her of this and that and one day of leaving the almshouse. "This is no place for you, little woman," he said, fondling her hair in the way she loved. "I am going to take you away."

Dickens says, speaking of his six months in the blacking warehouse which he considered the most degrading and difficult of his childhood experiences, that—

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship. . . . The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and helpless; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I had learned, thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and emulation up by was passing away from me, never to be brought back any more cannot be written. . . . My rescue from this kind of existence I considered quite hopeless, and abandoned as such altogether; though I am solemnly convinced that I never, for one hour, was reconciled to it, or was otherwise than miserably unhappy.

This was not the case with Annie Sullivan. Plunged into a far deeper degradation, for a much longer period (the almshouse was not yet through with her) she had at this time, when she was about the same age that Dickens was when he went into the blacking warehouse, no sense of shame. Dickens had known happier days. Annie had not, and when Father Barbara said that he was going to take her away she began to cry and said she did not want to go. But Father Barbara talked to her so agreeably of the Sisters to whom he was going to take her

that presently it seemed to her, too, a good plan. She left Tewksbury in February, 1877, almost a year to a day after she came, and went to the hospital of the Sœurs de la Charité in Lowell, Massachusetts.

Bright colours danced in a perpetual and bewildering procession before her eyes now. The two operations in Tewksbury apparently had done nothing for her, and the colours had grown stronger and livelier, but every doctor who looked at the eyes seemed hopeful. Very soon after her arrival in Lowell a Dr. Savory set to work on them. His operation relieved whatever was causing the colours, but left the sight so blurred that she could still be classified in public records only as blind. More benefit might have followed if her convalescence had not been interrupted by one of the most painful incidents of her childhood. Her eyes were still bandaged when a woman who had been mortally burned was brought in screaming and placed in the cot next to hers. A curtain was put up, but a mere curtain could not shut out the screams and moans or the smell of burnt flesh. Annie became hysterical and had to be taken away to another room, with the bandage sadly disarranged. Nothing that ever happened at Tewksbury was so dreadful. No other topic was discussed for days. Flesh had sloughed off, the charred bones had dropped away, bare white bones lay exposed, and the woman's clothes were seared into her body. Not a detail was neglected, and the Greek chorus of women who lay on the other cots kept harking back to it and recalling every other accident they knew in which a person had burned to death. All of which would have been memorable enough and horrible enough even if the bandage had not been disturbed.

The hospital Sisters with their fresh white bonnets were a delight to the little girl. From where she lay on the bed she could see a group of them outlined against the window, their heads swaying over their sewing like pretty columbines. Later she was allowed to help them fold the bonnets, which were ironed out flat and had to be handled with great care. Ever

so slight a mistake in folding a bonnet, even if it were not soiled, meant that it had to go back to the laundry. Simply touching them was a delight. Nor was this all.

In the ward there was a sacred heart picture of the Virgin with candles below it before which Father Barbara said Mass. The chanting of the Latin words, like music, mystical and holy, incomprehensible and suggestive of vague longings and great heights, made her feel very close to the Lord. She used to slip into St. Patrick's Church, next door, when it was empty, and climb reverently over the altar to peer at the chalice and the carvings. Sometimes Father Barbara would join her, and the two would sit in one of the pews pretending that they were listening to a sermon. Then he would take her around the stations of the cross, chanting the story that belonged to each one as they went. After that they would leave the church and walk hand in hand along the Merrimac River. At night he would read to her of St. Bridget and St. Lucia and St. Catherine and of the terrible persecutions that the Catholics had suffered at the hands of the Protestants.

When she was better she went with the Sisters on their errands of mercy, carrying baskets to the poor. One house which they pointed out she remembered ever afterwards. It belonged to a man who was generally believed, as he no doubt believed himself, to be a friend of the poor. He was a brilliant Irishman (North of Ireland Presbyterian Irish), already notorious on three continents because of his conduct during the military occupation of New Orleans, an unscrupulous but rather magnificent lawyer, a charlatan and a demagogue: Ben Butler—Silver Spoon Butler. Annie's friends treasured him as their friend. They did not have friends enough to be critical, and, besides, they liked him.

He was one of the first advocates in this country of a ten-hour working day for factory employees as against the fourteen- and fifteen-hour day which was then the custom. He had opposed and still opposed an amendment to the state constitution

which provided that no person in Massachusetts should have the right to vote, or be eligible to office, who could not read the Constitution in the English language and write his name. This Butler considered a blow to the Catholic Church and the Irishmen. Most of the barons of England who won Magna Carta, so Butler reminded whoever would listen, could not read or write, and—

... an examination of the pay-rolls of that revolution which established the liberty of this country will show that much the larger number of the soldiers were such as could not have voted under the strict application of this rule of the Constitution of Massachusetts. ... Such a provision is an invasion of liberty and the rights of men, and to-day is depriving substantially all the labouring men of the South of that true citizenship which the soldiers of Massachusetts, many of whom could not read and write, fought to give them,—namely, equality of rights that belonged to the man because he was a man.

Annie's friends, the majority of whom could not read or write, considered themselves quite capable of voting, and much more competent to manage the country than the men who had it in charge. At any rate, for these reasons, and others that will appear later, the sorry figure of Ben Butler, tricked out in the splendour of a child's imagination, became her first hero, a shining knight in armour.

This was a lovely time for Annie, but it did not last long. When she had recovered as much as it seemed she would ever recover, Father Barbara took her to Boston and left her there with some friends of his by the name of Brown who lived on Springfield Street. She remembers only that the house was dark, that it was her duty to wash and wipe the dishes, and that once when she was banging joyously and erratically upon the piano—the first piano she had ever seen—someone jerked her roughly away.

She had not been with the Browns many days before she was taken to the city infirmary, where once more her eyes underwent in rapid succession two more operations, one at

the hands of a Dr. Wadsworth, and one at the hands of a Dr. Williams. She entered the hospital on July 16, 1877, and liked it very much.

