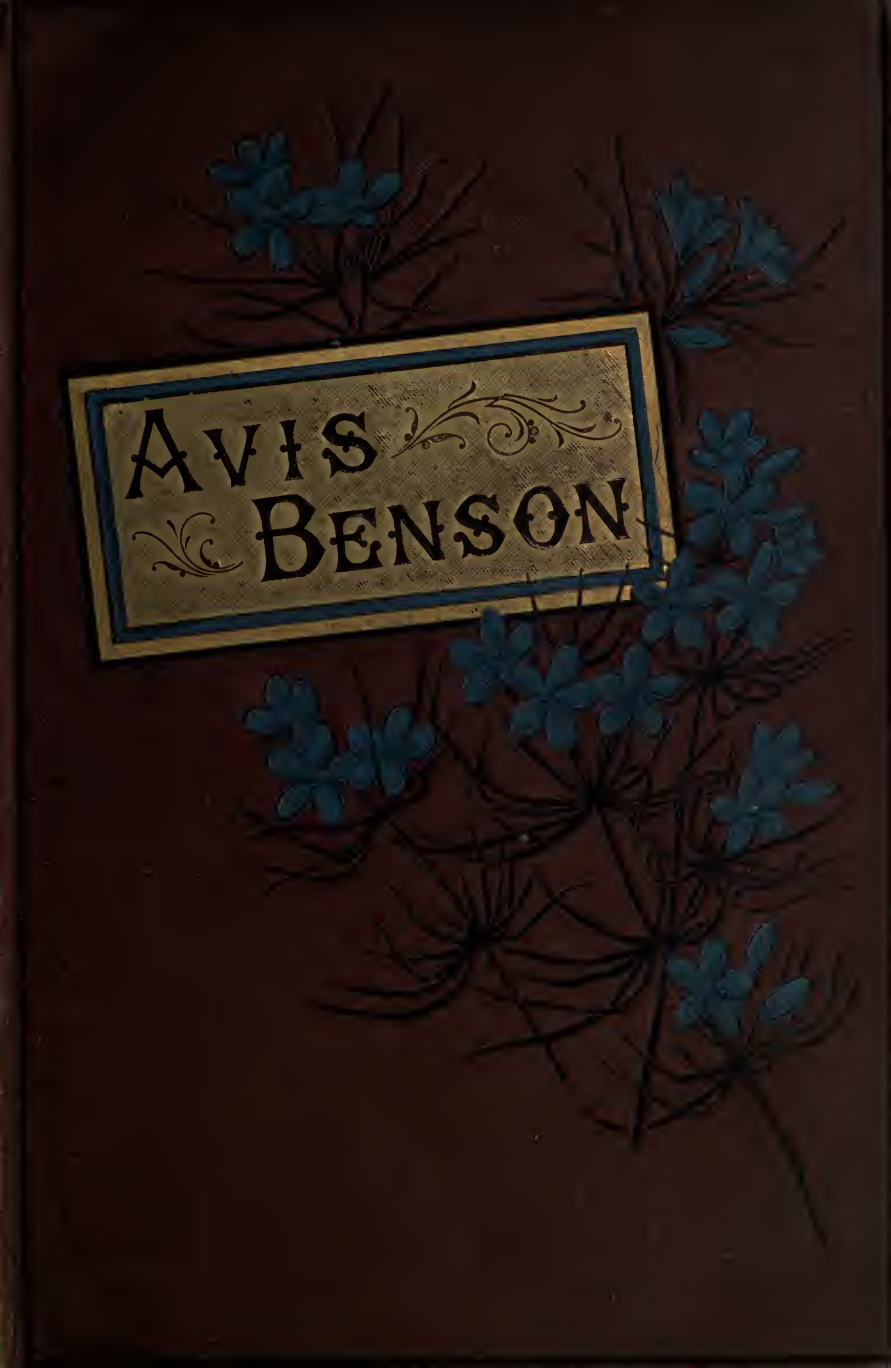
AVIS
BENSON

Reward of Merit

Presented to

Lillie McMinn

by

Beverley St Baptist Morning S.S.

Dec 13. 92.

AVIS BENSON.

"They shot down my mother with me in her arms."—*Page 73.*

AVIS BENSON;

OR,

MINE AND THINE.

With other Sketches.

BY THE LATE

MRS. E. PRENTISS,

AUTHOR OF "STEPPING HEAVENWARD, "THE HOME AT GREYLOCK," "AUNT JANE'S HERO," ETC. ETC.

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These stories originally appeared in American periodicals, and *are* now published in this country, in the belief that the many readers of Mrs. Prentiss's writings will be glad to have them.

London, 1880.

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MINE AND THINE.

MINE AND THINE.

I.

"Look here, Noll, Mrs. Benson was in last night after you went to bed, and she says she's a good mind to send Avis to school."

"Ho! that little thing?"

"She ain't so very little; and she's the smartest creature at her books! And, Noll, I'm going to give you two turnovers to carry to school to-day."

Noll expressed his approbation of this generous decision, by tossing his cap into the air, and by a contemptuous "Pooh!"

"Oh, very well! I know who'll be glad of them, if you don't want them."

"You can't come it over me with apple turnovers, mother," continued Noll. "I ain't a-going to be hired to carry Avis Benson to school."

"Who said anything about Avis Benson?" cried his mother.

"Just as if you'd go to offering turnovers for nothing!" retorted the boy. "No, I ain't a-going

to be seen going to school with a *girl;* no, not if you went down on your knees about it."

"If you had a little sister, you'd *have* to do it, you naughty boy, you! How can you be so contrary? Poor Avis! If her three brothers hadn't died, she wouldn't need to be beholden to you, or anybody else."

Noll made no answer. He could just remember a solemn, yes, an awful time in his short experience, when there was a funeral at Mrs. Benson's, and three little coffins were carried out, one after another, and how afraid he was that there was something catching inside, and shuddered lest he should get it, whatever it was.

"All the fellows will laugh at me if I go with a girl," he said.

His mother, perceiving that he was beginning to yield, hastened to urge on the cause of little Avis.

"No, they won't laugh at you, either. And if they do, they'd ought to be ashamed. Come, here's the turnovers; one's mince, and one's apple. And here's a doughnut for you and another for Avis. Now, Oliver Watson! What a boy you are! Well, if you eat up your dinner the instant you've done breakfast, you'll have to go to bed hungry, that's all."

Oliver, who knew how little this threat really meant, formidable as it sounded, marched coolly off, consuming both doughnuts before he reached Mrs.

Benson's. There he found Avis, sitting on the door-step.

"Halloo, Avis!" he shouted.

Avis made no answer, except by the faintest little smile which she tried hard not to smile.

"You've got to go to school along of me," continued Oliver. "Your mother says so."

"No, I ain't a-going to school," said Avis.

At this moment, her mother, a pale, sorrowful-looking woman, came to the door.

"Yes, ma wants you to go," said she, "and Noll 'll be good to you—won't you, Noll? Come, here's your dinner all ready. Give me a kiss and run right along."

"No, I ain't a-going to school," repeated Avis.

"Yes, go right along. Ma insists upon it. You know you promised, last night, that you would go."

Avis burst into loud cries and tears, throwing herself into her mother's arms, and clinging tightly to her neck.

"There, that will do!" said Mrs. Benson, unclasping the little arms; "now give ma one more kiss, and go with Noll."

But the screams and cries were only redoubled. "What shall I do?" cried Mrs. Benson. "Noll, you come and coax her."

"I have enough to do with coaxing mother,"

replied Oliver. "Come, Avis, don't stand fooling there. We shall be late. I can't wait for you all day. Just say out and out, are you going, or ain't you going?"

"Well, I ain't; there!" said Avis angrily. "I shan't goes unless ma goes; so there, now!"

"Poor little thing!" said Mrs. Benson. "She's cried herself sick, and isn't fit to go to-day. You come for her to-morrow, there's a good boy." So saying, she rummaged in the little dinner basket for some special dainty with which to entice him to come again, and drew forth a delicate china cup containing a custard.

"There, as long as Avis won't go to school, we'll give part of her dinner to you," she said.

"I don't like your custards," said Noll bluntly. "They're skinny. Mother says so, too."

Mrs. Benson put on a meek, resigned look, with which Noll was quite familiar, and which he hated cordially.

"I'm glad my mother ain't like *her*," he said to himself as he ran away. "I pity Avis, I'm sure. I ain't going there any more."

The teacher of the district school, a young woman in a faded delaine which once boasted many colours, received her tardy pupil with an ominous frown.

"It ain't my fault," cried Oliver. "It's Mrs. Benson's. She and Avis they just kept me a-waiting

and a-waiting. And I haven't been late but four times this week."

A smart rap on his unlucky knuckles from the teacher's ferule, was her only reply to this statement of facts.

"See if I ever go nigh Avis Benson again!" muttered Oliver, as he marched back to his seat, with his smarting little fist doubled into a convenient form for knocking her, or somebody, down. "They're all alike, girls are; all they know how to do is to cry when they're little, and, when they're big enough to be school-ma'ams, to hit a fellow for just nothing at all."

Now, it was the firm intention of Avis to go to school after a suitable degree of opposition on the subject, and she was not at all pleased when, the next morning, she saw Oliver march sturdily past her mother's house without so much as giving her one chance at a free fight.

"There goes old Oliver Watson!" she said to herself. "And he may, for all me."

"There, he's gone and left you, I declare!" said Mrs. Benson. "What a naughty boy! But that's all in the bringing up. Because he's all she's got, his mother can't bear to cross his will. Well, ma isn't going to spoil her little Avis so. Come, you're to go to school, Oliver or no Oliver, if I have to take you myself."

"Oh, no, no!" Avis burst out; "I don't want to go! I can't go!"

"Well, there now, stop crying; you know it does break ma's heart to hear you take on so. It *is* hard to go off with other people's boys when you might have had three brothers of your own to take you around."

Now, Avis had heard these three brothers spoken of in a lamentable voice every day since she could remember. And she was heartily sick and tired of it. She was not old enough to know how sorrow had changed her mother from a blooming, cheerful young woman, into a prematurely old, sallow, and pining one. All she did know was, that while a good deal was said about obedience, nothing was ever done to secure it, and that with a few tears she could make herself monarch of all she surveyed.

"It isn't nice here at home," she said to herself, as her mother, with a deep sigh, went to make some change in her dress. "I've a good mind to go to school all by myself. I know the way, and I can."

So, without waiting to make known her intentions, she set off at full speed, never stopping until she was out of breath, and not a little fatigued.

"I don't see the schoolhouse anywhere," she said at last, "and I'm sure it used to be right here. I wish I'd waited for ma. What if I've got lost? Well, if I have it isn't my fault. It's all because

that ugly Oliver wouldn't stop for me this morning."

She walked on a little further, perplexed, tired, and hungry; then she reflected that "ma" would certainly come to look for her, and that it might be well to retrace her steps. But no one was to be seen upon the long, lonely road, and her heart

began to beat fast with terror. "I've got lost! I've got lost!" she shrieked out, running wildly this way and that. "Oh, why doesn't ma come to find me? And I'm so tired! Oh, dear! oh, dear me!"

How often she had seen her mother rock herself back and forth, uttering just such a heart-breaking

"Oh, dear! oh, dear me!" and wondered if it was the headache, or the toothache, or what it was that ailed her! But now the sound of wheels was heard, and Deacon Watson came driving along in his waggon, as jovial and merry as a boy.

"Why, Avis Benson!" he cried, "how on earth came you here?"

"I was going to school, and I got lost, and I'm *so* tired," said Avis in a little weak, wailing voice. "Oh, you'll carry me home, won't you?"

"Of course I will. Why, you're as pale as a sheet. What time of day did you start for school?"

"I guess it was about nine."

"Whew! And its half-past four now. Where *have* you been all this time?"

But Avis had fallen asleep, and lay back in his arms, her face all stained with tears, and her chest still heaving with sobs.

"She's a pretty little creature," said the deacon as he drove on. "I wish I had one just like her. Just like her, all but the spoiling, I mean. She's an awful spoilt child. But I suppose her mother is about crazy by this time; so *git* up, old Bob, and let's put her out of misery."

Mrs. Benson was, indeed, in a fearful state, and had only been kept in her senses by Mrs. Watson's good common sense.

"Don't take on so," she said, when, after a fruit-

less search for the child, the poor mother had flown to her for refuge. "There ain't no sense in it. There ain't no bears to eat her up, nor no woods to get lost in; I expect she's gone on and on till she's come to some house, and they've took her in and fed her, and 'll be bringing her home. La! there she is now, in my husband's arms; ah, I knew no harm had come to her. What would make you take on so?"

"When you've lost three of them, you'll know," returned Mrs. Benson, seizing upon her stray lamb, and covering it with tears and kisses.

"I ain't got 'em to lose," said Mrs. Watson somewhat grimly, "but I know one thing, I'd rather a' had 'em and lost 'em than have been as I have."

It is said that our friends may be divided into three classes: friends who love us, friends who hate us, and friends who are indifferent to us. Mrs. Watson and Mrs. Benson were friends who hated each other. They never had had a quarrel; they ran in and out of each other's houses with perfect freedom; Mrs. Watson had the Bensons to tea very often, and Mrs. Benson had the Watsons just as frequently. When Mrs. Watson had a felon on her finger and could not make her own bread, Mrs. Benson came twice a week to make it for her. To be sure she would make it *à la* Benson and

Mrs. Watson ate it with a bursting heart, and declared it abominable. And when fatal disease stole into Mrs. Benson's wide-awake home and robbed it of the three laughing boys that made it so noisy and so cheerful, Mrs. Watson smothered her maternal fears for Oliver, and watched day and night in the sick-room, and offered consolation to the dying one. Mrs. Benson found all she said a solemn mockery, and wished people would not talk about things they didn't understand. Mrs. Watson was very kind, very kind indeed; but then you know she never lost three children all within four days of each other!

Mrs. Watson did wish Avis Benson wasn't taught to say "ma;" it sounded like a bossy-calf or an old sheep, or something just as silly.

And Mrs. Benson shook her head, and said what a pity it was Mrs. Watson's feelings were not a little more tender, and that Oliver was not obliged to treat her with a little grain of respect.

Under these circumstances, it was not strange that the children were not fond of each other, and that Oliver, brought up by a mother who had never known a day of sickness or sorrow, despised Mrs. Benson's watery ways; while Avis, petted and fondled as she always had been, shrank from Mrs. Watson's somewhat rough good-humour.

But the little adventure just described brought

a new element into this social atmosphere. When Oliver saw the limp figure in his father's arms, and looked at the wan, tearful face, his heart misgave him. He wished he had coaxed Avis to go with him that morning, instead of stamping past her house so savagely. And Avis, in her gratitude to the deacon for coming to her rescue, clung to him henceforth with an affection which he heartily returned.

She hardly remembered her own father; he had been dead several years, and she crept into Mr. Watson's strong arms, and laid her head on his great, wide breast, with that love of protection peculiar to the feminine nature.

"She is a pretty little thing!" he often repeated, and if Mrs. Watson invariably added, "Yes, but she is just spoilt," he only laughed good-humouredly and declared: "But I'm getting fond of her!"

A wise man has said that "love never needs a reason." No, it needs no reason! Its springs often lie hidden amid inaccessible, far-off mountains, and it comes down from those heights to "wander at its own sweet will," and never asks itself, or tells to others, why its bright waters encircle ragged rocks, or linger round bare ones, or why it sometimes casts itself at the feet of some simple flower whose life it thenceforth becomes!

II.

"THEM children's always a-quarrelling," said Mrs. Watson to her husband, as the sound of angry voices reached her ears.

"It's all along of Oliver's being so obstinate," returned the deacon. "You never broke his will, and he expects to have his own way with Avis, just as he does with you."