The most dramatic event of the day here, as in all charity hospitals, was the arrival of the doctor. First of all, an important-looking man in a surgeon's coat would come through the door followed by internes and flanked by nurses. He stood at the head of the patient's bed and read aloud from a chart indicating the nature of the illness. Then he examined the patient's tongue or pulse, prescribed, and passed on. The inmates were perfectly quiet or whispering until all the examinations and prescriptions were over, but the last interne had hardly turned from flirting with the last nurse before the chorus broke forth: "He said this about me." "Did you hear what he said about me?" The story of a doctor who cut into a living man thinking him dead and went mad afterwards, the story of a doctor who cut out a man's eye and stood with it in his hand trying to decide whether to stop there or cut deeper. Thousands of preposterous horrors were recited by the gaunt chorus which watched ignorantly but keenly the drama that passed before it.

The head nurse, Miss Rosa, who for many was a greatly beloved presence in the ward, let Annie make lemonades for herself, chipping ice off the block in the refrigerator and sweetening it herself, a slight privilege, but one she had never enjoyed before. Her eyes were no better, so far as she could tell, than they had been when she came, but she was content. After a while, however, the doctors said they were through with her. It was time for her to go. Father Barbara had already gone, called off to another part of the country, the Browns did not want her, and there was nowhere to send her but back to Tewksbury. She knew now what Tewksbury meant. She screamed and fastened herself to one of the doctors. Inexorably they peeled her off. The commonwealth of Massachusetts had claimed her. The commonwealth of Massachusetts threw

her once more into its great sewer of charred souls and misshapen bodies.

In the meanwhile, at least so the story runs, two visitors had come to Tewksbury from Feeding Hills—John Sullivan and his wife, Bridget. It was a long trip for them, that which to-day can be covered in a few hours, and all their trouble was for nothing. The authorities—and they were afraid of all “authorities”—told them that Jimmie had died and that Annie had gone away. They did not tell them where she had gone, and that was the last that John and Bridget ever knew of her. In 1896 a young woman with blue eyes and dark hair came to Feeding Hills with an old man with flowing beard and flowing garments—from Washington, apparently looking up war records for a pension. Old Bridget Sullivan watched sharply while they questioned her, but she did not quite have evidence enough.

“If Annie Sullivan’s alive,” she said after the girl had gone, “that was Annie Sullivan,” and spent the rest of her life regretting that she had not asked her outright who she was.

CHAPTER IV Misery and Romance

ANNIE was not put back in the hospital—hospitals, so it was believed, had done all they could for her—but in a ward in a building across the courtyard with a miscellaneous group of women, most of whom were younger than the ones she had known when she and Jimmie were together. Some of her new companions were insane, some tubercular, some perverted—the woman on the cot next to hers was a pervert—some were cancerous, some epileptic, some crippled. The ward across the hall was filled—always filled and nearly always overflowing—with young women who were there to have children they did not want. After the children were born, the mothers were transferred to the ward below Annie’s.

These three wards were under the care of a sad, quiet little woman with a crooked back, Maggie Hogan, who moved about among them like a grey angel, soothing them when they wept, calming them with soft sweet words when they cowered before the pain of bringing new life into the world. The girls called her “Little Mother,” and she was godmother to all their children. Those that seemed likely to die before the priest came she baptized herself, going through all the details of the familiar ceremony, even lighting the candles.

God knows they died fast enough. Healthy and diseased alike were packed together in the foundling house in a separate building not far away, ten and fifteen in a single room, though the advisory board of women who came on tours of inspection said that there should not have been more than two in a room. Flies and mosquitoes played over them without interference.

The heating system was inadequate, and the children were too scantily clad. There was insufficient ventilation, and the atmosphere was rendered unwholesome by the proximity of the toilet. "The kind, faithful, and intelligent personal care requisite is intrusted to pauper women, who, provided they are physically capable, are ignorant, unwilling, and selfish." The children were not much trouble. The women who looked after them during the day quieted them with drugs when they cried at night; under the circumstances the members of the advisory board did not think it surprising that most of them died within a few weeks after their arrival.

These visiting women were disturbed by laxity in other parts of the almshouse. It was suspected—this point came up later at a public investigation—that some of the children were conceived as well as born at the institution. The women urged a more complete separation of the sexes.

By this time ugly rumours were circulating throughout Massachusetts concerning conditions in the almshouse, but the superintendent found himself unable to change them. He was still sending in the same dreary report, still begging for a barn, for water closets, for separate quarters for the insane sick. He was pleased to add, however, that the average cost to the state during this year, 1878, was only \$1.75 per patient. "This gratifying decrease," he said, "is the result of careful economy in management and expenditure."

Annie found her new surroundings a pleasant relief from the ward where she and Jimmie stayed. The women were younger, some of them no more than twelve years old, and there was not the same air of hopelessness about them. They were transients, here to have their children. Soon after the children were born, the mothers were transferred to the workhouse at Bridgewater, whence several ways of release offered themselves. Many found positions in private homes. Some of them, after the necessary biological interval, came back to Tewksbury to have more children.

Most of these young women were coarse and ignorant, and the language they used would not pass the most indifferent censor, even in our careless day. Maggie Hogan tried, like Maggie Carroll, to throw the scant robe of her protection around the shoulders of Annie Sullivan, but Annie was too interested to want protection.

"Very much of what I remember about Tewksbury is indecent, cruel, melancholy," she says, "gruesome in the light of grown-up experience; but nothing corresponding with my present understanding of these ideas entered my child mind. Everything interested me. I was not shocked, pained, grieved, or troubled by what happened. Such things happened. People behaved like that—that was all there was to it. It was all the life I knew. Things impressed themselves upon me because I had a receptive mind. Curiosity kept me alert and keen to know everything."

During the daytime she played with the children (some of whom were covered with syphilitic sores) and during the evening she listened to their mothers. There was more light in Annie's ward than in the others, and for this reason the girls from across the hall used to come in after supper and sit around a kerosene lamp on a post in the centre of the room, telling stories of the past. This was Annie's first contact with romance.