"As to that, did *you* ever break his will? Wasn't it as much your business as mine?"

"Well, no, not exactly. I always said I could drive any kind of a team except a team of young ones. I never pretended that I knew how to manage Oliver. But as to Avis"——

"Yes, as to Avis, you are making a fool of yourself over that child. It provokes me to see you sit by the hour together cuddling her up."

The deacon laughed, and made the same old answer—

"Well, I *am* getting fond of her."

Meanwhile Oliver and Avis had "made up," and were playing together in great harmony. For

though Avis always declared that she couldn't bear Oliver, and though Oliver maintained that he hated girls, the children were constantly drawn together by some mysterious attraction. This state of things lasted till Oliver's school-days were over, and he had become a great awkward boy, at that charming age when everybody pecked at and snubbed him, and when he was rude and disagreeable in return.

"What's the reason you won't go with me, as you used to, Avis?" he asked her, as they met one Saturday afternoon near the fence that divided the two farms. "I never liked you so well as I do now and you hardly speak to me."

"Ma says you're the rudest, noisiest, tearingest boy she ever saw," returned Avis. "And at Sue Hunt's party you tore my dress."

"I didn't mean to tear it. I shouldn't think you'd lay up such a little thing against a fellow."

"It isn't a little thing. It was one of my new dresses that ma made for me to wear when I go to boarding-school."

"To boarding-school? You are going away to a boarding-school? Well, if that ain't the meanest thing yet!"

He turned away, and went straight home, crossed the brook, wound up the hill, pushed on and on, till he found a place remote enough for the explosion, that had got to come, somewhere.

What right had she to go away, he should like to know? And what sort of notions would she get into her head when she found herself among city folks?

He lay upon the grass, anything but an interesting object, a boy and yet a man, a man and yet a boy, kicking against the pricks of life, while hardly conscious what they were. He only knew that he was unhappy and out of sorts.

But he had not much time for the nursing of moods in these days. He had chosen the life of a farmer as the life he liked best; spring work was hurrying on apace, and was calling for him now. He got up with a sudden jerk, and was soon engrossed with the care of horses, cows, and sheep.

Deacon Watson's farm was large and profitable; so was the widow Benson's, and Mrs. Watson had her own views on the subject. Though she always spoke of Avis as a spoiled child, she was very willing to think of her as Oliver's future wife, and of the consequent merging of the two farms into one.

"Mrs. Benson won't live long," she mused; "she worries too much. Then Avis will need somebody to look after her, and why shouldn't it be our Oliver? To be sure, he's neither hay nor grass now; but by the time they're old enough to be married, he'll be a handsome young fellow, just like his father. La! how awful fond I used to be of him!"

Avis went off to school in great triumph. She had been obliged to fight many a battle to gain her mother's consent to the separation this involved. But in giving way to her grief as she had done, Mrs. Benson had gradually lost her hold on Avis's affections. To see a face always sad and tearful, to hear such endless dismal allusions to "your dear pa,"

"your three brothers," had become intolerable. She wanted to get away somewhere, anywhere, out of sight of trouble. To be sure, Deacon Watson was jovial enough, and fond of her as if she were his own child. But, then, that horrid Oliver! And that sharp-sighted Mrs. Watson, who had only to look at you to read you straight through, as she

would a book, toss you down at the end, and say, "Humph!"

"There's no sense in your taking on so, ma," quoth she, as they were packing her trunk together. "Mary Ann Green will come and stay with you, and she's twice as good company as I am. And, at any rate, I shan't be gone long. Only three months."

But the three months, with vacation between, ran into six months, then into twelve, and Avis, fascinated with new scenes, and used to an obedient parent, had no intention of settling down at home. She did not kill herself with hard study, not she, but learned to dress tastefully, got hold of a little French and a little music, and took lessons in oil painting, which resulted in some execrable pictures, which tortured the very walls on which they hung.

At the end of two years she felt she knew all there was to learn, and was prepared to go home to astonish everybody with her acquirements. During those two years her mother had lived ten. She had continually pined and chafed and moaned, and when Avis at last came back to her, it was just a little too late to make amends for all this, and she broke completely down.

"How provoking!" thought Avis. "Just as I was going to begin to have a good time, mother must needs take to her bed!" She forgot that she had

had a good time all her life, and that such times last for ever with nobody.

"Avis has grown as pretty as a picture," said Deacon Watson. "Don't you think so, Oliver?"

"She looks well enough," was the gruff reply.

"When I was a youngster," pursued the deacon, "I wouldn't have lost such a girl for want of asking for her."

"No, that you wouldn't!" cried his wife. "You had brass, if you hadn't gold. As to Avis, a pretty farmer's wife she'd make, to be sure!"

Oliver got up and left the room. The time had been when he was indifferent to Avis; then her name had begun to sound musical in his ear. Now he could not bear to hear it mentioned, or to mention it; she had become too much for him. Why? When? How? He asked himself these questions in vain. Why? Because I do! When? Why, always! How? I don't care!

He kept himself aloof from her, watching her from a distance. Conceited though she was, she fancied that he disliked her. And he was a handsome fellow, as his mother said he would be when he was nothing but an ugly duckling, and worth flirting with, if nothing more. As he made no advances to her, she found herself constrained to besiege him in his own camp.

One evening, when he had just come home from

his day's work, he found her perched, like a bird, on his father's knee. She at once alighted from this friendly bough in pretty confusion.

"Excuse me, Mr. Watson," she said, "I had no idea you were so near." And then she asked him to accept a little pocket pincushion which she said she had made with her own hands.

So he was no longer Oliver to her, but Mr. Watson! And hadn't every girl he knew given him a pincushion? She went away discomfited, and he did not offer to go with her.

"Ma's been longing for you to get home; where have you been, Avis?" asked her mother in a repining tone.

"I do wish you wouldn't call yourself 'ma,'" retorted Avis. "I've been to the Watsons', if you must know."

"Seems to me Oliver doesn't come here as much as he used to," proceeded Mrs. Benson; "I hope you ain't discouraging him."

"There's nothing to discourage and nothing to encourage. I don't suppose he's the only fish that swims in the sea."

"Don't be angry with your poor old ma—mother, I mean. I lie here a-thinking day in and day out, and wonder what will become of you after I'm gone."

"After you're gone," repeated Avis, with surprise. "Why, where are you going, mother?"

"Yes, that's the question, where be I going? I mean, where am I going? You mustn't make fun of your poor ma's grammar, when she's a-lying, may be, on her dying bed."

Now, if Avis had seen her mother take to her dying pillow once, she had seen her do so a score of times. So she was not in the least concerned at this fresh announcement.

"You've died so many times that when the real time comes you'll do it to perfection," she said, laughing.

"I'll tell you what it is, Avis," Mrs. Benson went on, "I've led a life I'm ashamed of. After your dear pa, I mean your dear father, died, and then all those boys I was so proud of, I just settled down to hug up my troubles and make the most of 'em. Mrs. Watson, she always laboured with me about it, but I thought she didn't know what she was talking of. She kept saying, 'Get up, go round and look after other people's troubles. Yours ain't the only ones. There's plenty of 'em everywhere, and if we all sat 'round weeping and wailing, it would be a dismal world.' Now, Avis, you mark my words. When your time comes, and it will come—I've brought you up so easy that I've nigh upon spoilt you, and your time'll have to come—don't you set down crying and moaning. Hunt up poor folks, and hear what they've got to say about trouble. Go and see

old people that think they've lived too long, and cheer them up. And if you can't do anything else for sick people—and I know you ain't strong, I've brought you up so tender—why, carry 'em a smile, or a flower, or a kind word. It's wonderful what a little thing it takes to brighten up sick folks."

She lay back on her pillow, quite exhausted by this unusual effort of a weak intellect. Avis went to her now, roused and alarmed.

"Are you really so sick, mother?" she asked more tenderly than she had ever spoken in her life.

"I thought you ought to know. I hoped I should live to see you and Oliver—to see the deacon teach you what I'd ought to. Avis, don't put off getting ready to die as I did. Get ready now. I hope I'm forgiven, but I don't know. I'm going off into the dark. Kiss me, dearie."

Poor Avis kissed again and again the lips already growing cold in death, and then sent a hasty, bewildered message to the Watsons. They all came, full of sympathy; and though Oliver did not speak a word, the expression of his eyes as hers met his told his story. It said, "You are going to be left all alone in the world; come to me!"

What a poor little waif she was, to be sure! For a time there did not seem to be any comfort for her anywhere. The whole tendency of her education had been to nurture the selfish element

of her nature, not to eradicate it, and she was fain now to sit down and represent herself to her own consciousness as the most afflicted being on earth. Her dead mother had virtues the living mother never possessed, and she wept over her very much as, by example, she had been taught to weep.

"This won't do, little Avis," said Deacon Watson, when she went to pour out her grief on his shoulder. "You know I love you just as if you were my own child, and I ain't going to say anything to you I wouldn't say to one of my own. But it is two months now since your mother was took away, and I've never seen you smile in all that time. Look here, my child. Don't you suppose me and my wife's had our troubles? Why, we've had awful ones. Sometime I'll tell you all about it. But we carried them right to the Lord, and He just took and explained 'em to us. Why, it was beautiful. 'Look here, deacon,' says He, 'haven't I always treated you like a son? Haven't I always been tender to you, and generous to you, and given you all you asked for, and thrown in some things you hadn't sense to ask for?' 'Yes, Lord, it's all true,' says I, 'but I'm a poor, miserable creature, and the rod hurts so that I can't help crying out.' 'I meant to hurt you,' says He. 'That's the way I show my love. You were getting too fond of this world, and so I tried to wean you from it. And if this blow

isn't enough I shall send another.' And I said, 'Yes, dear Lord, break me all to pieces if Thou wilt!' And He did. There wasn't a piece left as big as a pea. But He came close to me while He was whipping me, and came so often, that I got well acquainted with Him, and getting acquainted is the same thing as loving; and rather than not see Him at all, I begged Him to come with a rod in His hand. · My little Avis, poor little girl, can't you do that?"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Avis, shrinking away. The deacon looked at her lovingly, yearningly, but said no more.

He knew, and knew well, that the shortest way to a human heart was 'round by the way of heaven, and that he must reach Avis through that power, and, for the present, through that alone.

But he had made an impression on her. She understood now that his loving ways, the ways that had always attracted her, sprang from something purer and deeper than the fountain at which she had ever drank. His peculiar affection for her had hitherto excited her vanity; now it revealed itself as something supernatural, and not of the earth, earthy; for, while she could not understand it, she found a quality in his strikingly lacking in that of others. Even Oliver, though he now hovered around her, did not meet her wants.

"I wish," she said to him one day, "that you were as good to me as your father."

"I never shall be. Some people are born to it and some ain't. The two things I am made for are to have the best farm in the State and the dearest woman for a wife."

"Wait till you get her!" cried Avis, and she flew away as on wings.

But she found her loneliness almost tolerable, and, somehow, Oliver's admiration met a want, and satisfied something in her which she dignified with the name of a craving for love. While this element existed in her heart, it was but as an egotism of a refined selfishness, and it was always asking what it should get rather than what it should give.

"I'm kind o' sorry you're after Avis Benson so much," Mrs. Watson said to Oliver. "She's a selfish, spoiled child, and nothing more. What you and your father find to like in her I don't see, and never shall. Nor do I wonder so much at your doing so either, for he never sees a fault in anybody. Folks is all alike to him, and he just loves 'em straight through, and when he come a-courting to me, he thought he'd found something so good in me that made him pick me out from the other girls. But I see it just as plain as day, that if I'd said no, it wouldn't have put him out at all; he'd have gone and courted Amanda Jones, or Hannah Stinson.

But as for you, Oliver, I thought you had more sense."

Oliver vouchsafed no reply, for he was a man of few words and many deeds, and, withal, fond of thinking and acting for himself. His mother's opposition was just the stimulant he wanted, and that very evening he made Avis believe that it was quite essential to her happiness that he should come and live with her in her desolate home. People in the village said it was an appropriate engagement; that she was the prettiest girl, and Oliver the "likeliest" man among them; and then the families had been so intimate.

At any rate, this engagement became a marriage, and the young couple settled down in Avis's home. Soon the dismal old house that had so long looked as if it was dying of disease of the heart, put on the cheerful aspect that youth and health and fresh paint could give it. They fancied that they were quite happy. Avis said in her peculiar way that she hoped Oliver would continue to be "good" to her, and he promised over and over that he would, without being aware that his goodness was to consist in letting her have her own way in everything, and in thinking all she said was all-important and unique. He never whispered to her that she was to make a slave or a drudge of herself for him, though, quite unconsciously to himself, that was exactly what he proposed to let her become.

III.

"I FORGOT to tell you," said Oliver one day at dinner, "that I am going to sell old Whitey. He isn't worth his feed; and besides, I want a horse that has got some mettle."

"But I don't want old Whitey sold," said Avis, a touch of wounded pride in her voice.

"Why not?"

Avis hesitated. Sure enough, why not? Why, because she was piqued at Oliver's saying he was going to sell the useless horse without consulting her. But she was only dimly conscious of that, so she said—

"Because mother was fond of him."

"Not half so fond as she was of old Brindle, and yet you consented to have her sold."

"Yes, but you consulted me about that."

"Oh, it's a matter of spunk, then, is it?" asked Oliver incautiously.

"Why, of course; I don't want my horses and cows sold off, and not a word said to me."

"My horses! My cows!" The "my" grated on Oliver's ear.

"I did not suppose you wanted me to run and ask your leave to sell a good-for-nothing old horse like Whitey."

Avis made no reply, but pushed back her plate with a warlike air that irritated Oliver, but did not destroy his appetite. She might go without her dinner, if she choose to be so silly, but she should see how little he cared. So there they sat, those twain who had promised to honour and cherish each other, in anything but a cherishing mood—Avis piqued, Oliver defiant. Who was to blame? Why, both were in the wrong. In the first place, Oliver should have been diplomatic enough to let the proposition about old Whitey come from Avis, as he could have done easily enough. But when he had failed on this point, Avis should have owned that she was a silly little girl to mind such a trifle; but she did mind it when he enacted sole master of land and goods won through her, and wouldn't he another time consult with her before selling off things? If she had said this with the pretty air with which she had asked him "to be good" to her, who doubts that he would have yielded?

As it was, seeing no sign of relenting in her face, Oliver walked off very much out of humour. And the farmer who wanted just such a demure,

reflective animal as old Whitey, coming to urge the conclusion of the bargain, Avis shortly saw "dear mother's favourite horse" led off to turn the wheel of Sam Stover's cider-mill. Indignant tears burst forth at the sight.

"Poor mother, you did not think your little Avis would come to this!" she thought. She cried out what tears she had for the occasion, and then slipped off, across lots, to find Deacon Watson, he who had so often settled their childish quarrels. At supper-time Oliver went home to an empty house, a thing not very unusual, since it was understood that the "children" should come home to tea whenever they felt inclined. But on this occasion, Oliver perceived that Avis was avoiding the interview with himself that must prove embarrassing in their present mood, and this increased his displeasure. He had half a mind not to join her at his mother's tea-table; yet, on the other hand, he felt that there was nobody like mother, after all. So he went across the fields, and into the kitchen, where he found Avis seated on a low stool at his father's feet, one of her little hands buried up in his big ones, and his mother busy over the fire, very red in the face. He had seen Avis in this way scores of times, with nothing but pride in it, but now it irritated him.

"Is there no one to help you get supper, mother?" he asked, in a tone that reproved Avis. "That

kettle is too heavy for you; let me fetch the tea-pot."

Mrs. Watson gave him a grateful smile. Though she was dauntless in energy, and proud of her strength, she had enough of the woman in her to like to be looked after. And Oliver made an ostentatious display of his skill in the culinary line, which Avis was keen enough to perceive and be displeased at.

There would have been an awkward scene at the tea-table, if Deacon Watson had seen, as his wife did, how things stood between the children. But all he saw was that the two human beings he loved best, or at least, next to his wife, had come home, and so he kept up a flow of genial, kindly talk, that concealed the silence of the rest of the party.

"Oh, how I do wish Oliver was like his father!" thought Avis. "He looks exactly like him, and how can he, when they're so different?"

"If Avis loved me half as well as mother does, I should be satisfied," mused Oliver. "And I do wish she'd learn mother's way of making bread."

In the course of a few days their mutual disgust with each other blew over. They fancied everything stood on as firm a foundation as before.

"It was only a little thing," Avis whispered in Oliver's ear. "I didn't mind it much."

"Nor I either," returned Oliver. "Another time

we'll be more careful how we get drawn into such silly disputes."

"Why, I was not silly!" cried Avis. "Of course I had to stand up for dear ma's horse!" And then she wished that offensive word "ma" hadn't slipped out.

"You know that was not the point. You know perfectly well, that you were angry because I did not run and ask you if I might sell him."

"I wasn't in the least angry."

Oliver began to whistle, and Avis began to cry.

"I wish dear mother was alive," she sobbed.

Oliver turned on his heel and went off. Avis washed up the tea-things, looked in the glass to see if her eyes were very red, and after a little hesitation went to the prayer-meeting, as she usually did when particularly unhappy. Not that she had ever found special consolation there, but from a dim, remorseful feeling, that if she went there often she would win the right to feel a little more complacently toward herself. For she was not naturally conceited, and was fast losing the effect of the flatteries she had received at school, under the sense of Oliver's dissatisfaction with her.

At this time the village was divided into two parties on the subject of a projected railroad. Deacon Watson objected to it, and had some strong men on his side. Oliver, on the contrary, full of

youth and ambition, was for pushing the thing right through; and Avis, in a fit of perversity, had opposed her husband, and enlisted with his father. Of course, some hard words were spoken on all sides, and on this particular evening Deacon Watson undertook to set things straight.

"Brethren," he began, "it ain't no use for us to come here and pray together, unless our hearts are at peace with one another. We've all got a little riled about that railroad, and maybe we've all said things we oughter not. I'm afraid I have, for one. And if I have, I'm sorry, and hope you'll forgive me."

There was silence throughout the room. Who had ever heard other than words of love and kindness from this gentle, genial man? Everybody felt condemned at his attempt to assume the sins of which he was so guiltless. This silence at last became so oppressive, that the deacon rose to his feet again.

"I've been thinking," he said, "that what I need is to have my heart all broke to pieces. When I get down on my knees, and the Lord shows me what a poor sinner I am, and yet is just as good to me as if I wasn't—I declare I don't know what to make of it. But when I go back to my work I feel myself growing lofty again. Brethren, let's get away down low, among the poor sinners and keep there. Then when the Lord wants us He'll know

where to find us." There was something inexpressibly tender and humble in the way in which these words were spoken.

"I wish Oliver was here," thought Avis, "and would take pattern by his father."

But it did not occur to her to imitate him herself. She found all the rest of the exercises most tedious. Everybody who spoke gave the impression that the road to the kingdom lay through the land of bemoanings. Everybody complained of a cold heart, and bewailed the low state of religion.

"What is there in father that is so different from the rest?" Avis asked herself before she went to sleep. "I'd ask him, but he wouldn't know. I wonder how he keeps himself so sweet and happy all the time! It isn't because mother never snaps him up, for I've heard her take his head right off his shoulders."

Thus musing she fell asleep, and when she awoke next morning Oliver had gone to his work. Once more their quarrelsome humour blew over, and for some weeks they walked together in a harmony that both found so pleasant that each resolved to make it last for ever.

"It is always *little* things that we fall out about," said Oliver. "It all seems so ridiculous afterwards."

Yet notwithstanding the outward peace, Avis was not at rest. She found Oliver's ambition and in-

cessant stir and bustle a good deal in her way. He never could find time to read aloud to her, or to have her read aloud to him, and she had thought so much of carrying on his education in that way! And she thought it his duty to go to the Wednesday evening prayer-meeting, but he always contrived to have some pressing engagement on hand. She remembered a time when nothing would tempt him to stay away from this meeting because she was sure to be there, and if it was pleasant to be with her once, why wasn't it pleasant now?

When, half-crying, she asked him this question, he laughed at her, declaring that she was no longer a novelty, and that he liked her better at home than abroad.

It was a great relief to her starving heart when there came to it her first-born son. All that was sweet and feminine in her came out to meet and care for this child.

"It beats me out and out," said Mrs. Watson, "to see Avis with that baby. I always thought she was nothing but a silly little spoilt child. But she'd give her heart's blood to that young one."

"Yes, I'm getting very fond of her," quoth the deacon.

"You've been going that way so long that I should think it was about time you'd got there," was the conjugal response.

Avis was, indeed, all devotion to her child, who did not, however, make many demands upon her. He vegetated on from day to day, a jovial, healthy boy, who did not know how to cry, and did know how to sleep. The love she could not pour out on her husband she lavished on this little idol. Making his tiny garments, nursing him to sleep, taking him home to see grandpa and grandma—these were her apparently innocent joys. Oliver was very fond of him too, and as baby's face soon began to cloud and his lips to quiver if mamma's did, papa had to learn a little more self-control than he had hitherto done.

IV.

MEANWHILE public interests must go on as well as babies', and Oliver, who had long been called a "rising man," had risen to the height of his ambition, and become superintendent of the new railroad, which was to make him both rich and influential. Intent on her own duties and pleasures, Avis gave him little sympathy in his new projects, and he fell into the habit of talking them over with his mother.

"*Mother's* got a long head," he was continually saying to Avis, in a tone that implied, to her fancy, that she had none.

"I'd rather have a heart, if I'd got to choose," she replied coldly, and then fell to talking nonsense to her boy in tender tones that she used to reserve for her husband only. She had been disposed to make an idol of Oliver if he would let her; but as he did not prove quite the ideal husband he had promised to be in the days when he was seeking her, she turned her affections to her child. Yet they had their snatches of pleasure in each other,

and as soon as the baby got upon its feet, and Oliver was not afraid to touch him, lest he should fall to pieces on his hands, the young father became bery proud of his son and heir. He became a certain bond of union, for he was a piece of property in which each had an equal share. Avis had always been annoyed at a habit Oliver had of speaking of what she considered her farm as his. She regarded the property as her own, and considered herself as most generous in permitting him to come and live on it with her. He, on the contrary, felt that she might consider herself as most fortunate in securing such services as his.

"I think you might say 'our farm,'" she said to him one day when, feeling out of humour, she was ready to make the first straw she could pick up an aggressive weapon. "Knowing it is mine, it must sound strangely to hear you always speaking of it as yours."

"Then why don't you say 'our baby' instead of speaking of him as if he were all yours? However, such trifles are not worth speaking about. By the by, did I tell you that old Gleason had subscribed handsomely to the railroad?"

"If you've told me once you've told me a dozen times. Why! if here isn't another tooth! Just think of it, Oliver, baby's got another tooth!"

"Yes, I suppose so," returned Oliver abstractedly,

"and I can coax him to put down his name for a thousand more."

Avis turned away in disdain, and after one or two more attempts to get her to take interest in his interests, he went off, as usual, to somebody who did.

The railroad was at last completed, and if it ran over a good many prejudices and passions, it did its work in happy unconsciousness thereof. The value of Deacon Watson's farm was increased by the new order of things that supplanted the old-fashioned ways of the past, and Oliver's was equally so. But the two men were quite differently affected by this fact. The deacon, who loved to study God's providences as the most interesting book he knew, next to his Bible, read in this one an invitation to double all his subscriptions to benevolent objects, and sent his minister such a present as drove that half-starved worthy straight to his knees with thanksgivings. Oliver, on the contrary, opened a bank account in a neighbouring town, with the triumphant thought that he was now in a fair way to wealth. His farm, for he always called it his, to the constant but secret annoyance of Avis, was in admirable condition, and he whispered to himself that one of these days, when his father was gone, the number of his acres would be doubled. So he buttoned his coat over a self-complacent if not a happy heart, and went on his way rejoicing.

"I wish I knew what ails my baby," Avis said to him one morning. "He was very restless last night."

"Babies always are when they're teething," returned Oliver. "I wish, though, that this youngster would let me sleep after my hard day's work. You ought to see the hay we got in yesterday. Why, what's the matter now? What on earth are you crying about?"

"I don't know. I suppose I'm nervous about my baby."

"Why don't you get mother to run in, then?"

"You always talk as if your mother knew everything!" replied Avis. "And the fact is, she doesn't know half as much about babies as I do. She's forgotten all she learned when she was young and had you."

Oliver stood looking at the baby a minute or two, said to himself there wasn't likely anything ailed it to speak of, and went off to his work. Yet the child was really very ill, and when he came in to dinner, the little creature lay almost unconscious in its mother's arms.

"Don't take on so, Avis," he entreated, seeing her distress. "I'll go for mother, and send for the doctor, and do everything under the sun, if you'll only stop crying."

But this was a case beyond "mother," beyond the

"doctor," beyond poor Avis's tears and prayers. The little pilgrim was soon to enter upon a journey which should lead him away out of sight, out of the reach of imploring hands, out of the hearing of listening ears. They sat around him through a few hours of suspense and pain, and then he stole noiselessly away.

And now, when her heart was breaking, Avis did not fly to her husband for comfort, but instinctively turned to the faithful heart that had so often warmed and sheltered her.

"Father!" she said pitifully, and he took her in his arms with the old words set to a new and tenderer tone.

"Yes, dear, I'm getting very fond of you!" And then he knelt down, and with tears gave up the cherished little one to God. "We mustn't say a word," he whispered, as they rose from their knees. "He was God's before he was ours. It's hard, it's dreadful hard, to say, 'Thy will be done,' but we must say it, every one of us."

"*I'll* never say it, never!" cried Avis. "It isn't right to take away all I had. What made God give him to me if He was going to take him away? I never asked for him. God sent him of His own accord. And it's a cruel, cruel thing to take him away!"

"Yes, it is," thought Oliver. "There'll never be any more peace in this house. That baby was all

that kept us two together. Don't take on so, Avis," he said coaxingly. "I'll try to be good to you, and make you forget baby."

Avis shrank away.

"Make me *forget* him!" cried she. "That's just the way you men talk. My precious little darling," she said, snatching the lifeless form from Mrs. Watson's arms, "how *could* you go away and leave your poor mother all alone? Didn't you know you'd break her heart all to pieces?"

"Don't talk to her; let her be, Oliver," whispered his mother. "It's just the way her ma took on when them boys died. And Avis is going to be her ma right over again."

The image of Mrs. Benson, withered, yellow, sighing, weeping, and reading novels, came up unpleasantly before Oliver's vision.

"I'd give all I've got in the world to bring that baby to life again," he said. "Avis never used to be a bit like her mother, but if she goes on crying at this rate, she'll get to be her perfect image. And doesn't she suppose it's something to *me* to lose such a splendid boy?"

Unfortunately this did not occur to Avis. The baby had always been to her "my" baby; her own love, for it seemed so vast in comparison with Oliver's sentiment toward it that she looked down upon it with contempt.

"Do go away, everybody!" she said, when all there was to say and do had been said and done. "Oliver, you go home to tea with your mother. I'm going to bed, myself; my head aches, and my heart aches, and the whole of me aches."

"Poor little girl!" said the deacon. He would have liked to put her in baby's cradle, if he could, and rock her to sleep. But she crept away, and the three sat together in sadness and silence. Mrs. Watson made tea, and her husband and Oliver took some, but her own cup remained untouched. *Her* heart was aching for her son; what sort of a home had Avis made for him, and what sort of a home was she going to make? Something was wrong somewhere, and so she told her husband as soon as they got home.

But the deacon couldn't see it. He said he hoped to see a more submissive spirit in Avis in time; "But the fact is, I'm getting fond of her!"

Yet he prayed, with sweet, childlike faith, for the sorrowful little heart, and as he rose from his knees said, with tears—

"I never had anything come so near me as this. I feel sorrowful, and beat out, and joyful, all at once."

"I don't see any sense in being joyful," said Mrs. Watson. "What is there to be joyful about?"

"Ah, that I don't know. Only I've always took

notice that the Lord wraps up His best things inside of them that don't look pleasant on the outside."

"Well, I thought you was one of the sort to take on dreadfully if anything happened to that baby. You seemed all bound up in it."

"So I was. But I don't want to be all bound up in anything but God. I'm sorry He's hurt Avis and Oliver, but I'm glad He's hurt me. I needed it."

"I'm sure I don't know anybody that needed it less. To hear you talk, people would think you was the very off-scouring of the earth, you that wouldn't hurt a fly!"

The deacon had long ceased to "argufy" with his wife, as he called it. He was better at believing and praying than he was at speech-making. And when it became necessary to decide where the baby's little grave should be, and Avis said, of course, "right alongside of dear ma," he silenced Oliver's objections by his own acquiescence, though it was an unheard-of thing to bury a Watson among Bensons.

"Humour the little thing, humour her," he said. "If it's any comfort to her to have her baby's grave right under her window, why, let her."

"But the Watsons have always been buried together," said Oliver. "And I don't want my boy laid alongside of Mrs. Benson. She'll be crying over him, even though she's dead. I never saw her when she wasn't crying, and Avis is going on just like her."

Yes, Avis cried day and night; she grew thin and pale, and black circles formed themselves under her eyes. When Oliver tried to comfort her she accused him of never having loved the child; and when, in an awkward way, he made efforts to divert her mind from its sole object of thought, she reproached him with taking more interest in his railroad stock than in her sorrow.

And when all this, as well as past habits, formed by her absorption in her child, drove him to his mother, she upbraided him with neglecting her when she needed him most. His life with her became intolerable, and from a good-tempered, he degenerated into an ill-tempered man, and began to find fault in his turn. He complained that she had lost all of her good looks; that she took no pains to please him; that there was nothing properly cooked; and that the house was so untidy that he was ashamed to let his mother set foot in it. There came, at last, an explosion, caused by a tiny spark.

"I'll tell you what it is, Avis," Oliver began one night at the tea-table; "if you keep up this incessant crying and moaning I shall jump out of the window. You got along without the baby before you had him, and I don't see why you can't now. I'm sure I'd give everything to have him back if I could, but you see I can't. And to have you going on so, month after month, looking and acting just as

your mother did, riles me up so that I can't so much as eat in peace."

Avis responded by a fresh gush of tears, and did really look so old, so untidy, so woebegone, that she was enough to try the patience of a better man than Oliver. "And the bread is sour, too," he pursued, with growing disgust. "I do wish you'd make bread like my mother's."

"And I wish you'd go back and live with your mother!" cried Avis. "You are there half the time, as it is."

"You'd better take care what you say."

"So had you."

"Well, this cat-and-dog life don't agree with me, and I believe I'll take you at your word. How soon shall I go?"

"Whenever you please."

"A fine piece of work you'll make of this farm!"

"I'm *able* to take care of it!" cried Avis, rousing herself. "You'll see now what I've got in me. You can carry off all the stock you've bought, and the mowing-machine, and half of everything."

"I'll make out a list, and divide everything fair and square," he said. He left the table, and began to write. His hands trembled with passion as he did so, for in parting with his wife he must part with the beautiful farm he had so long spoken of as his.

As to Avis, her sudden fit of anger had subsided,

and the thought of the lonely, desolate life that lay before her, made her shudder.