In the beginning her favourite was an Irish girl with blue eyes and black hair who waited on the superintendent's table dressed in a blue uniform and a white apron, an outfit which to the hungry eyes of the little girl looked, in contrast to the dingy garments she and the rest of her companions wore, like the silken robes of the Queen of Sheba. The pretty waitress had secret pockets in her apron into which she used to stuff goodies from the superintendent's table—chicken salad, cake, and biscuits, all mixed together in a grand delicious mess. While the women ate it they talked mysteriously about themselves.

The mystery, which for many months was unfathomable to

Annie, was in every case connected with a baby that was about to be born. Annie knew that the baby was a disgrace and that mothers like these sometimes left babies in hallways and on doorsteps. She gathered that men were dreadful but women loved them. In some way they were responsible for the babies. The girls wept as they talked, and Annie sometimes wept with them without knowing why. The girls were not explicit. "Then it happened," or "I couldn't help myself. The mistress was out and we were alone in the house." "He loved me and I loved him." When Annie asked questions they laughed at her and told her to ask Tim. Tim was the man who drove the Black Maria. She never asked him, but she used to think that she might be going to have a baby, too, and used to feel her body anxiously to find out.

Nearly all of the women had splendid stories to tell of their surroundings before they came to the almshouse—beautiful garments and jewels and handsome houses; but most of the stories, Annie suspected even then, were not true, and it was obvious that the women did not believe one another. Only one was ever able to produce proof. She had boasted so insistently of former grandeur that the other women began to snarl at her. In order to prove that she was not lying she sneaked into the baggage room where the clothes the inmates discarded when they came into the almshouse were kept, uncleaned, in paper bundles, and brought hers out. Two items Annie remembers: a pair of blue satin shoes which for one dazzling moment she tried on her own feet, and a blue velvet bolero.

In a little while Annie was able to offer contributions of her own to these evening gatherings. She began, when the women grew tired of exchanging tawdry reminiscences, by telling them the stories of the saints and the Protestant persecutions that she had learned from Maggie Carroll and Father Barbara, but it was not long before a way was provided for her to get more stories.

It was Maggie Hogan who introduced her to the small library in the administration building, and it was Maggie who selected her first books, taking only those whose authors were unmistakably Irish. And it was Maggie who persuaded a mildly crazy girl by the name of Tilly Delaney to read them to her. Later Annie selected the books herself. Her system was to choose from the titles (she could not see them) which the superintendent read out to her: *Cast Up by the Sea*, *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, *Stepping Heavenward*, *The Octoroon*, *The Lamplighter*, *Darkness and Daylight*, *Tempest and Sunshine*.

Tilly had to be bribed to read. Her one hope was to be able to escape from the institution, and she used to prowl around at night, cat-like, with eager, wild eyes, looking for an opening in the high wall. Annie promised that she would do everything to help her, and the two girls would sit down on the floor at the head of Annie's bed, between the head of the bed and the steam pipes which ran around the room. It took patience to listen to Tilly, more patience than it had taken to catch the birds at John Sullivan's place in Feeding Hills, for Tilly paid no attention to what she read, except when escape was part of the narrative. She skipped whole pages and never could remember from one time to the next where her place was, Annie, helpless in her semi-dark world, had to show her how to find it by guessing where it was from what she knew of the story. Sometimes a shudder passed over the girl's body, her lips foamed and she made strange sounds. Frightened at first, Annie learned to wait calmly until the fit was over and the reading could be resumed. Her impatient, rebellious soul she was learning to subdue when she felt that the object to be obtained was worth it.

Now and then Tilly demanded her pound of flesh, and Maggie planned a mock escape. Tilly flew into a great state of excitement and when night came two girls instead of one prowled about the grounds until Annie was able to persuade Tilly that all avenues were cut off and they would have to wait

until another time. Once or twice Maggie had Tim leave the big gate open and let Tilly through it. Always he caught her before she had gone very far and afterwards for a long time Tilly was content. It was excitement rather than escape that she wanted. And Annie, too, was getting what she wanted. In the evenings now she retold to the girls the stories that Tilly had read to her during the day. They listened eagerly. Little Annie Sullivan knew how to tell a story.

Later there was another woman who read to her—Delia. Delia had lived in England, where her father was a coal miner. The twelve members of the family slept in two rooms. In Delia's bed there were five—three at the head and two at the foot. Her older sister Estelle was the only one who slept in a nightgown. She had a toothbrush, too, which a man had given her. The children were accustomed to seeing their mother and father in the most intimate embrace and thought nothing of it. They were surrounded by brutal conditions and did not know that other conditions existed. The older sister quarrelled with her father and ran away, to America, they heard. Her mother worked harder than ever, washing. Delia used to wake at night and see her bending over the tubs. Delia became a thief, and after her mother died she, too, ran away. Sometimes she worked, sometimes she stole, sometimes she lived with men. One of the men brought her to the United States. He died soon after, and that was how she came to be at Tewksbury.

Bertha Maître. Bertha was born in the City of Quebec. Her mother had burned to death from an overturned kerosene lamp; she never saw her father and did not know anything about him. For years she lived happily in an orphans' home, where it was understood that she was one day to be dedicated to the service of God. She had beautiful golden hair, of which she was very proud, and the Sisters used to adore it, for they quarrelled among themselves as to which one should brush it. She did not realize that her dedication to the Lord included the sacrifice of her hair until the bishop in his gorgeous robes

advanced towards her with the shears in his hand. When she saw the great golden locks falling to the floor she screamed and seized the bishop's hand. "I lied to you," she cried. "I lied to God. I don't want to live here. Let me go!" A dead silence fell. The convent mother led her out of the chapel. White-faced nuns helped her disrobe. There was no sound except Bertha's sobs. During the rest of the time she stayed in the convent no one spoke to her, and the nuns used to cross themselves and mutter prayers when they passed her in the corridors.

A position was found for her in an English family where she was known as the French governess. While the children learned French, she learned English. One evening she made the acquaintance of a gifted young musician who had come to the house several times when the lady gave receptions. This evening he left the other musicians and came into the hall where she stood and asked for a drink of water. He knew by her uniform that she held a position in the household. Before he left he gave a note to the head butler to give to her, asking her to meet him at a certain place. Many meetings followed that first one. Bertha's lady went to Europe and asked Bertha to go with her, but the girl had other plans. Her sweetheart was going to Boston, and he wanted her to follow him. "I would have jumped into the fire," she said, "if he had asked me." She found it not so easy to get work in Boston.

Day after day she sat in employment offices; evening after evening she came home and waited for her lover. One evening she told him that they must get married, and after that she never saw him again. When her condition became apparent, her landlady told her she had better look for another room. "I burst into tears and told her that I had no friends and nowhere to go. She went out without speaking. The next morning a man came and asked me questions. I refused to tell him my lover's name and told him he could do what he liked with me. He brought me here."

Sally Stacy was older than most of the other women in the ward and very quiet. The matron found out that she was a nice seamstress and gave her plenty of work to do, mending garments for the inmates. She sat at the head of her bed all day long tucking, gathering, hemming, darning, and whipping. Annie used to perch on her bed and ask her questions. Sally made her get off the bed because she mussed it, but she seemed to like having her around, for as the days went by she told her what had happened to bring her there. She was born in Nova Scotia of Scottish and Irish parentage. All her people for as many generations as they could remember had been fishermen. Her father's father had saved enough to educate his oldest son for the Presbyterian ministry. He had married the daughter of a toll keeper in Fundy and was very much beloved by his people. He sent his boy, David, to medical school, but there was not money enough to keep Sally in school after she was fourteen. It was when she was twenty-five and David came home to pay them a long, long visit, bringing a college friend of his, that misfortune came to her. Her father and mother never knew, nor did the man, Phil. She came to Boston and got work. As her confinement approached she drew her corset strings tighter and tighter but it was no use. The secret could not be kept, and when she was thrown out she had nowhere to go but to the almshouse. When the baby was born it was horribly deformed and had tuberculosis. Sally at first refused to see it, but when Annie laid it on her arm something in her heart seemed to warm towards it. Later she said she would nurse it and would not let them carry it away. But it was too weak to take the breast. They kept it alive a while with a dropper, and when it died Sally wept bitterly. Annie asked her why, because she had never wanted the baby. She said she didn't know. When she saw it put into the box for burial she asked permission to get something out of her bundle in the storeroom. She returned with a man's silk handkerchief and a photograph which she told Annie was Phil. She took

off the coarse gown of the baby and wrapped it in the silk handkerchief and laid the picture on the cold little body.

But why tell over these beads of misery? There is no end to them. The result, so far as Annie was concerned, was an outlandish impression of what life was like and a queer fascinated antagonism for men. She was instinctively a little afraid of some of the men in the almshouse, in particular a great brute with misshapen fingers who supervised the dining room and used to fondle her and some of the more attractive women as they passed in and out. He was the object of storms of abuse which seldom reached his ears, for all of the women were afraid of him. "Beefy," they called him behind his back. Among themselves they complained bitterly of the soggy bread, the rancid butter, the tasteless stews, the rotten fish, the eternal corned beef. It seemed to Annie that the food bothered them more than the loss of their virtue. But they generally ate in silence. If anyone dared a complaint Beefy howled at them all indiscriminately: "Beggars, thieves, whores, what do you expect? Broiled chicken and lobster, I suppose, and cream cheese from the dairy of heaven. One more word and I'll throw you out!"

Sadie Sullivan, one of the boldest of the pregnant women, answered him back one day. "I dare you to throw me out, you dirty beast." Astonished and infuriated he leapt upon the bench to reach across the table for her. One of the other women pushed a bucket of hot tea in front of him. He tripped over it without upsetting it, and fell to the floor. Sadie threw her plate at him and yelled to Annie to hit him. Others screamed and threw plates and food, but Beefy got to his feet, grabbed Sadie by the hair, and gave her several heavy blows on the face. Annie jumped up on the table and turned over the bucket of tea, regretting as it trickled over him, and ever afterward, that it was not scalding hot. Beefy turned from Sadie and made a pass at Annie just as the superintendent and his son dashed into the room.

"What are you doing?" the superintendent shouted. And "Hold your tongues, you women," as they all began to talk at once. "Keep quiet and let one speak. You there." But no one had a chance to speak. They were interrupted by Sadie's screams and the cry of the woman who stood beside her. "Get the doctor quick. The child is coming." Beefy had not spoken. The superintendent ordered him to clear the dining room. No one waited. They all stampeded, glad of an excuse to escape. Sadie's baby arrived before the doctor came. A few days later they put her and the baby in a pine box and buried them together.

There was at this time apparently no thought in the mind of anyone in the world concerning the future of Annie Sullivan. The salvage value of the inmates of such institutions is not high, and even the doctors were letting her alone. She actually went three years without an operation on her eyes. She knew in her own mind that she wanted to get out of the almshouse—she had had a glimpse of the world outside, and she knew that there were schools where blind children like herself could be educated, but how an entirely friendless and isolated little girl could find a path to the schools she did not know. There seemed to be no future ahead of her but to grow up in the institution, in which case the pattern of her life would be much like that of Maggie Hogan, who had been there since she was a very small child.

Maggie had lived in Chicopee, near Annie's old home. Her father was dead, and her mother kept Maggie and her four other children alive and together by washing and doing housework. One day a relative brought Maggie a pair of red slippers which she loved even as Annie had loved the Taylor girl's parasol. She slept with them and kissed them, and on the edge of a rustic bridge over a brook which ran past their house she sat down to admire their reflected beauty. One day—her mother saw it from the ironing board—she leaned over too far and fell into the brook, striking herself cruelly on the rocks.

The next thing she remembered was being in bed, all bandage and plaster and pain. Her mother had to work harder than ever after this, and the oldest girl had to leave school to help. Soon afterwards two of the children died of scarlet fever, and it was not long before Mrs. Hogan followed them, heart-broken and worn out with anxiety and poverty. The oldest girl, the one who had left school, was taken by a farmer to help in his family, and Maggie was sent to the almshouse at Tewksbury. Like Maggie Carroll, she never complained. "You can't help being poor," she would say, "but you can keep poverty from eating the heart out of you." "The less change you have in your pocket the more good thoughts you can put in your head." She had somehow managed to get a shelf put in the window beside her bed, and she always kept plants in it—geraniums and wandering Jew and fuchsias, which bloomed prodigiously. Many times Annie saw her caress the flowers lightly with the tips of her fingers.