"I wish I hadn't answered him back," she thought. "What made me? But it's done, and can't be undone."

She cast a furtive glance at Oliver. He, too, had cooled down, and was sitting in gloomy silence.

"There is one thing we can't divide," he said.

Struck by his manner, Avis drew near.

"What is it, Oliver?"

"Our baby's grave!"

She started, and cried—

"O Oliver! you may have everything else, everything! the whole farm, all the horses, all the cows, and I'll go away somewhere to live, only leave me my baby!"

In her desperation she had got her arms around him, and was looking into his face with an appealing expression that smote him to the quick.

"A man and a woman, who've got a little grave between them, can't part," he said hoarsely. "It won't do, Avis."

"No, it won't do!" she repeated. "I've lived a year since we first spoke of it."

"So have I. It didn't seem as if there would be anything left in the world, when I'd lost my little girl."

And so the big boy and his little girl hushed up their quarrel, and entered upon some festal days

"She was looking into his face with an appealing expression that smote him to the quick."—*Page* 56.

that made their home, as they fancied, a sort of Paradise. Neither of them reflected that no radical change had been wrought in their characters, and that misunderstandings were sure to recur when this new honeymoon was over.

Yet only a few weeks had passed when Oliver, recovered from his terror at the prospect of losing wife and lands, began to absorb himself in outside affairs, and when Avis's grief once more resumed its sway, making her undesirable in his eyes.

Things were resuming their old tone, and both were in fault, when one day, early in the spring, they were brought together by an event that gave a shock to the whole community. Deacon Watson was driving his wife home from a neighbouring town, and approached a railroad-crossing, just in time to be caught by the locomotive of a train not due at that hour. Mrs. Watson was instantly killed, and the deacon received injuries that disabled him for life. All petty squabbling retreated in dismay before this terrible event. In his grief at the loss of his mother, Oliver began to appreciate Avis's sorrow over her baby as he had never done, and Avis forgot herself, for a time, in her sympathy for him. She consented, without hesitation, to remove to the deacon's house, to assume the care of him, and the new household was soon harmoniously formed. But Satan himself, as it seemed to her, lost no time

in bidding her stand up for her rights. "Why should Oliver have his full liberty, and go and come when he pleases, while you are shut up with his father? He isn't your father." And again—

"What do you think Oliver is doing now but taking away the fence that has divided the two farms, so as to throw them into one? A fence made by your grandfather, and renewed by your father! Much he feels his mother's death!"

"I'll let him see that if he won't look out for me, I can look out for myself," she continued, and the next time Oliver came home to dinner, it was not ready, and to his remonstrance came the fretful answer—

"I can't be nurse and cook at once."

And Oliver replied—

"If you begrudge doing for my father the little he needs, I can find plenty of people who would think it a privilege to wait upon him. If I had known you were going to be so selfish,"—and then followed an ominous silence.

V.

THE deacon, sitting all day long in his arm-chair, suffering from the shock of his wife's death, and the injuries he had himself received, soon caught the jarring notes that made discord where there should have been sweet music. For a long time he did not speak of it to either husband or wife. But he told the sad story to Him whom he was wont to consult in every emergency, day after day, lamenting it in His presence, and praying for his "poor boy," his "poor little girl," in tender, pitiful accents.

And at last the time for speaking to them came on this wise. Oliver had been unusually thoughtless of Avis's comfort, and she unusually provoking, and they had parted in disgust—he to deposit money, she to resume her household tasks.

"Avis," said the trembling voice of the deacon, "it won't do."

"What won't do?" she said, approaching him.

"For us three not to live in peace together. I've been humbling myself before the Lord about it, and

asking Him to forgive me, and to help me to turn over a new leaf, and He says He will."

"You can't think how ashamed of myself you make me feel, when you talk so," said Avis. "If everybody was like you, we should all live like angels, and there'd be no need of going to heaven. But Oliver aggravates me, and I aggravate him, and I know we don't make a pleasant home for you."

"It isn't that that worries me," said the deacon, with a quivering lip. "It is sitting here and thinking whether it is a pleasant home for the Lord Jesus. And I'm getting so fond of Him."

"A pleasant home for the Lord Jesus!" These words rang in Avis's ears all day long; went with her to her pillow; rose up with her the next morning. Her mind ran back to the day when she and Oliver became one, and entered her mother's house, there to make for *each other* a home, without one single thought that in doing so they were to make a sanctuary for a diviner resident. She recalled so many selfish, petty ways of her own, so many of Oliver's, and looked at them in the light of this thought, till she felt like going and hiding herself away to be seen no more. But that she could not do, and then the idea came to her, like a good angel, that it was not too late to turn over the new leaf their father had spoken of.

"I have not made a pleasant home for Oliver,"

she said, remorsefully, to herself, "and I'm afraid I never can. But if the One father is 'getting so fond of' will come and live here with us, I'll try and make it a place fit for Him to stay in."

She went about her household tasks with a new purpose warm at her heart. This home, to which, in silent thought, she had invited her Divine Guest, should be graced with that order and neatness she would choose should reign there were He to be visibly present. There should be the kindly service to father that should win his smile. There should be the loving word to Oliver that would fall gently on his ear.

But all this, so beautiful in theory, was hard in practice. "A purpose is not a life." A host of bad habits met her on the very threshold of her new one. She found herself idle and listless where she meant to be energetic and zealous. It was easier to speak the irritable rather than the conciliatory word. And she found herself faltering, vacillating, almost despairing.

At the same time she began to mark a change for the better in Oliver. It was the reflection of her own improvement; but she did not know that, because she found more and more to hate in herself. But it was becoming very sweet to think that in all she said and did she was trying to please a new and dear Friend. She caught herself asking Him con-

tinually how He chose to have her to do this or that, whether she was right here or wrong there, what else there was she could do for Him; and the more she forgot herself, and gave up her own ways and plans, the more peaceful, the more happy, she grew. In her simple life there were no great events; her battles, when she fought any, were with very little things, but little things make wondrous combinations. The avalanche that destroys a whole village is made up of single snowflakes that come down on noiseless footsteps. The honey that fills the hive was stolen from ten thousand flowers. Blessed is the sphere of woman! She need not go abroad for work, nor lift up her voice in the streets. Let her be only a flower, full of sweetness, and the bees will find her out, plunge into her bosom, and carry sweets away. Ah, how much the Bible means, when it says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive!" And now let us look into some of the homely details of Avis's new life.

She had inherited from her mother an inordinate love for novel-reading, and all other books were distasteful to her. But here was Oliver's father, sanctified by suffering, and with heavenward glances that made such reading insipid, needing the use of her eyes every day. Once she would have said that it was bad enough to have to read aloud, without being restricted in her choice of books. But

now she yielded, gracefully and kindly, and then came the reward in elevated tastes. What she read from courtesy she began to appreciate and to love.

Then there had been a sore spot about her mother's arm-chair. She thought that because it had been her mother's seat through so many years, it belonged to her as a matter of simple justice. But from the outset, Oliver always planted himself in it whenever it seemed most sacred to her, or she fancied herself most fatigued. He often wondered, when she gave him an unpleasant word, what he had done to deserve it, for his selfishness toward his wife was more thoughtless than wilful. But she gave up the chair now, and found in doing so that she was not feeble or in need of a luxurious seat, and that there is no repose like that of a peaceful conscience. Then as to the bread—what a triumph over herself she gained on the day that she surprised and delighted her husband by making it as the late blessed Mrs. Watson had done! It may be necessary for a man to go to the stake. For a woman it is enough to renounce the precepts and the example of her own mother for those of her husband's.

But it will be objected, "This little wife is losing her individuality, if she ever had any, and is becoming, not everything to all men, but everything to two. Is she not training her husband to increase of

selfishness, and to that tyranny to which men are prone?"

It is true that if, at the beginning of her married life, a woman yields to her husband a weak, undiscriminating subservience, she will lower the tone of his character, as well as that of her own. But no man can walk, hand in hand, with a wife who yields not to him but to God, whose docility is that of a sanctified heart, without becoming himself elevated and ennobled.

Let us look into the matter a little more closely.

"Do you mind my going to spend the night with Mrs. Lane?" Avis asks.

"Yes, I do mind it. I hate to have you wear yourself out over that sick woman, full of whims as he is."

"All sick people are full of whims. And I don't mind hers in the least. And it doesn't wear me out; you know I shall come home in the morning as bright as a dollar."

"Well, I'm getting ashamed of myself. You do all the nice, kind things, and I sit by and look on. What's got into you?" He gets out the sleigh, wraps her in the buffalo robe, almost teases her with anxiety lest she should take cold; and as he carries her over the snow to their friend's door, he says—

"Now promise me, little girl, that you won't tire yourself out, and that you won't undertake to walk

home in the morning. I'll come for you bright and early."

And then he goes home, and sits over the fire with his father, and they fall into pleasant discourse, first about the dear little wife, and then about the dear Friend who had changed her so.

"She hasn't spoken a word about it to me," Oliver says seriously. "I had no idea what had got into her."

"Don't let her get ahead of you," the deacon replies. "A man and his wife oughter keep step with each other."

"Yes, that's so," Oliver assents. "But it is easier for women to be good than it is for us men. It seems to come natural to Avis, now she's got started. But I shouldn't know where to begin."

Yet he proves that he does know, for an hour later, when stillness had settled down upon the house, he kneels, for the first time in a good many years, beside his bed, and asks that the secret taught his little wife may be taught to him. And he is thoroughly in earnest in his prayer, for an amended, ever amending life has preached to his heart, and taught him to believe in Jesus Christ, and in the power of His gospel and His grace. So true it is that no one runs the heavenward race alone; but, as has been quaintly remarked, "when He says, 'Draw *me*,' He adds, 'and *we* will run after thee.'"

But all Oliver's habits were against him. He had fairly compassed himself with worldly cares that withstood him at every point. He not only owned more land, and more productive land, than any man in the country, but he owned more railroad stock, and more bank stock. Nothing could go on but he knew all about it, and nothing prospered in which he had no hand. He was public-spirited, and was always getting up schemes for the general good; now he had a project for a course of lectures that were to complete the education of the rising generation; now a scheme for introducing water into every house; and next news, he was impressed with the fact that the Rev. Abraham Penfield was getting old, and that it was time to gather him to his fathers, and find a miraculous young man to fill his place.

"It's all doing and no thinking," the deacon whispered to himself. "It ain't good to be so awfully busy. One thing is, he has to be two men instead of one, all along of my being so helpless; but that ain't all of it; he is stirring by nature, and never was one of the sort to sit still two minutes at a time."

"I want to have tea right away," Oliver broke in on these reflections. "I'm going to have the choir meet here to sing. That will please you, father, I'm sure."

It did not occur to him to add that this was Avis's proposition; and she was willing to let him have the credit of it. It certainly made a delightful evening for the patient old man, who lay back in his chair listening to his favourite hymns, with happy tears rolling down his cheeks.

"It's just next to going to heaven," he said, as Avis was preparing him for the night. "I don't know what I've done to make the Lord so good to me."

"And I'm sure I don't know what *I* have, either," said Avis.

"I guess it's just His way," said the deacon.

"I wish it was His way with me," said Oliver, when his wife repeated these words. "But you and father seem to have all the good times to yourselves. I thought if I had the choir here, and heard so many hymns sung, I should get into a good frame against to-morrow. But I got to thinking about that fellow, Josiah Sweetsir. He cheated me on that last yoke of oxen. Letting alone you and father, and a few of your set, I don't see that church members are any better, when it comes to a trade, than people who make less pretence."

"I think we ought to judge a church by the best people in it," replied Avis. "Besides, when two men have a piece of business between them, I suppose one of them always gets the best of it. And,

this time, why shouldn't it be Josiah, instead of you?"

"Well, I have the name of being good at a bargain, and it isn't very pleasant to be come round by such a fellow as Josiah Sweetsir. I'll be even with him yet, though, you see if I don't."

He sat up late looking over his accounts and so slept late next morning. Avis had to go to church without him. This was nothing new, but it gave her unusual pain, because he had promised to turn over a new leaf in this respect, and she had really seen in him a desire for a new life.

"We must pray more for him," the old deacon said. "And as to patience, we can't have too much of that. When I think what the Lord Jesus has to put up with in me, I feel like putting up with everything in everybody."

And when Oliver found that neither his father nor his wife uttered a word of reproach to him, he felt greatly ashamed.

VI

"If I live till next Sunday, I'll go to meeting all day," Oliver said to Avis. "If our minister was only a young man, it wouldn't come so hard as it does now."

"I'm sure I never could look up to and love a young man as I do Mr. Penfield," said Avis, with a sigh. "But if anybody else would suit you better, I'm sure I haven't a word to say."

"He puts things in such a melancholy way. It is a good deal as if when a fellow is going to start on a voyage, feeling as most young fellows would, somebody should come and put his hand on his shoulder, and say, 'Everything looks very fine and prosperous now; but you must not forget for a moment that your ship may spring a leak, or take fire, and then what would become of you?' You won't pretend that that would help to make the voyage pleasant?"

"Something would depend on what the voyage was for."

"Well, allow that it is for pleasure. There's no harm in that, is there?"

"We've sprung a good many leaks in our voyage, young as we are," replied Avis.

"But we haven't gone to the bottom."

"No, but if we had never had anything to set us to thinking, perhaps we should. You are so well and strong, and have so many irons in the fire that you have hardly any time to think. And it is a good deal so with everybody else in the village."

"Yes, 'most everybody is running and racing like a loose horse," said the deacon. "Sunday comes once a week and hitches 'em up, or they'd run themselves to death."

"For all that, I think the Reverend Abraham might be a little wider awake," returned Oliver. "And when a man's been hard at work all the week, he wants his Sundays to be a rest to him. But Mr. Penfield always harps on things that ain't pleasant."

"His sermons comfort me," said Avis. "When I am listening to him I feel as if I didn't care what happened to me, if I could only be good."

"Well, you *are* good; there's no two ways about that."

Avis shook her head, and the old deacon said gently, "There is none good but God." And, after a pause, he added, "I kind of think—of course, it don't become an old man like me to be

positive—but I kind of think that sometimes when we don't like our minister, it's because we ain't up to him. He's travelling on the way to heaven, and so are we, but we've let him get ahead, and he sees things we can't see; and when he says he sees 'em we say we don't see 'em, and so they ain't there."

"Well, now, take his sermon this afternoon," said Oliver in a confident tone. "He says the best thing that can happen to a man is to have some great misfortune to bring him down. I call that sheer nonsense. It's just as if you should say to a tree, 'Here you are, growing up straight and strong and green, but that isn't good for you, and I'm going to take my axe and cut you down.'"

"I never was good at argufying," replied the deacon. "But I'll say this: If there wasn't ever a tree cut down, what should we build our houses and barns with? And if the Lord never cut a man down, where should we get people to comfort us when we're in trouble? You've heard me tell about them awful times when the Indians used to go prowling round, so that the men never dared to go to their work without taking their guns with 'em, and how they shot down my mother with me in her arms, and killed or carried off half the women in the village. There wasn't a house where there wasn't weeping and wailing. And such a

spirit of love broke out there, you never see. Great strong men got together and laid their heads on each other's shoulders and cried like girls. And them that had lost the most was the kindest and the tenderest among 'em. One man was stripped of everything. They murdered his wife, they tortured and carried off his daughters, they burnt down his house. And he grew so sweet, and tender, and loving, that them that hadn't had half his trouble went to him to be comforted. The village was full of brothers and sisters; you would have thought they hadn't had but one father and mother among 'em. And when the Lord had brought 'em all down, He came and lifted of 'em up. You never see such times. They all turned to Him just as a lot of frightened little children run to their mother. And He spread His great white wings over 'em all, and just gathered 'em in."