The women used to tease Annie about her superior airs, and some of them used to say, "She'll be walking out of here some day on the arm of the Emperor of Penzance." The Emperor was a crazy boy who kept the walks clean and fancied himself a general directing the movements of the army in defense of his empire. Annie heard all this with pretended indifference, but it was more or less the picture of herself that she carried in her own mind, though the Emperor of Penzance did not figure in it.

She was almost taken away, though not in just the manner the women anticipated, by another crazy boy, Jimmie Burns, who ran errands for the asylum. He was thought to be perfectly safe.

One day when Annie was walking with Delia he stopped before them, his hamper of bread still on his arm, and addressed Annie as his long-lost love. Delia ordered him sharply to get along with his bread, and, when he set the bread down on the walk, became frightened and ran. Annie stood her ground, how-

ever, finding it rather pleasant to hear his deep masculine voice speaking to her. He called her Jennie (it was love for a woman by that name which had put him in the infirmary) and begged her to fly away with him. By this time Annie had begun to wish that she had flown with Delia instead, but she got rid of the boy by promising to meet him on the following day. By the time Annie got back to the ward everyone knew and the women laughed and teased her unmercifully about her crazy lover. Maggie Hogan warned her to stay out of his way. "There's no telling what he might do," she said.

Annie promised to obey Maggie and kept the promise for one day. Then she said to herself, "How silly to be afraid! What could Jimmie do to me?" and forth she sallied to meet her lover. She had really thought that because he was crazy he would not even remember her, but when he saw her he ran towards her shouting, "Jennie, Jennie, Jennie, I'm here. I'm coming." Annie wished now that she had stayed in the ward. There was that in his voice which made her tremble.

He put the hamper down on the walk and was all for dashing out of the hospital then and there. Annie reminded him that hungry people were waiting for him and offered to help him take the bread to them. "You are trying to fool me again," he said, the cunning of madness creeping into his voice. He caught her around the waist and pressed her forcibly against his shoulder. "You don't get away from me this time, my sweetheart." Annie tried to make him at least move the bread off the walk so no one would trip over it. He let her go and reached for the bread, but catching sight of her intention to escape sprang towards her and snatched from under his coat a long knife he had stolen from the bakery.

"Jimmie!" she shrieked.

Someone knocked him down from behind, and the knife fell out of his hand.

"Pick it up and run," shouted the man who had knocked him down. He had pinned Jimmie's arms to his sides and was

calling for help, while Jimmie struggled with a madman's strength to free himself. Still trembling, Annie ran back to the ward with the knife in her hand. "Serves you right," mumbled one of the women, "he should have cut your heart out, that crazy boy you run after."

It was many years before Annie permitted herself to be romantic again.

CHAPTER V

Escape

MR. ISRAEL ZANGWILL had not yet called America the melting pot, but signs were not lacking even to Annie in her isolation in the colony at Tewksbury that other oppressed peoples besides the Irish were looking for an asylum in the United States. The most startling evidence came one morning when she was drawn out of doors by a commotion in the courtyard where a crowd of young men and women like none she had ever seen before, so godlike they were in their beauty and strength, were crying and lamenting in a strange tongue. Only one English word came out of the mêlée: "Devil." One of the men walked up and down repeating it vindictively. But it was not their distress that held Annie, it was their beauty. She was entranced with it. Whatever the cause of their present trouble these were people who had known happiness. They were fresh and glowing, and their children, playing heedlessly at their feet, were fat and rosy. Their hair was long and silky, and their features, which she afterwards came to know as Slavic, were strong and pleasant. They were dressed in bright colours. They were graceful and picturesque in the midst of their grief. Presently they grew calmer, and one of the women placed a candle on a cobblestone, and they all knelt and prayed, but they wept more than they prayed.

The superintendent told Annie that they were Polish immigrants who had been robbed by the agent who brought them over. These were sad years for Poland. Like the Irish, the Poles had been driven from their own country; like the Irish, through the oppression of a more powerful country. In 1865, the year

before Annie was born, the entire property of the Catholic Church in Poland was taken over by the Russian government. In the same year all persons of Polish blood in the nine western provinces of Russia were forbidden to acquire land. The Polish language was interdicted and Russian taught instead. There was every inducement for Poles, especially if they were Catholic, to go anywhere but to Poland. Thousands of them came to the United States. When these immigrants left the almshouse—and they vanished in a little while as suddenly as they came—it was to go as labourers on farms not far away. Annie remembered them fifty years later, when she went back to the country around Feeding Hills and found a number of the farms which in her childhood had been occupied by the Irish and before that by the "Yankees" now in the hands of Poles. The drama of the races was working itself out.

The community in the poorhouse was cosmopolitan, as she had known it during her first sojourn. Her first contact with the Negro came here. She remembers only one, a black giant of a man, fat and sweating, who used to shovel the clothes down a bulkhead into the basement where the laundry was done. He had white protruding teeth like tusks and used to work stripped to the waist and singing. He held a repulsive fascination for Annie, and she used to creep close to the bulkhead to watch him.

Most of the inmates were still Irish, but with a difference, for Ireland had recently got back something she had not had for many years—hope. Hope so burning and so far-flung that the meanest Irishman in the basest of poorhouses could not help having a share in it. The hope was centred in the person of one man, young Charles Stewart Parnell, who in 1875 had quietly taken a seat in Parliament from the county of Meath, making very slight impression and that unfavourable, and who four years later had become, without question, the first man in Ireland and the most interesting man in the British Empire.

The ascendancy of this man over the Irish was in his own

day an enigma; in ours it remains no less so. He was born in Ireland, it is true, but what education he had he got in England, and he spoke, not with the Irish brogue, but with a strong English accent. He was a landlord; the Irish for whom he was fighting were tenants, and a good part of the fight was to help them keep their land against the landlords. Parnell was a Protestant; most of the Irish were Catholics. The Irish are quick, warm, and impulsive; Parnell was cold and reserved, "encased in steel"—pleasant and charming—but "you always felt there was a piece of ice between you and him." He had none of old Daniel O'Connell's flaming power of oratory, and he was not in any sense a man of the people, but the mantle of O'Connell had fallen upon him, and the Irish, even the Irish in Tewksbury, were ready to die for him.

The story of what he did came to the almshouse through the friendly offices of another Irishman, editor of the Boston *Pilot*, Mr. John Boyle O'Reilly, who is to-day remembered in anthologies for two or three graceful poems of love. As a hero in Tewksbury he stood second only to Parnell. His opinions were accepted there without question, and the inmates loved him because he was approachable and romantic and—thoroughly Irish. He was born in Ireland, but as a young man he had enlisted in the British Army deliberately to instigate rebellion among the soldiers. When his purpose was discovered he was exiled to Australia, whence, with the help of a Catholic priest, he escaped on an American whaling vessel. He seldom missed an opportunity to declare his hatred of England (the first money he made here was by lecturing on political prisoners), but he never used this hatred, as so many did, to promote brawling and dissension among the Irish and their neighbours.

It was a tribute to O'Reilly that though he was Irish and Catholic and a Democrat—a Butler Democrat at that—he was at the same time accepted as a friend by old conservative Boston. More than once he appeared on the platform with Wendell Phillips, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and others equally

distinguished. "I have just met," said a stranger to a Bostonian, "the most remarkable, the most delightful man in all the world." "I know whom you mean," the Bostonian replied. "You mean John Boyle O'Reilly." This personal charm was reflected in his paper. "I esteem it a great honour," Oscar Wilde wrote to him, "that the first American paper I appeared in should be your admirable *Pilot*." William Butler Yeats and Katharine Tynan were regular contributors, but it is doubtful that any of their contributions were read to Annie. Other sections of the paper were much more interesting to her and her friends.

Their excitement passed almost beyond the bounds of reason late in 1879 when the *Pilot* announced that Parnell was coming to the United States. The Irish Land League had asked him to make the trip, "for the purpose of obtaining assistance from our exiled fellow countrymen." Just what the nature of the assistance was to be was not altogether clear except to the Irish. "Clearness of aim," remarked a Canadian paper, "is not the Hibernian forte, and it is difficult to understand whether Mr. Parnell is asking for bread or gunpowder." Mr. Parnell was asking for both, as the Irish (even Annie Sullivan) well knew, and the Irish were ready to give him both. They would not have minded war. As O'Reilly expressed it, "God purifies slowly by peace but urgently by fire." The Irish were ready for fire.

At the time of this visit Parnell was thirty-three years old and looked like a king, as indeed he was—the uncrowned King of Ireland. He seemed in those days to be a man of destiny whom nothing could turn aside. The affair with Mrs. O'Shea, which brought the whole glittering structure to ruin and the hopes of the Irish with it, came later.

No king could have been more grandly received. When he arrived in New York he was met in the bay by a special committee of three hundred men, including distinguished senators, judges, merchants, and ministers. When he addressed eight

thousand people in Madison Square Garden Thurlow Weed accompanied him to the platform. When he spoke at the opera house in Newark the Governor of New Jersey came to hear him. When he held a meeting in Brooklyn, Henry Ward Beecher spoke in his behalf. In Boston Mayor Prince presided, and Wendell Phillips spoke. In February he was invited to address the national House of Representatives, an honour which up to this time had been given to only three other men—Bishop England of Charleston, Kossuth, and Lafayette. The Senate and the House followed the invitation by authorizing the Secretary of the Navy to employ any ship or vessel best adapted to the service to send relief to the poor of Ireland, and appropriated any sum of money which might be necessary.

Annie did not have to wait for Tilly Delaney or Delia to read her the story of Parnell's triumphant progress. Maggie Hogan read it, and while she read Annie embellished it with all the tag ends of glory she had ever known. She thought, because of a song she had heard, that he was Prince Charlie. Was he not bonnie, was he not a prince, and did he not come from over the water? As she sang the song to herself tears of delight came to her eyes with the thought that she belonged to him and he to her and both to Ireland.

For a long time now her dominant idea had been escape. Tilly Delaney did not desire it more frantically, but while Tilly wanted nothing more than to get out, Annie wanted to go to school to prepare herself to enter the attractive world through which Mr. Parnell moved. The sick old women hanging to life by the slenderest of threads had told her before they dropped off into perpetual oblivion that there were schools where blind children could be taught to read and write, and this gave her something to live for. As a matter of fact, the most famous of all such schools was only about twenty miles from Tewksbury—the Massachusetts School and Perkins Institution for the Blind.

The impossible had been accomplished at the Perkins Institution, and the story of it had gone around the world. The leading press agent was Mr. Charles Dickens, who in *American Notes* gave an account of his visit there to see for himself the miracle that Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe had achieved in placing Laura Bridgman—the first blind deaf mute for whom it was ever done—into contact with the world around her.

Dickens liked the Perkins Institution.

I went to see this place [he wrote] one very fine winter morning: [it was on Saturday, January 29, 1842] an Italian sky above, and the air so clear and bright on every side, that even my eyes, which are none of the best, could follow the minute lines and scraps of tracery in distant buildings. Like most other public institutions in America, of the same class, it stands a mile or two without the town, in a cheerful healthy spot; and is an airy, spacious, handsome edifice. It is built upon a height, commanding the harbour. When I paused for a moment at the door, and marked how fresh and free the whole scene was—what sparkling bubbles glanced upon the waves, and welled up every moment to the surface, as though the world below, like that above, were radiant with the bright day, and gushing over in its fulness of light: when I gazed from sail to sail away upon a ship at sea, a tiny speck of shining white, the only cloud upon the still, deep, distant blue—and turning saw a blind boy with his sightless face addressed that way, as though he too had some sense within him of the glorious distance: I felt a kind of sorrow that the place should be so very light and a strange wish that for his sake it were darker. It was but momentary, of course, and a mere fancy, but I felt it keenly for all that.