Oliver listened in silence, while Avis quietly wiped her eyes. The sorrow that had moved him for a season, and then taken wings and flown away, had left the print of its heavy footstep on her heart. She understood Mr. Penfield's teachings as only those could do who could say, "I have been brought low and He helped me." And the thought of driving this good, patient, hard-working man away was very painful to her. Long after the rest of the household were asleep, she lay and pondered over

her husband's growing dislike to one for whom she felt an ever-growing love.

"It seems hard that when religion is nothing to Oliver, and everything to me, he need mix himself up in parish matters," she thought. "But if he says Mr. Penfield must go, go he will. He's at the head of everything, from the railroad down to the very bread we eat. And when I married him I thought I was so condescending because I had learned a little French, and a little music, and a little painting!"

She seized the first opportunity when they were alone together to pour out all these anxieties into her father's ear.

"Well, dear," he said, "there's no use in opposing him with words of our'n. We'll just go to the Lord about it. He loves our minister, and He'll keep him here, unless he has got some better place for him."

"You speak as if you were so *sure*, father."

"Yes. You see I'm getting very fond of Him. And setting here all day long with idle hands, I get to thinking about Him till He seems as near as can be. And when you get so near you can see just how good He is; and before He speaks a word you can tell what He's going to do by things He's done before."

"But Oliver has got such a will."

"Maybe he has. But it ain't nothing to the Lord's. He can topple a man's will right over by

just a breath. He can take a man that's running one way as hot and eager as if his life depended on it, and turn him right round, just as eager to run the other way. Don't you be afraid. It'll all come right."

Avis stood in thoughtful silence. She had no such strong faith, and could not understand it.

"I wish I felt as you do, father," she said at last. "But it don't seem as if such prayers as mine could have anything to do with God's will; persuade Him, now, to let Mr. Penfield stay. I don't so much wonder at your expecting Him to answer yours."

"You see, dear, when I was first set in this chair and was told I'd got to stay in it all the rest of my life, it come hard to me. I was well on in years, but I was just as lively and fond of work as ever. I liked to use my limbs just as a boy does. And when I was knocked to pieces, and what was left of me was set in this chair, says I, 'Now, deacon, you're cut off from your work, and you'll have nothing to do but to pray from morning till night. You've always said you wished you had more time to pray, and now you've got it.' Well—well, so I had got the time, but I hadn't got the spirit. When I'd prayed for a while I was all beat out, and couldn't say another word. Well, I turned it over and over in my mind, and I asked that wonderful Man that used to pray whole nights at a time, what the matter was.

Says He, 'You take it for granted that a man can make himself pray, and there isn't a man in the world who can. You stop goading yourself up, as you used to goad your oxen, and leave it all to me.' Well, I did. I said, 'Dear Lord, I'm a poor ignorant old sinner, and I set here with nothing to do, and I want to spend my time praying; but I can't.' And then He opened my eyes, and I see the whole thing. He wanted me to say, 'I can't,' and as soon as I said it, He said, 'But *I can!*' Ever since that I know I shall get what I ask for, because I know my prayers are not mine; they're His; don't you see, dear? And I'm getting so fond of Him!"

Avis did not quite see, yet her faith was strengthened, and she felt some courage in asking that Oliver might be led to value their pastor as she did, and not raise a party against him.

"I'd ask Mr. Penfield to come to tea some night, only I should have to invite Mrs. Penfield too," she said. "Wouldn't you like to have him come, father."

"Yes, dear. And don't you be prejudiced against Mrs. Penfield. She means well."

"I daresay she does. But she'll be sure to say something Oliver won't like. I don't know what the reason is, but she always dries me all up. She is so solemn, and so prim, and talks so like a book. I suppose it is because I'm such a bad girl that I

don't like to hear her repeat verses from the Bible, and talk about being consistent."

Something like a smile played around the deacon's lips for a moment, and then he said—

"We must take people as we find 'em. It takes all kinds of trees to fill the woods. Mrs. Penfield lives up to all the light she's got. I expect things will look different to her some time. She thinks now it's her duty to speak what she calls a word in season to everybody. She's got a plan about it in her head."

"Yes," said Oliver, who now came in to tea, "she loads herself up with just so much shot, and you hear her go bang! bang! bang! and then she quits the field without any game. When I was a boy I hated her like the mischief. I never went there on an errand, or met her anywhere else, that she didn't ask me where I expected to go to when I died."

"We've got to be so brimful of love to the Lord Jesus that we run over," said the deacon. "And love doesn't make anybody hate us. And I don't think anybody 'll hear us go 'bang' after that."

"We shall get rid of her when the Reverend Abraham departs," said Oliver, looking mischievously at Avis. She coloured, for she felt angry and hurt at his speaking thus. The hasty answer rose to her lips, and flew from them before she had time to think. Oliver was quite ready to retort, and they were fast verging toward one of their old disputes,

when Avis suddenly became silent. Oliver looked at her curiously.

"I wish I knew what has changed her so," thought he. "How much nicer it is than it used to be when she always must have the last word."

"I am sorry I was angry with you," she said. "It was very wrong. But you know how kind Mr. Penfield was to us when baby died, and, somehow, when you make fun of him it seems to hurt baby, and that hurts me."

One of those sudden revulsions came over Oliver, for which we can account on no human grounds. He knew he had been most to blame, yet here was his little wife asking his pardon. And she had given him such a good supper; just such things as his soul loved, made after his, not her, mother's way; it was a shame to tease her so.

"She shall keep her minister, for all me," he thought. And so he told her that night before he slept.

"I've given it all up," she replied, "if some one else could do you more good."

"It isn't so much the good I'm after. I do not mean to say I don't care for that, to be sure. But I want to be interested. I want to hear something new, not the everlasting old story, over and over."

"The 'old story' has begun to sound new to me lately," said Avis. "And it is as sweet as it is

new. Sometimes I think I'd like to go about telling it to everybody."

"I hope you never will," said Oliver nervously.

She looked up into his face, with a smile that said she wasn't going to do that, or anything else he hoped she wouldn't do.

"I know an old story that's begun to sound new," he said, looking down lovingly into the bright face; "an old story that's as sweet as it is new."

And so that cloud blew over, and Mr. Penfield never knew on what a very little point his fate had hung. Oliver had not much education from books, but he had a good deal of the sort men pick up among men, and it was quite true, as Avis had said, that he could drive off their minister if he chose to use his influence in that direction. And now what made Avis stop short in the midst of her discussion? What was the hidden spring of her humble apology; an apology on which so much turned? It was the question that had so often wrought both inward and outward change:

"Am I making this a pleasant home for the Lord Jesus?"

And surely He who condescends to our low estate is willing to abide where this question is asked, even if no perfect home is ever offered Him by poor human hearts.

VII.

Not long after this event, which, though trifling in itself, was an event in Avis's quiet life, a little tremulous wail of surprise from not "*my* baby," but "*our* baby," announced a new life in the house. The newcomer was received with far more delight than even their first-born. Oliver had been captivated by a brace of boys belonging to a friend and neighbour; these sturdy youngsters were quite a different affair from the infant he had been afraid to touch, and he realised now that all sturdy youngsters must first be wailing babies. Avis received her new treasure with a chastened joy that lay deeper than her passion for her lost darling, yet was less consuming, for she held it lightly, as a treasure, perhaps, lent, not given. The old deacon looked on with gentle, genial smiles; the new happiness stealing into the household was filling his loving heart with gratitude and peace.

"It is a mysterious Providence," said the Reverend Mrs. Penfield to her husband, "that keeps the old deacon living on so. Mrs. Watson looks

very delicate, since the birth of her infant, and when I urged her to resume her class in the Sunday school, she said it would be impossible, because the care of her father was becoming almost as great as the care of her child."

"Of course, she ought not to undertake any other than the work that lies at hand," replied Mr. Penfield. "I think it quite enough for a woman to be a good mother. And as to the deacon, dear old man, I bless God every day that he lives. I believe this church owes more to him than to any of us."

"You are so peculiar," replied Mrs. Penfield. "He used to be tolerably active before his accident, but he can't go round among sinners now, and I think it's an awful thing to outlive your usefulness. I hope I shall not outlive mine."

"I hope not, my dear. But I wish I could convince you how much we owe to the deacon for his example and his prayers. I believe he was never so useful in his life as he is now. He has a faith in prayer that puts mine to the blush, and a sweet, tender love to Jesus that stimulates mine whenever I approach him."

"He *is* broken down a good deal; he used to be so rough and noisy."

"It is not so much breaking down as softening and refining under the influence of his protracted

sufferings. It is beautiful to see how he behaves and quiets himself like a little weaned child."

"But he doesn't labour with sinners," persisted Mrs. Penfield. "I sent Rachel over there yesterday (she has shown such obstinacy and hardness of heart lately that I have thought of dismissing her), and he never said a word about her sins."

"What did he say?"

"He only took hold of her hand, and smiled, and said, 'Well, my child, you see how happy a poor, sick old man can be!'"

"I can imagine just how he said it. And, you may depend upon it, he asked to have the right word given him, and had it given."

"You grow more peculiar every day," was the reply, and Mrs. Penfield hugged herself in her own narrowness, and went her way. And this way was to the kitchen, where she found "Rachel," a young girl whom she was trying to "bring up," crying over the ironing-table, and scorching one of the reverend garments of the family.

"What is the meaning of this?" was asked in severe tones. "Is this the reward for all the good advice I have given you? What are you crying about? Have you been reading a novel? And look at this shirt! Scorched till it is ruined! Rachel, I really cannot allow things to go on so much longer. You and I shall have to part."

"I didn't mean to scorch it. The tears got into my eyes and blinded 'em so I couldn't see. And I ain't been reading no novels, either."

"Then what are you crying about?"

"I don't know, exactly."

"You do know! I insist on being told."

A burst of tears was the only reply.

"I declare, if you haven't set the iron right down on the ironing-sheet and burnt a hole through to the blanket!"

"I'm very sorry. I'll never do it again. It's all of the old deacon. To see him setting there, looking so white, and hear him say how happy he was! And I'm young and strong and active, and yet ain't happy. No, not one bit or grain."

"I rejoice to hear you say so. No one can expect to be happy who is at enmity with God."

"I ain't at enmity with Him. And it don't do me a mite of good to talk to me so. It makes me show all my grit."

Mrs. Penfield sighed and look resigned. Rachel seized her iron and went to work with a nervous zeal.

"I don't know what to do with you, you hard-hearted girl," said Mrs. Penfield after a time. "I am really afraid your day of grace is over."

"Perhaps it is."

"And don't you know where you'll go if you persist in your present course?"

"I suppose I do."

"Then why don't you turn from it?"

No answer.

"I repeat, why don't you turn from it?"

Still no answer, but furious ironing. Mrs. Penfield left the field with a flushed face, and proceeded to her husband's study.

"I shall have to part with Rachel," she said. "She grows more impertinent every day, and her hardness of heart is dreadful."

"I am sorry to hear it," was the reply, "for Mr. Watson was asking me only yesterday if I knew of a little girl who could relieve his wife of some of her new cares, and I thought of Rachel. She could hold the baby and wait on the deacon and do many such things."

"She is a very capable girl," said Mrs. Penfield, "but she tries my patience so that I shan't mind parting with her. I wish you would call her into the study, and labour with her before she goes." Mr. Penfield obeyed, and a few tender, kind words unlocked the poor girl's heart.

"I ain't had a minute's peace," she said, "since the old deacon spoke so good to me. It made me want to be just like him. But I didn't know how, and I was unhappy, and cried, and then I scorched a shirt, and Mrs. Penfield, she"——

"Mrs. Penfield has long cared for your soul, and

sought its best good. But she says you have been impertinent and careless."

"Yes, I have. She kept firing at me till I got ugly. But if I can go and live in the house with the old deacon, maybe the sight of him'll do me good."

The transfer was made, and Rachel fancied she had got to heaven. She certainly was on the way thither very soon. The atmosphere of love and kindness and forbearance in which she found herself soon began to show its effect upon her, and under the old deacon's quiet influence she learned to live a new life.

Some months later, hearing of this, Mrs. Penfield remarked that she had not, after all, laboured in vain.

Meanwhile the "young deacon," as his father playfully called him, was maturing in all sorts of sweet baby-graces, making the house vocal with his gladsome voice, and every heart warm with his winsome ways. But just when he reached the age when his little brother died, he was suddenly seized with symptoms of his fatal disease. This time, Oliver's distress was almost as great as was that of Avis. His heart had been growing warmer under an almost imperceptible, but sure Christian progress, and this child was far more to him than his first-born son had been. And he dreaded the tearful

months that he fancied would follow its death. It was a time of sore suspense and distress. The old deacon sat in his chair, and wept with them. The baby was the human "landscape of his life." Every day developed some new feature, offered some fresh variety, to his monotonous day. Yet his tears were not so much for himself as for his children; he had gradually, and with sweet docility, laid so many things at his Master's feet, as they were called for, that it would be comparatively easy to lay there one more of the blossoms of faith. But it is not easy to see those we love suffer; we bear their burdens more painfully than we bear our own. And as long as we live in this world we shall be human beings; sometimes, very human.

"Dear Lord, look at 'em," he whispered, "look at my poor boy and my poor girl. Don't be too hard upon 'em. Temper the wind to my shorn lamb, my dear little girl. Couldn't a little more be laid on me, and so let them go? Dear Lord, they've lost one; mayn't they keep this? But I am an ignorant old creature; it isn't for me to dictate. No, I don't even want to give hints. What do I know about it? Thy will be done!"

Such simple, childlike little prayers stole out of his heart on noiseless footsteps; on unseen footsteps they crept to the ear of Him who is "touched

with the feeling of our infirmities," who never willingly afflicts nor grieves, and was only now trying the faith of these young creatures by lifting a rod He did not mean to use. The baby came back to them, dearer than ever; but it was to yet more chastened hearts, not to foolishly elated ones.

"I'd like to go about and tell everybody all I've seen in this house," said Rachel, who, having cried herself sick with grief, was now crying herself well with joy. "I never see people behave so quiet that felt so bad."

Oliver was the leading mind of the village, and could not help knowing it. But a little child had led him now into depths of experience never before penetrated. That week of suspense taught him lessons he never forgot, and made him take a stand before the public as a Christian man. Avis went on her way with a glad heart; its selfishness fleeing before the Divine Guest; whose presence she was always invoking, and happiness flowing in as fast as that flowing out. The dear old father lived many years; lived to see boys and girls sport about his chair, and his children rising up to call him blessed. He lived to see the Spirit of God respond to his tender pleadings for scores of human souls who found the way to heaven through his gentle guidance. He lived to die as a good man should,

self-renouncing, self-distrusting, self-forgetting, a very child in his sense of his own attainments, a very soldier of the cross, in the reality of his achievements. "And devout men carried him to his burial, and made great lamentation over him."

SUCH AS I HAVE.

SUCH AS I HAVE.

CHARLES EMMET, after the usual number of haps and mishaps in that line, had at last sailed into the quiet haven of married life and cast anchor there. Everybody congratulated him, for he had won the girl of his heart. Everybody congratulated her, for she was to walk the earth hand in hand with one of the best specimens of manhood, and to become refined and elevated by her love to him and his to her. At least, such was the promise the unknown future seemed to whisper in her ear. Why should she challenge this promise? Thousands had seen it fulfilled; thousands had passed, in ennobling transition, from bride to wife, from wife to mother, from mother to serene, happy old age, celebrated the silver, then the golden wedding, and at last dropped anchor once more, but this time "within the veil."

But in the great drama of life we never know whether we have come to see tragedy or comedy. We see the bridal pair come down the aisle with chastened joy on their faces, we see them pass out into

the world husband and wife, and then we must sit down and wait to learn what is going to happen next, and whether our smiles or our tears will greet them. Are we not always more or less sad at the bridal, because of the curtain that hides the future?