The children were not in uniform. He liked that.

Good order, cleanliness, and comfort, pervaded every corner of the building. The various classes, who were gathered around their teachers, answered the questions put to them with readiness and intelligence, and in a spirit of cheerful contest for precedence which pleased me very much. Those who were at play were as gleesome and noisy as other children.

The faces of the blind fascinated him—

... how free they are from all concealment of what is passing in their thoughts; observing which, a man with eyes may blush to contemplate the mask he wears.

But the face that fascinated him most was that of a girl

... blind, deaf, and dumb; destitute of smell; and nearly so of taste: ... a fair young creature with every human faculty and hope, and power and goodness and affection, inclosed within her delicate frame, and but one outward sense—the sense of touch. There she was before me; built up, as it were, in a marble cell, impervious to any ray of light, or particle of sound; with her poor white hand peeping through a chink in the wall, beckoning to some good man for help, that an immortal soul might be awakened.

Long before I looked upon her, the help had come. Her face was radiant with intelligence and pleasure. Her hair, braided by her own hands, was bound about a head, whose intellectual capacity and development were beautifully expressed in its graceful outline, and its broad open brow; her dress, arranged by herself, was a pattern of neatness and simplicity; the work she had knitted, lay beside her; her writing-book was on the desk she leaned upon. —From the mournful ruin of such bereavement, there had slowly risen up this gentle, tender, guileless, grateful-hearted being.

Like other inmates of that house she had a green ribbon bound round her eyelids. A doll she had dressed lay near upon the ground. I took it up, and saw that she had made a green fillet such as she wore herself, and fastened about its mimic eyes. ...

This was Laura Bridgman.

Dr. Howe was alive at the time of this visit. He, too, is worth a glance as he stands beside his famous pupil—"the great Dr. Howe whose figure towers over little Boston," one who has never had what he deserves either from American biographers or from the American public, one whose reputation which always lagged behind his accomplishment was dwarfed by that of his wife which always ran far ahead of what she had achieved. Comparatively few who know that Julia Ward Howe wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" know also that the

name of Samuel Gridley Howe is one that takes rank second to none in the annals of great teachers. Horace Mann said, "I would rather have built up the Blind Asylum, than have written *Hamlet*," and believed that the time would come when everyone would agree.

Dr. Howe came into manhood on the tidal wave of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, which had already done its best and its worst for France and was for the moment creating more disturbance in Greece than anywhere else. Freedom was in the air; attention was on the oppressed: leaders believed and taught the rest of the world to believe that the interest of each member of society, no matter how poor, how blind, how deaf, how degraded, was the interest of all. "There floats not upon the stream of life," said Dr. Howe, and he was reflecting the best spirit of his time, "any wreck of humanity so utterly shattered and crippled that its signals of distress should not challenge attention and command assistance." This was the text around which he built his life.

He had scarcely taken his degree in medicine before he rushed off to Greece under the influence of Lord Byron. He fought in Poland, and when he came back to America it was to collect funds for Greece. In the meanwhile several groups in America had begun to study the needs of the blind. A school was already established in New York and in Philadelphia, and a handful of men in Boston had a project for one and wanted Sam Howe to be the head of it.

The school was founded on several premises which turned out—and Dr. Howe was one of the first to discover it—to be entirely wrong. One was that blindness was a visitation of God, governed by beneficent but incomprehensible laws. Eighteen years later Dr. Howe absolved God completely and placed the blame where it belonged. Another fallacy was that the blind in some mysterious way were, by virtue of their affliction, rendered superior to the seeing. When Dr. Howe contradicted this he knew that it would be denied and that his own earlier

writings would be quoted against him. Nevertheless, in his report for the year 1848 he printed it in capital letters—"THE BLIND AS A CLASS ARE INFERIOR TO OTHER PERSONS IN MENTAL POWER AND ABILITY." He further said, "The infirmity of blindness is really greater than it has been supposed to be. . . . I am penetrated with respect for the uncomplaining fortitude with which these men and women have borne their hard lot."

Dr. Howe worked against many difficulties and made surprisingly few mistakes. When the Institution was founded there were so few books in raised print that it would not have been worth while for the blind to learn to read if there had not been a prospect of more. He worked unremittingly for books and begged Congress to establish a library for the blind at the nation's expense. It was not done during his lifetime, but, like other suggestions of his, it did go into effect after his death. He wrote a special geography for the blind and printed the first atlas in which raised maps were used, and made the Howe Press the most active in the world for the printing of books for the blind. He was wrong about type, a vexed question which had to wait nearly three quarters of a century for settlement, for he favoured a raised Roman type much like the one on this page, acting on a fundamentally right principle which nevertheless has to be disregarded in detail, which is that the blind should be kept as nearly like the seeing as possible. This kind of type is much harder to read with the fingers than the Braille or point type, and its use was for many years a serious obstacle in the instruction of the blind.

Like all modern teachers of the sightless Dr. Howe realized the importance of physical education, but he did not know how to beguile the children into playing. Blind children are so likely to hurt themselves when they move about that, unless the play is made especially attractive, they will sit still and do nothing. Dr. Howe used to lock the boys outside the building to make them take exercise; they huddled against the wall,

stamping their feet to keep warm. He believed in religious freedom but was not always able to make practical application of it, for blind children have to be led to church, and there were not always guides enough to go around. He saw the disadvantages of institutional life and said that institutions were "evils which must be borne with, for the time." He was greatly concerned with the adult blind who, he saw, had no place in the schools, and urged the establishment of a central clearing house to look after their needs, a project which was finally realized in 1921 with the inauguration of the American Foundation for the Blind. He pleaded for the collection of statistics concerning blindness. He objected to the use of the word "asylum" as a name for the institution; two years after his death the word "school" was substituted.