At all events, at this festival we may well be prophetically sad.

The young husband and wife are soon to part company—he to go up higher; she, for a time, to disappear in a sunless valley.

"How can I give you up?" she asks him on her knees. "What will there be to do, what to live for, when you are gone?"

"And how can I leave you alone, my poor little defenceless lamb?" he rejoins.

But the inexorable "It must be!" comes in and parts the twain. He goes up and goes on; she seems to go down and to make no advance.

She is a Christian girl, and though she goes down into a valley darker than death—for it is a small thing to kill the body in comparison to eating all the vitality out of the soul—after a time she emerges from it; for she has found other sufferers there, and has learned that what appeared to be a solitude is peopled with quivering human souls. She has her sorrow, so have they; she sheds tears, but they weep too; she is lonely and desolate in her grief, but so are they in theirs. She begins to be less absorbed

in her own sad story, and to listen to the eventful histories of her fellow-sufferers. And now comes the query, "What can I do for them?"

To use a homely expression, she takes account of stock, in order to find out what her possessions are before she begins to give.

And, in the first place, she finds that she is not rich in money.

They had started together, she and her Charles, with very little besides their youth and their faith. If, out of her scanty stock, she undertakes to give silver and gold, it must be on a small scale and in self-denial. But this self-denial she is willing to face.

In the next place, she has no brilliant talents.

She will never preach consolation with the tongue of the learned, or attract attention out of a narrow sphere. Not many, therefore, will stop groaning and murmuring, to hear what she has to say.

Nor has she vigorous health that would enable her to be the skilful nurse she would gladly become. When she goes to the sick-room it must be as a star of smallest magnitude, not as a sun. But she consents to "fill a little space, if God be glorified."

But, on the other hand, she has a warm, loving sympathising heart. It has grown supple under discipline, and tender under the rod. She has heard of "the sacred duty of giving pleasure;" and since

she feels herself incompetent for higher service, she consecrates herself to this. So she carefully counts up the ways in which this duty may be fulfilled, and finds, to her surprise, that its name is legion.

We say of the human smile that it is instinctive. It is from no sense of duty that a baby gives it as a welcome home to his mother. But when he has become a man, and perhaps welcomes her to his home, his smile has become transfigured into something of which a little child is incapable. There is a conscious love and conscious expression of it. And now, when Agnes Emmet rose unrefreshed from her lonely pillow, it cost her an effort to give even so much as a smile to those who greeted her on her waking. It was so easy to say, by her manner of entering the breakfast room, "Because I have had a tearful, wakeful night, I do not care how I lower upon my family. Why, when I am in pain, should I be trying to give pleasure? Such a task is too trivial."

But it did not look trivial now to try to give pleasure. Word and tone and glance of the eye had their sacred mission to perform; if she could not speak weighty truth, she could give the kindly, the welcoming, the reassuring smile.

And if she could not go to the hospital with stronger, more favoured sisters, to bind up bleeding wounds, she could touch and bless bleeding hearts

by the loving word, the sympathising clasp of the hand, that the poorest, the most unlearned, can give. Let us watch her progress through a single day.

She begins it with the firm resolve that in its course she will do something to beautify some other life. She has too poor an opinion of herself to expect that this will be some great, marked service, that will attract attention and elicit gratitude. She does not hope to come down on the parched earth in showers, but she does hope to sparkle one drop of dew, on at least one leaf or flower. Perhaps all she does, under the weariness with which she begins the day, is to try to repress or conceal that weariness and to speak a cheering word. And we are none of us too insignificant to cast a shadow or fling sunshine over those with whom we dwell. All life touches and moves life. The canary in his cage, whom we admire more than we love, for he is insensible to caresses, can yet, if he ails and droops and becomes silent, affect our spirits. And this is but a faint image of the impression of a mother's heart when her joyous boy hangs his head, and his incessant, lively prattle becomes an ominous silence. The human heart was made by so delicate, so cunning a hand, that it needs less than a breath to put it out of tune; and an invisible touch, known only to its own consciousness, may set all its silvery bells to ringing out a joyous chime. Happy he,

thrice blessed she, who is striving to hush its discords, and to awaken its harmonies by never so imperceptible a motion!

Our Agnes, then, has begun her day in no magnificent parade of glory; she has only come down to breakfast with a kind thought in her heart that makes her face pleasant to look upon. She has given such as she has—no more, no less. She has met with some verses full of Christian faith and hope, that she is sure will delight a poor woman who lives in a tenement-house, and up too many flights of stairs for her to climb very often. Other people, who knew that she was in sore trouble, gave her both money and good advice. But she received neither with the glow of pleasure with which she took from the hands of the postman the copied lines that implied that she had as tender a heart as women above her in social position.

After the verses were copied and sent off, Agnes was called upon by a friend, who presented her with some choice fruit, such as her delicate health required. Her thanks were warm, and what they ought to have been. It is not gratitude we want when we do, or try to do, kind things. We want some proof that we have given the pleasure we aimed to give. And Agnes was learning not merely to enjoy favours, but to let her friends see that she enjoyed them.

"If you are quite willing," she said, after admiring this basket of fruit, "I should like to share this gift with a friend. He is a lonely old man, and so deaf that I cannot make him hear a word I say, though he does hear others whose voices are stronger."

Permission was given a little ungraciously. When shall we become noble enough to let our friends enjoy themselves in their own way rather than through our prescriptions? But Agnes did not observe this, and by and by the poor old man, lying despondently upon his bed, was warmed and vivified by the bunch of grapes, not so much because they were grapes as because they said, "You are not so lonely and forgotten as you fancy. One friend, at least, has remembered and cared for you."

And now Agnes begins to flag. She has used up about all her strength, and has to go and lie down. It is hard for young people to have to take care of themselves. Liberty is as natural to them as to sportive animals and little children. She felt it now. She would have liked to be strong and well and to run to and fro like other girls, for alas, poor child, she was only a girl still; a married wife, a widow, and yet a graceful, tender, loving girl, as fond of being caressed and petted as ever, yet robbed, on the threshold of life, of the manly heart that had

cherished her. She felt unutterably lonely and sad as she lay there with her hands lying idly by her side. What were those once busy hands good for now?

"Are you able to see a visitor?" was asked just here. "Your cousin, Grace Leigh, has come."

"Yes, certainly; let her come up here, please."

She pushed the sadness that lay uppermost down into the depths of her heart out of sight; it could and would come up again by and by, but it shouldn't annoy dear Grace now.

Grace was full of petty trouble, and wanted nothing better than a sympathising listener. Though she was a lovely, attractive woman, somehow only the women seemed to find it out; and here she was, beautiful to look upon, with soft eyes that won your heart and soft hands that you loved to clasp, but an established—shall we apply the words to such a vision?—*old maid!*

"I am so glad to see you!" said Agnes. "I was lying here with nothing to do and longing for the right friend to come in. And you are just the very one. I was thinking, not half an hour ago, how dearly I loved you; I don't believe I ever told you half how dearly; did I?"

"Why, no!" was the surprised answer; and if Grace was an old maid, and rather a tall one at that, she got right down on her knees by Agnes's

couch, and their hands met in such a clasp as they never had before in all their lives.

"You can't think how much good you've done me," she went on. "I felt wofully out of sorts when I came here, and as if nobody in the world cared for me. You have had a great sorrow, I know; I don't mean to undervalue it; but Agnes, dear, I really and solemnly believe that

> ''Twere better to have loved and lost
> Than never to have loved at all.'

I have been so hungry! I think if I had ever won a heart and had the first place in it for an hour, I could have died of that ecstasy, or if not, that I could have lived on the memory, the delicious memory, of it all the rest of my days!"

The soft blue eyes filled with tears for an instant and then she went on.

"Perhaps it is silly in me to come and confess all this to you; but somehow it has done me good; and I don't want you to fancy I am a poor, disappointed, sentimental old woman. I seldom give way as I have done to-day. And no doubt He who said it was not good for man to be alone, sees some exceptions, and that mine is one of them. So kiss me now, and I'll be gone."

She whispered a few words in Agnes's ear and rose to go. They were the very words her young husband had often whispered, kneeling just so by

her side. She realised how little her cousin knew their sweet meaning, and that made her say—

"Don't go. Let us have a long, good talk. Tell me all about your poor folks, and your mission work, and everything."

Grace was only too happy to do it. The cloud on her brow passed away, and as she went on with her story, she began to realise that if there was loneliness in her life, there was also richness and fulness there.

"A great many people rise up and call you blessed," said Agnes, after listening nearly an hour to an animated, often amusing description of her cousin's work.

"Yes, we old maids have leisure to look after other people; and sometimes I think, though I'm not sure about that, that a lonely heart has more room in it for God than a full one. At any rate you love me, and I'm going away to feast upon that."

"What little crumbs are a feast to some people," thought Agnes when she was again alone. "Who would have believed that Grace Leigh, beloved and admired as she is by old and young, could be so humble as to stoop to pick one from my hand!"

She felt rested now, and the consciousness that just by being loving she had made the burden of life a little lighter for her cousin, made her own easier to bear. Still, when she joined the family in the

evening, she felt disposed to the silence and moodiness that is apt to possess those who are suffering either mentally or physically. When asked about her cousin's visit, she answered, at first, in monosyllables, and as if annoyed at having her sanctuary invaded. But was this the way to give pleasure? she asked herself. The thought roused her, and she repeated all the incidents of the visit that could possibly interest the family circle. It is said that "words make us ten enemies where deeds do one." Is it not equally true that words, rather than deeds, win friends for us? Are not kind, affectionate words the coin with which we buy just such words?

One might go on painting these homely, everyday scenes indefinitely. But enough has been done to give a timely hint to some of the lowly ones in our homes, who, feeling themselves of little worth there, have never tried to exercise the gift possessed by every human being, however obscure. We live in a strange, eventful world, and at every turn meet, even when we know it not, with hearts that are starving for the loving word we might speak, aching with a pain our sympathy could alleviate, lonely with a loneliness we could dispel. Who has not seen, in woodland rambles, the huge, unsightly fragment of rock made beautiful to the eye by the ready grace with which Nature trails over it deli-

cate vines, and springs forth from its crevices in charming ferns and tender blossoms, till its rugged form for ever loses its sharp outlines?

And is it not worth while to possess this fairy-like hand? May not those who find themselves obscure and useless, and sigh for a vocation, find this one of the sweetest, though one of the simplest, on earth?

At any rate, Agnes Emmet has made it hers, and her heart, in ministering in lowly ways to others, has found what it was not seeking for itself: the fountain of youth, of rest, and of peace; for if it is a "sacred duty" to give pleasure, what shall be said of the sacred pleasure of giving it?

HOMEWARD BOUND.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

THE good steamer "Aurora" was making her homeward trip across the Atlantic, and her passengers were preparing to set foot once more on their native soil. The voyage had been prosperous. There had been no rough winds, and but little sickness; agreeable acquaintances, that promised to become lifelong friendships, had been formed; and during the few hours now to be spent together, everybody was bent on showing his best side. If there is test of character in place and circumstances, it is a sea-voyage. The real self, the mean and paltry, or the benevolent and the noble, is forced to declare itself. And those who had persistently looked out, through the voyage, for Number One, who had been taciturn, and moody, and unlovely, now, inspired with the prospect of relief from the monotony of the past two weeks, were eager to retrieve their characters as speedily as possible. Children who had been treated as cumberers of the ship, if not of the earth, were now indulged with lavish greetings. Those who had looked daggers at each other across the

table, where two palates coveted the same dish, now bowed and smiled, and suddenly grew well-bred. People are thrown together at sea in somewhat of the free-and-easy way that makes picnics so unreserved and so significant in their results; and if Mr. Long did learn to despise Mr. Short, he also learned to think Miss Medium Height the most charming maiden he had ever beheld; while that young lady was fain to become the adored of the contemned youth, according to the almost universal law of cross-purposes. And while there was no plan laid to that effect, cliques were formed and adhered to as if this voyage of two weeks was to be the veritable voyage of life.

"How depressing it is," remarked one young lady, "to meet with invalids when one is travelling for pleasure! We have been fairly haunted by that Mr. Grey and his mother. We met them first at Nice, and he looked at death's door then. I cannot imagine what kept him alive. Then he turned up at Florence; and when we got to Rome, there he was again. And I declare, when I came on board the steamer last week, and saw him promenading the deck with that pinched, hungry look on his face, I thought I should give up!"

"We met him, too," was the reply. "But I shouldn't speak of him so much as looking pinched and hungry, as resigned and patient. Sick people

do get that look. It seems to grow on them; it's a kind of a graft, I imagine; for, of course, it isn't natural to people to be patient."

"How the sea air does take out one's crimps!" cried the first speaker, Miss Welford, whom it is time to introduce. "I shall look like a fright when I land. How do you manage yours?"

"It manages itself. Nature keeps me crimped both in season and out of season. I happen to be in the fashion just now, but next news I shall be weeping for the straight locks of an Indian maiden. Let's have a game of cards."

"Well. It will be a cheering spectacle for those Greys. They're such narrow, bigoted people! A few evenings ago mamma asked them, out of mere good-nature, to join us in a game, and they had the effrontery to decline, on the ground that they never played cards. Of course, it was nothing less than a reproof to us; and mamma resented it accordingly."

"I don't see that it was a reproof."

"Now, Edith Lemoine, how just like you that is! Whatever one says, you always take opposite ground. If I should say that Mrs. Grey is not a fussy old woman, you would declare that she is."

Miss Lemoine smiled.

"Considering the difference in our tastes, and that you and I are both strong-minded girls"——

"Speak for yourself. I'll not own to being strong-minded."

"Only to being a little self-willed," said her mother, looking as if she found that quality a wondrous grace. "I don't care if I join you girls in your game. I've got rid of a couple of hours over a stupid novel, and I believe I've slept off a couple more. How that everlasting Mr. Grey does cough! I really think people so far gone as he should stay at home, and not shock one's sensibilities by going round looking like spectres."

"I pity his poor mother," said Miss Lemoine. "He is her only son and all she has left. I suppose you have heard his romantic story?"

"As to that, we all have our romantic stories."

"But we don't all go into consumptions over them. And this is really a very interesting romance, at least, what I know of it. The girl he loved died five years ago, but he has been faithful to her memory ever since, and now he's dying, poor fellow."

"It is a very weak-minded thing to do," declared Mrs. Welford, yawning and looking at her watch. "He ought to have found another girl, and got married and settled down. Really, my dear, you seem vastly interested in him! For my part, I've no sympathy with your lackadaisical, broken-hearted people. And as to these Greys, they're a pair of

prigs. You should have seen the air with which they declined to play a harmless game of cards!"

"Well," said Miss Lemoine, "I don't care what you call them, but I like them. The care she takes of him! The love she pours out, yes, just *pours out* on him! And his respect and love and gratitude for her are just as beautiful. It makes me wish I had a mother."

"Rather an ungrateful speech, after all I've done for you on the voyage!" said Mrs. Welford coldly.

"So it was, and I was sorry the moment I had uttered it!" was the frank reply. "You have been very kind and I have been very ungrateful. But I suppose we all have our moods. And sometimes I am in the mood to be made a little girl of in the way Mrs. Grey makes a boy out of her six-foot-high son. It is very silly in me."

Mrs. Welford and her daughter exchanged glances, which were lost on Miss Lemoine: for at this moment there was a little bustle near them. Mr. Grey had fainted and lay in his mother's arms like one dead.

"Come away, girls," said Mrs. Welford, rising. "I really believe we shall have a burial at sea; and they say it's an awful scene."

But one of the girls was already out of hearing.