His was not an age of specialization, and Dr. Howe's attention was never exclusively on the blind. Men at that time were interested in everything, most of all in the oppressed and unhappy. Dr. Howe first met Charles Sumner when they were both fighting with the poor Irish on Broad Street in Boston against a mob of hoodlums who were plundering their houses. The fire department had broken through an Irish funeral. Sumner was knocked down, and Dr. Howe got him out of the crowd to a place of safety. Dr. Howe fought with the abolitionists and was a friend of John Brown. He established the first school in America for idiots, and he was profoundly interested in the deaf. He served on several commissions, and it is pleasant to remember that in his capacity as chairman of the State Board of Charities of Massachusetts he was indirectly responsible for the presence of Annie Sullivan at the school where Laura Bridgman was taught. His last official act was a motion in favour of an investigation of the Tewksbury almshouse. The actual investigation was carried out by his friend and successor as chairman, Mr. F. B. Sanborn of Concord, a friend of Emerson and Thoreau and other Transcendentalists.

The inmates knew that the investigation was afoot. Times

were still bad outside the almshouse, and the newcomers brought more stories of mismanaged government. Spectacular tales about the almshouse were in circulation all over Massachusetts. Dead bodies were sold for bookbinding and shoe leather. Foundlings were begotten within the walls of the institution; the inmates' poor belongings were stolen from them and the state funds were misappropriated.

"Frank B. Sanborn is the name," the women told Annie. "If you could ever see him, you might get out."

But how? Not through the authorities. They would pat her on the head and tell her not to mind. Not through her friends. They could tell her what to do, but not one had the spirit to do it for her. The fairy godmother she had once expected from the outside she knew now would never come. Since Father Barbara, no one from that world had taken an interest in her, though many ladies and gentlemen had come to investigate conditions and make changes. She could not write. She had no messenger. She must wait until she could see Mr. Sanborn himself. Sometimes the god descended upon them in person.

The condition of her eyes made this difficult. Her friends she distinguished mainly by their voices and by their general outlines. One stranger, unless she knew his voice, was much like another. But the day came when word flew around the ward that Mr. Sanborn had come. He was with a group of other men. She followed them about from ward to ward, pausing when they paused, quickening her steps when they quickened theirs, going over speeches to make to them if she could ever gain their attention. After a while the tour was almost over and the men were standing near the big yellow gate. In a moment they would be gone. In a moment her last chance of ever leaving Tewksbury would be lost.

She hurled herself into their midst without knowing which was he, crying, "Mr. Sanborn, Mr. Sanborn, I want to go to school!"

"What is the matter with you?" someone asked.

"I can't see very well."

"How long have you been here?"

She could not tell him that. Nor can she tell how long it was after this before one of the women came to her and told her that she was going away to school. The woman took her upstairs and opened the little bundle of clothes which had been wrapped up when she came to the institution and found an old shawl, a little undershirt, and a pair of shoes, all of them long, long since too small. "Why, you can't wear these," the woman cried to Annie, as if it were Annie's fault, while Annie, in agony, wept within herself, "Oh, I can't go, I can't go."

Somehow they got two calico dresses for her, one red and one blue, with black flowers on them. She wore the red one. Maggie tied up the other one in a newspaper bundle and with it a coarse unbleached chemise, twin to the one she had on, and two pairs of black cotton stockings. She had no locket around her neck. No birthmark on her shoulder. No picture of her mother wrapped in a yellowing silk handkerchief. No keepsakes in a jewelled box. Except for the bundle, all that she had was inside that unkempt, intelligent little head.

No one kissed her good-bye, but Maggie carried the bundle as far as the Black Maria, and her friends crowded around her with advice. "Be a good girl and mind your teachers." "Don't tell anyone you came from the poorhouse." "Keep your head up, you're as good as any of them." "Write me when you learn how." "Send me some tobacco if you can get hold of it." "Don't let anyone fool you into getting married. He won't mean what he says." The last words that she heard were from Tim, the driver: "Don't ever come back to this place. Do you hear? Forget this and you will be all right."

A man, probably a state charity official, went with her to Boston, and a kind woman in pretty clothes spoke to her on the train—asked her where she was from and where she was going. Annie would have died rather than confess to the almshouse, but the man supplied the information. It hurt,

and it hurt still more when the woman patted her on the head, called her a "poor child," and gave her an apple and a piece of bread and butter. Her face burned.

"The essence of poverty," she said many years afterwards, "is shame. Shame to have been overwhelmed by ugliness, shame to be the hole in the perfect pattern of the universe. In that moment an intense realization of the ugliness of my appearance seized me. I knew that the calico dress which I had thought rather pretty when they put it on me was the cause of the woman's pity, and I was glad that she could not see the only other garment I had on—a coarse unbleached cotton chemise that came to my knees. My stockings were black and my shoes clumsy and too small for me. Hers I noticed were shiny and black and buttoned up at the sides. I kept trying to hide mine under the seat. She wore a hat with feathers on it. I had no hat and no cloak, but a cotton shawl which, to my great embarrassment, kept slipping to the floor. But the inadequacy of my outfit did not dawn upon me until the woman pitied me."

When she reached the Perkins Institution she was asked her name and birthday. She gave the first, but, not knowing the second, announced glibly that it was the fourth of July. The year was incorrectly recorded as 1863 instead of 1866. She was taken at once—it was about five o'clock in the afternoon—to a singing class in charge of a blind woman with a rasping, disagreeable voice.

"What is your name?" the voice asked.

"Annie Sullivan."

"Spell it."

"I can't spell."

The girls giggled.

"How old are you?"

"Fourteen."

"Fourteen years old and can't spell!"

They had never heard of such a thing.

They had never heard of a girl without a toothbrush or a petticoat or a hat or a coat or a pair of gloves. Certainly they had never heard of a girl without a nightgown. That night for the first time in her life Annie slept in one. A teacher borrowed it from one of the girls. And that night and many nights thereafter she cried herself to sleep, lonelier than she had ever been in Tewksbury, sick with longing for the familiar and uncritical companionship of her friends in the almshouse.

She entered the Perkins Institution on October 7, 1880. Helen Keller was three months old.