"How can I help you? What shall I do for

you?" whispered Miss Lemoine to the agitated mother.

"Oh, if you'll step to my state-room and bring me the little flask and glass you'll see there. Henry, darling, you haven't gone and left your mother without saying good-bye?"

She spoke tenderly, but not passionately. Miss Lemoine marvelled at the composed tone, and kept on marvelling at the quietness and self-control with which the exhausted young man was soon brought back to life.

"I thought I'd got my furlough and was off," he said, with a smile, as the colour, what little he had, poor boy, began to return.

"I almost hoped you had, dear child." As she spoke, her eyes and those of Miss Lemoine met, and she read in those of the young lady a sort of horror and disgust.

"It will be comparatively easy to suffer when I suffer alone," she said, in reply to this look. "Unless you have been very ill yourself, you can form no conception of what my dear son is undergoing. Such exhaustion is harder to bear than pain. It is like death; but it is not that blessed messenger. There is the distress, but not the relief."

Miss Lemoine was silent. The thought of death was most repugnant to her; she could not think of him as a "blessed messenger." Yet she lingered

near the Greys with the true womanly sympathy that is the badge of most of her sex, and with a vague desire to show what she felt. And as she stood and watched the mother's hand caress the dying son, a thrill of pain shot through her heart as she reflected that no maternal caress had ever been hers; that her life had been won through the death of a girl not older, not more ready to die, than herself. For outwardly worldly as she was, she had a heart with a sanctuary of its own; if neither priest nor sermon had consecrated it, that was not quite her fault.

"You will soon be at home," she said at last; "and once there, Mr. Grey will be free from the discomforts incident to travelling." The young man smiled and said softly, and rather to himself than to her, "Yes, at *home!*"

Mrs. Grey caught his meaning, though the girl did not. She knew that their homes were to lie in different lands—hers amid dust and heat and cross-purposes; his amid peace and rest in the Lord.

"Upon my word, you are the strangest girl I ever saw!" exclaimed Mrs. Welford, when she next met Miss Lemoine. "How could you hang over that young Mr. Grey so?"

"I pitied him with all my heart," she replied. "I don't suppose there's the least chance of his ever getting well; and he's so young! And his mother

will be left entirely alone. And to be alone is so lonely!"

And as if the utterances of these plaintive words had suddenly revealed to her the emptiness and the solitude of her own heart, the girl crept away to her state-room, threw herself upon her bed, and wet her pillow with her tears. "What is the matter with me?" she moaned; "I am young, and strong, and well; I can have everything I want; and yet here I am, crying my life out." And then there flashed through her mind a few words she had met with in a story that day. "Only God can satisfy a woman;" and she stopped crying to ask herself if this could be true, and if here was the explanation of the insatiable hunger of her heart. But, as she had said, she was young and strong, and so she soon fell asleep, and slept on, soundly, till midnight. Then she was awakened by the sound of many feet hurrying about on deck, and of confused cries and shouts. She started up in great bewilderment, and ran out into the saloon and into a scene of the wildest dismay. Women and children were running about, or were clinging to each other in hopeless, tearful, pallid groups. Everybody's real character was coming out; people were pushing past each other and getting in each other's way, each disposed, apparently, to sacrifice all the lives on board, if that were necessary, in order to secure personal safety. "What shall *I* do?

What will become of *me?*" seemed the thought of each.

"Oh, what *is* the matter?" cried the trembling girl again and again, before she could get the appalling reply—

"We are on fire!"

At last she found the Welfords, under whose care she was returning home.

"Oh, here you are!" cried Mrs. Welford; "I had quite forgotten you. Only to think of all our lovely Paris dresses being burned up! Mr. Welford says we may have to take to the boats, and that we can't carry our trunks with us. And there are Mr. Johnson and those Greys going about talking to people as if the judgment day had come!"

Miss Lemoine at this moment caught sight of Henry Grey. His pale face was illumined with a celestial glow, as he spoke to the group about him of the dangers and the hopes of the moment—danger to the body, hope for the soul.

"To those of us who love the Lord Jesus it is only getting home, to be with Him a little sooner than we had expected," he said; "and we shall find that He knew we were coming, and had made every preparation for us."

"But oh, Mr. Grey," said one, "what of us who don't love Him? What will become of us?"

For answer he fell upon his knees, and those

within reach of his voice fell upon theirs. And more than one soul, borne upon the strong wings of his faith, gave itself away to God in those awful moments when the help of man was vain.

Edith Lemoine's was one. Unconsciously to her the Holy Spirit had been preparing her for this tragical scene, and now, when there seemed but a step between her and death, the heavens were opened—she saw within the veil. And they who have thus seen God, cannot describe what they have seen. Finite words cannot define the infinite.

Meanwhile, in spite of reassuring messages from the captain to the contrary, the fire went raging on, and the danger was rapidly becoming more imminent. One boat-load of terrified human beings had already set forth, and an eager crowd was contending for the second. Mr. Welford had seen his wife and daughter safely off, and now came hurriedly to Miss Lemoine.

"There is no time to lose," he said; "come this instant!"

She looked at Mr. and Mrs. Grey. Exhausted by their sympathy for others rather than by terror for themselves, they sat side by side, hand clasped in hand, silently praying for those who were too bewildered to do more than weep and lament.

"Are you going with me, Mr. Welford?" she asked.

"No. Men will not be permitted to leave the ship till all the women and children are off. Come this instant!" Then, seeing Mrs. Grey with her helpless boy at her side, he added—

"I will see you to the boat, also, madam."

"I cannot leave my son," was the reply.

"Surely no one would refuse Mr. Grey a place in the boat, ill as he is," said Miss Lemoine.

"He could not bear the exposure of an open boat this cold night," said Mrs. Grey. "Do not think of us, dear young lady. We are safe in God's hands; and if we go home, it will be together. And I have made myself so miserable, at times, in looking forward to our separation! I never thought God would be so merciful!—would give me such a joy!"

"I insist, ladies, on your both taking to the boat!" said Mr. Welford decidedly. "It is my duty to act for you, since your wills are paralysed."

"He is right, mother," said Henry; "and if you will not go without me, I will go too."

"Oh, my boy, let us die together!"

"We have no right to insist on dying. Think, mother, our lives belong to God, not to ourselves. And you may yet do for Him some of the work I have so longed to do."

With a groan, the elder yielded to the decision of the younger, and in a few moments the sick man

and the two ladies were lowered into one of the last boats.

The faint dawn of day was just beginning to illumine the sky, and to make the picture of the burning steamer a little less ghastly. "If the sun rises, Henry may survive this day," was the fond thought of the mother, as she enveloped his emaciated figure in shawls and blankets eagerly proffered her by those who needed them less. He lay now half asleep from exhaustion, the image of death; and, after a time, Mrs. Grey slept, too, as persons of a certain temperament do after a great mental strain. Miss Lemoine sat and alternately watched them and the burning steamer, which they were leaving behind them. At last the young man aroused and looked anxiously about him, and his eyes met the sad ones fixed upon him.

"I am the only son of my mother, and she is a widow," he whispered. "Is it presuming too much if I say that when I am gone, a hopeful, happy young girl like yourself might sometimes cheer a lonely hour?"

"Hopeful! Happy!"

Did these delicious words describe her? Prophetically she felt that they did. Even amid the horrors of those awful hours, and in the presence of death —for death was coming on apace—she knew that

something had come to her that was to make her happy for ever!

She was not a common girl, and so she did what few girls would have done. She knelt down and took his cold hand in both hers.

"I have neither father nor mother," she said. "I am my own mistress. If your mother and I can learn to love each other, and I think we can, I will be a daughter to her after you are gone. And, perhaps, before you go, you ought to know that you have opened golden gates for me, and given me a glimpse of heaven. I am going to live for that world now; not for this."

He did not reply, even by a smile; he only looked up straight into her eyes till he met and recognised the soul there.

Nor did she shrink from the scrutiny, for death was yet coming on apace, and precious, weighty moments were speeding away.

"I am satisfied; you have a soul; my mother will not be left alone," he said at last.

Mrs. Grey awoke, and started up eagerly to look at her son. Her troubled face turned to the sky, but it was cold and leaden and sunless. He shivered beneath his wrappings, and she shivered in sympathy.

"Can't you give me to God, mother?" he said faintly. "He is going to give you Himself, in my

place, and something strong and sweet and human besides."

"Will you have me for a daughter, *mother?*" asked Edith, using the sacred word for the first time.

They clasped hands in silence, and when they next looked at the sky, if the sun did not shine there, it was bright where the tired traveller disappeared from their sight, and went into the celestial city, to go no more out.

The "Aurora" was burned to the water's edge, but most of her passengers were rescued by another boat.

The hazardous and romantic compact entered into by Edith Lemoine, would probably have come to an unhappy ending under ordinary circumstances. But the event proved that a divine, unerring hand had ordained the meeting, and that the orphan girl was to find a mother, the bereaved mother a devoted child in an open boat upon an open sea. A friendship that, was to be lifelong, had its birth on the most fickle element, and it was a blessed thing for both, that, though they had to cross the Atlantic Ocean in order to meet, two kindred, congenial souls at last recognised each other. Life is all Providence, not accident.

TAKING FOR GRANTED.

TAKING FOR GRANTED.

"It was so ungentlemanly!"

"And so unkind!"

"And she bore it so sweetly!"

These, and a score of similar remarks, proceeded from a party of young girls returning home from an afternoon sewing-circle, and the object of their displeasure was the Rev. Jeremiah Watkins, who had been making an address to them on the subject of Foreign Missions. At every tea-table they represented he was made the subject of animadversion, and in most cases the result was—

"You don't say so!"

"I couldn't have believed it!"

"It is inexcusable!" and the like.

But there was one exception to the rule.

"Only to think, mother," cried Isabella May, the instant the family had gathered around the tea-table, "Miss Raymond told Mr. Watkins at the sewing-circle that we had agreed at her request, to call it the 'Watkins Society,' in his honour, and he replied, 'So I heard, but supposed you said it in your coarse

way!' Did you ever hear of such an outrageous speech?"

"Mr. Watkins is incapable of such rudeness," was the reply.

"Why, mother, half a dozen of us heard it."

"You misunderstood him. I am as positive that he never said it as that I did not say it myself."

"But I am positive that he did. We all heard it, and talked of nothing else all the way home."

"My dear, you are doing him a great injustice. How often I have warned you against trusting to first impressions. I am sure that when Mr. Watkins hears this absurd story he will be able to explain it. Come, let us have no more of this. I am ashamed of you for repeating such nonsense."

Isabella would gladly have defended herself by many vehement protestations, but she dared not run the risk of displeasing her parents, warmly attached as they were to the young missionary, who was about to leave home and friends for a foreign field.

That very evening he called, and as he had been accused in the presence of the whole family, Mrs. May resolved to give him as public an opportunity to defend himself. In as few words as possible she told him the story, adding—

"And now for your explanation to these foolish girls, for I *know* you can make one."

"I happen to remember my reply. I felt a little

embarrassed at the honour done me by the young ladies, and said, 'So I heard, Miss Raymond, but supposed you only said it in your jocose way.'"

Poor Isabella May! The blood rose to her forehead, and she hurried from the room, the picture of shame.

"I hope this lesson will last for ever!" thought she. "What fools we have made of ourselves. I will never be positive about anything again as long as I live!"

The resolution lasted till the next day, when she thought it her duty to go through a certain portion of the church, soliciting aid for a very destitute family.

"Everybody gave me something but Mrs. Howard," said she; "and she wouldn't give me a cent, stingy old thing!"

"Have you any other proof that she is 'stingy?'" inquired her mother.

"What other proof do I want? There she sits in her nicely-furnished parlour, beautifully dressed, and wouldn't give me a red cent. How can people be so mean?"

Mrs. May rose without replying to this speech, and unlocking her desk, took from it several account books.

"'The stingy old thing' subscribed liberally to our Ladies' Tract Society, at all events," she said,

handing the book to Isabella. "And I am treasurer of our Home Mission Society also; see, she gave more last year than any half dozen put together."

"But that is no reason why she should refuse to give a few cents to a poor, starving family," said Isabella.

"You are not stating things fairly. 'A few cents' would have been received by you with indignation. And what right have we to dictate to her how she shall spend her money, or when?"

"I have no doubt," returned Isabella, determined not to be convinced, "that she is one of the sort who subscribe largely when it will make a show, and she can get you, and Mrs. Wentworth, and Mrs. Ransom, and Mrs. Terry to admire her for it; and when a young girl, whose opinion she does not value, calls upon her, she draws her purse-strings together and tells her to go about her business. I am so disappointed! I told poor Mrs. Murphy that I had no doubt I could raise a hundred dollars for her and I've only got fifty. I thought Mrs. Howard would give fifty, at least."

"My dear, do you know of any one whom you would like to have decree just what portion of your money you shall spend in charity, and how?"

"That is very different."

"Come, now, we are just filling a box for the family of a Western missionary, most worthy, yet

destitute people; I should like that grey suit of yours for one of the girls; she is exactly your size."

"My pretty grey suit? Why, mother! And I have just given Mrs. Murphy's oldest girl my brown suit!"

"How can you sit in this 'nicely-furnished parlour, beautifully dressed,' and refuse me one suit of your half dozen?"

"I think that you are unreasonable, mother. I am sure I am conscientious about giving. I lay aside one-tenth of my allowance for charitable purposes, and that's all the Bible requires."

"And suppose Mrs. Howard does the same? Have we any right to require more of her than of ourselves?"

"Perhaps not. But still, I do think she might have given me something."

"Then I have an equal right to say I do think you might give me that grey suit."

Isabella smiled, but looked a little foolish. A few hours later she burst into her mother's room with a—

"Well, I am about the biggest fool I ever saw! I went to carry the fifty dollars to Mrs. Murphy, and made a long string of accusations against Mrs Howard."

"I hope you did not mention her name?"

"Well, I did not intend to do that, but in the midst of my tirade, Mrs. Murphy interrupted me to ask of whom I was speaking, and when I told her she began to cry.

"'O Miss Isabella!' she said, 'don't breathe a word against that blessed lady! It's me and mine she has saved from starvation this many a year. It's all along of the drink that she refuses to give us money. If my poor partner would only leave off his bad ways we should live in peace and plenty. But when he was her coachman he was that under the power of the liquor that he upset her carriage, and the horses ran a long way and got hurted so they had to be killed; and don't you mind, miss, how her beautiful boy was thrown out and made into a poor cripple?'

"I said it must have happened when I was a little girl, for I had never heard of it. But oh, mother, how ashamed I feel! What shall I do to cure myself of this habit of forming hasty and uncharitable opinions? Not a day passes that I do not get into hot water in consequence. Why, according to Mrs. Murphy, Mrs. Howard has been like an angel of mercy to her. She will not give them money because 'my poor partner' gets it and drinks it up; but she pays their rent, and clothes them, and never gets out of patience with them. I declare I never heard of such a lovely character.

The next time you call there I wish you'd take me. I mean to try to become exactly like her."

"Poor child, always in extremes," replied Mrs. May. "There is only one Being whom it is worth your while to be 'exactly like.' But you cannot imitate Him too closely."

"No, I cannot," thought Isabella, as she retired to her own room. "If I were more like Him I should not be so hasty and so uncharitable. But I have had a good lesson to-day, and one I shall not forget very soon."

She was a warm-hearted, generous girl, and when she found herself guilty of injustice to those about her, she felt deeply pained and grieved. And as she desired to surmount her natural faults and foibles, she sincerely prayed for Divine aid, while yet proposing, if one may use such an expression without irreverence, to form a sort of partnership between herself and God. She was to do a great deal by prayers and tears and efforts, and He was to do the rest. She had yet to learn the humiliating, but salutary truth that her strength was perfect weakness, and that the soul that would be purified and sanctified must cast itself wholly upon Christ. So she went on, hating her easily besetting sins, but continually following them, thereby causing pain and trouble to herself and some of her dearest friends.

Among the latter, she prized most highly a former school-mate, Clara Bradshaw, and her brother Fred. Clara was quite her opposite in character; she could reason before she judged, could reflect before she spoke; she had a large fund of good common-sense, and often kept Isabella from her headlong mistakes. As to Fred, he was a genial, well-informed young man, whom Isabella admired and could have become fond of if he had given her a chance, but whether poverty or want of affection restrained him, he had never paid her any other attention than would be natural to pay his sister's friend. Still, unconsciously to herself, Isabella had some secret, undefined hopes that if he ever reached a position that would enable him to marry, she should be his choice. Meanwhile, as he evidently preferred no one to herself, she felt at ease; she had a pleasant home, which she was in no hurry to leave, and many spheres of happiness and usefulness lay open to her. He and Clara were orphans, and had a family of young brothers and sisters dependent upon them, and this required incessant industry in both. But the scene suddenly changed. The death of an uncle put it into their power to alter their whole style of living. Fred need no longer drudge as boy's tutor, a business he detested; and Clara could now enjoy a little of the elegant leisure always familiar to Isabella.

"It is a great change for them," said friends and lookers-on. "It will be a wonder if their heads are not turned."

Indeed there was so much benevolent interest of this sort expressed, that Fred and Clara ought to have shown a vast amount of gratitude to almost everybody.

For a time Isabella rejoiced with her friends most warmly and truly. The thought that prosperity might change their relations to herself did not cross her mind until the fact of change became evident. Clara, always quiet and undemonstrative, grew more and more so; Fred gradually ceased visiting her, and she rarely met him in his own home. What could it mean? She spent many and many a doleful hour in trying to fathom the mystery before she spoke of it to her mother, to whom she was in the habit of confiding everything she could reveal to any human being. But one day, as they sat together at work, she began on this wise—

"A line has been running in my head for several months—

"'Sadder than separation, sadder than death, came change.'

"Is it not true that to lose faith in friends is sadder than to be bereft of them? If they are separated from you ocean-wide, they are still yours; and if they die, you feel that God has done it and

submit to His will. But when they grow cold toward you there is nothing to hope for, nothing to do."

"This could not occur save through the will of God, my dear child, and I see no reason for not referring the minor as well as the great events of life to Him. But do not let us lose faith in our friends too readily. *Circumstances* may change while affections do not. Remember how prone you are to hasty judgments!"

"There is no haste in this case," returned Isabella. "You have no idea what I have been going through ever since Clara and Fred came into possession of their uncle's fortune. Fred never comes near me, and Clara has grown so cold and silent!"

"Are you sure that there has been no change in yourself?"

"There was none till I was chilled by their behaviour. At present I feel none of the sweet confidence I used to have in their friendship, especially Clara's. And, mother, there can be no harm in telling you, but it mortifies and even chafes me to see Clara, who for a little while dressed herself and the children as became their new position, fall back into all her old economies. She has actually taken Will and Tom out of school, and is teaching them herself, as she used to do. I used to pity her when she was obliged to do this, but now—I hate

to own it, but it is true—it revolts me to see such meanness in one I have loved so devotedly. O mother! nobody knows how I have loved her! And now I have lost my ideal; for if there is any one defect in a character I cannot forgive, it is meanness."

"I will own that your statement surprises me," said Mrs. May after a time. "But habit is second nature, you know, and Clara was born and brought up in a painful, narrow school. Perhaps she does not yet realise how large her fortune is. It is very large, your father says, and she can afford herself every reasonable indulgence. But do not throw away a friend you have loved so long for one fault. Remember that you are not faultless yourself, and that your defects are probably as repugnant to her as hers are to you."

Isabella said no more. She felt that she knew more than she could make her mother see. The wound was deeper than a human hand could reach, and the alienation between herself and Clara became more and more decided. They kept up appearances, but that was all. The old, delightful past was gone, and with it some of Isabella's youthful faith in those she loved. And, as time passed, she could not help pouring her grievances into other ears; this, that, and the other friend learned that Clara had been spoiled by her good fortune; that her pretended

affection for Isabella had been mere love of the gifts lavished on her in poverty; that she was incredibly parsimonious; yes, and there was no doubt she had prejudiced her brother against the warmest-hearted, most faithful friend she had ever possessed. People were only too willing to believe all this, and of course it came back to Clara's ears greatly exaggerated. She was a proud girl, and suffered in silence, not offering a word in self-defence. Two or three years passed on, during which Isabella's old love would have turned into contempt and aversion, but that she was a Christian girl, accustomed, with all her foibles, to pray for those who wounded, as she would for those who despitefully used and persecuted her. Then it began to be whispered about that Fred Bradshaw was leading a dissipated, worthless life, wasting his own and his sister's substance in riotous living.

"Of course he would not care for me or expect me to care for him, if all this is true," thought Isabella. "But I must know it from Clara herself, not from mere public gossip."

Finding that she could no longer conceal the misdeeds of her erring brother, Clara confessed the economies she had practised in order to shelter him from public scorn, how her heart had been slowly breaking under its disappointments and shame, and that so far from being rich and able to live at ease,

she was now reduced to almost their original poverty. Isabella could not express her penitence and sorrow.

"How could you let me misjudge you so?" she cried. "What is a friend good for, if not to weep with those who weep?"

"Fred was such a dear brother!" replied Clara. "And I had always hoped he might make you my sister. At first I would not betray him to you, hoping that after the first pressure of temptation was over, he might, like the prodigal son, come to himself. But the consciousness that I was keeping from you a secret of such importance made me, no doubt, appear constrained and unlike myself. Then I was suffering such wearing heart-aches and suspense that I could not seem bright and loving as happy people can. And I knew that, not understanding economies, you would assume that they sprang from a narrow mind, a thing your generous soul loathes. People have shaken their heads and begged me not to let mine be turned by my good fortune, when I have been going about with a heart like lead. And other girls have talked by the hour about some article their dressmaker had cut wrong, while I was writhing under real sorrow. Yes, and not a few have run on about the petty foibles of their servants when I was straining every nerve, listening for Fred's step, and wondering with what evil company he was then occupied."

"I wonder you did not lose your senses."

"I am not one of that sort. I have need of them all. Fred has squandered not only most of our money, but has ruined his health and lost his reputation. No one would receive him into their house."

"And all this time I have been abusing you, you poor child!" cried Isabella, once more bursting into tears. "Well, I can make no promises for the future after the failures of the past. I can only hope that the deep-seated, Gospel humility I have so long needed, will spring up out of all we both have suffered, and that, through God's blessing, this is the last time I shall take anything for granted that touches a human character unfavourably. If you can feel any respect or affection for me, I shall be only too grateful for it, and I know now that I never lost mine for you; I prayed for you every day, and often and often said to myself—In heaven all coldness will have passed away; we shall see eye to eye, and know as we are known."

It is needless to add that the reconciliation between the friends was complete, and that Isabella had, at last, learned a lesson whose impressions nothing could efface. Alas, that it should be so, but we are fallen, erring beings and have to be taught, like refractory children, everything under the rod.

WHY SATAN TREMBLES.

WHY SATAN TREMBLES.

It chanced, upon a time, that two evil spirits, subordinates of the Prince of Darkness, yet high in rank and intelligence, were holding converse together concerning the interests of his kingdom.

"Notwithstanding the success of many of his bold designs," said one, "some secret, invincible obstacle yet bars his progress. While it may be said, with truth, that the soul of man belongs to us, our right to its possession is disputed. Our king himself has hours of despondency."

"I have often thought," was the reply, "of visiting the abodes of men, to learn, if possible, what secret powers are in league against us. I would fain know the number and the force of the enemy, and whether they that be for us are more than they that be against us. What think you? Shall we volunteer to enter on such an expedition together?"

"Nothing could give me more delight. Let us hasten to the king and lay our project before him."

The prince received his faithful servants gra-

ciously, and after consenting to the proposed journey, gave them their instructions on this wise:—

"On reaching the abodes of men, you will at first see much to encourage you. You will find throughout the world an almost ceaseless activity in my service. Day and night they work the works of darkness in the walks of business and pleasure; at home and abroad, on land and on sea. Everywhere the sound of clamour and contention will make music in your ears. Everywhere the sight of oppression, rapine, cruelty, and death will inspire you with confidence. But there is scattered up and down among them, a large class who profess and call themselves Christians. They are sworn enemies. They openly denounce me and mine. They have their banner and their watchword. They send their emissaries to the remotest ends of the earth, and to the very islands of the sea. The secret of their power is hidden from mine eyes. Yet, alas! I have only too lively suspicions as to its source. How gladly would I become omniscient, and so penetrate to the depths of every human heart! I charge you to search this matter to its foundation. Do not be misled by appearances. As they mingle among their fellow-men, these enemies of ours do not always show their colours. They eat, they drink, they marry and are given in marriage, like those about them. They are to be seen

in all the ranks and relations of life, with no singularities that necessarily distinguish them from their fellows. You must follow their every footstep, invade their strictest privacy, in order to learn their watchword and obtain the key to their inmost lives. A man is never so much himself as when alone. See him, then, alone. And when he is in the crowd, tempt him; and when he is in the desert, follow and tempt him still. He cannot harm you, but you may ruin him."

The spies listened and obeyed. They gained the upper world and mingled with its inhabitants. Sometimes they appeared in human guise, and offered an alluring, dangerous friendship. Sometimes they appeared angels of light. But it was more in accordance with their character as fiends to remain most of the time invisible, launching the unseen darts, whispering the envenomed word. It was their delight to lie in ambush behind some apparently innocent pursuit or pleasure, and suddenly rush thence upon an unsuspecting victim. But at first the world struck them as almost wholly the kingdom of their king. For here little children were already criminals: there even women were selling themselves unto sin. The whole earth groaned and travailed together in a common anguish that had sin and Satan for its base. Men met on battlefields to hew each other down like blocks of

wood. Reckless and lawless mobs rushed through the streets, laying waste the homes of widows and orphans. Hatred and lust, sickness and sorrow and death held triumphant reign all over the earth. In green valleys and by the side of musical brooks, and in the presence of God's great mountains, and in quiet rural homes, they saw sights and heard sounds that well-nigh froze even their ardent, hellish blood. And in populous cities these sights were but multiplied a thousand-fold, and these sounds were re-echoed from a thousand souls. The less experienced of the two spies broke forth into exultant cries—

"I see triumph written on every grain of sand upon these shores, on every blade of grass, on every stone that paves their streets. Man works for and with us; body, soul, and spirit."

As he spoke, a troop of children passed joyously along. It was a little army with banners. They gathered into a spacious church, and its dim, religious light fell upon a thousand forms and hallowed a thousand faces, while their voices broke forth in triumphant song.

"Our enemies begin to train their light infantry betimes," said the elder spy dryly. "How will they march and fight, think you, when they become veterans in the service? Come away; this scene disgusts me."

They crept away abashed, they knew not why,

and flew over land and sea only to find men leagued together in the cause of their God. Christian mothers taught their little ones the name of Jesus. Multitudes thronged to temples built for His worship, and did Him honour. They went forth, two and two, to carry His praise to the ends of the earth. They formed themselves into bands and fought their way through the very camp of the enemy. They poured out their money like water, and counted not their lives dear unto them, for their watchword was, "Faithful unto death."

"You will observe," said the elder confederate, "that the power of these saints is immense. Their organisations are well-nigh perfect. They have their Sunday schools, their churches, their innumerable societies, all over the globe."

"But is not this equally true of us? And have we not lurking in every human soul, a traitor ready at almost any moment to arise and bid us welcome? I am disturbed by what I see, but not disheartened. These men are not all of one mind. They waste time and strength in useless discussion. They hinder their success by their pride and by their conceit. There is not one among them who has not within him the germ of close likeness to our prince. Like him, they may fall off from their allegiance and become finally his."

"They may, but it will require all his and all our

craft and vigilance to accomplish that end. For know that I have a clue to the obstacle hinted at by our prince. It transcends in its gravity and importance all we have hitherto seen. Remember that we have yet to penetrate where mortal footsteps may not venture. We are on the threshold of such a scene; let us give it a moment."

They enter a room, and saw a little child kneeling and praying—

> "Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me!
> Bless Thy little lamb to-night."

Shrouded by the shades of evening, but visible to the eyes of the spirits of evil, there stood the Man, Christ Jesus. His hand was on the head of the child. He was hearing and answering the infantine petition.

The younger spy shrugged his shoulders and smiled; but no answering smile responded to his.

"Is the prattle of babes to dethrone our king?" he asked derisively.

"Nay, but come hither," was the reply.

They stole to another room. A young girl knelt with clasped hands; her face, beaming with celestial peace, was raised to heaven, and her lips moved in prayer. Her experiences of life had been brief and well-nigh painless. She had grown up in a happy home, shielded from temptation and guarded from harm. The depths of her soul had not yet been

stirred by sorrow or by passion. Yet, as some flowers turn to the sun, so this soul turned and opened itself to the Sun of Righteousness; morning and night found her looking upward in adoration and in prayer. Unconsciously, she was becoming rooted and grounded in love by each act of devotion, and gaining strength for future conflict and dismay. The words she uttered were few and simple, but Jesus Himself waited to listen to and accept them.

"I should not be appalled by such a sight as this," said the elder spy; "but the scenes I am now calling you to witness are habitual, not occasional. That little child makes an altar of its mother's knee every morning and every evening. This young girl has sprung from such a childhood. Her habits are as fixed as the everlasting hills. And the habits of the Being she adores are equally as inflexible. She, an obscure, timid girl, has power to summon her King from His throne, and He listens with as much sympathy to her story as to that of any potentate on earth."

"We can afford it!" was the reply.

"Here there is a man who has spent all his best years in our service. He has despised and contemned God, angels, and men. Lucifer, Son of the Morning, was not more richly endowed with self-reliance and with pride. He is one of the strong men of his times. Behold him now."

They looked and beheld a grey-haired, venerable man lying in the very dust, not so much as lifting his eyes unto heaven, but smiting on his breast and crying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" He recounts the sins of his youth and of his manhood. He declares that he abhors himself, and repents in dust and ashes. He entreats forgiveness, with rivers of water flowing from his eyes. Every word he speaks comes heaving up from the very depths of his soul. He does not know that he is humble and like a little child; he only knows that he is a sinner against God. And, alas, for the emissaries of Satan! He who inspired, also hears this prayer. Their eyes behold Him in His beauty; they despise, and esteem Him not; but still they see Him visibly present, with tender eyes and loving glance. How gladly they escape from this uncongenial scene, and fly for refreshment to kindred souls!

"That man has prayed thus for years. Every day his confessions become more ample and more minute. Morning, noon, and night he withdraws from business and pleasure, and comes to this spot, and prostrates himself before God. And he never has come to an empty room. His Master is always there waiting for, expecting him. For such a man to go from such a Presence into the pursuit of our interests, is simply impossible."

So spake the evil spirit, and trembled as he spake.

The two passed next an open door, whence a coffin was born tenderly out.

"That was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow," said the elder to the younger. "Let us hasten to her, that in her sorrow she may not maintain her allegiance."

They approached the couch on which she had thrown herself, and even these malignant beings respected, and were for a moment silent before her sorrow.

Then he who was most hardened in sin whispered —"It was your one little ewe lamb, that slept in your bosom! It was all you had left. Earth has no longer a single joy for you. And how many other mothers are at this moment sitting as queens in homes never made desolate by death. Why should you be smitten while they are spared? Revolt against Him who has dealt so unjustly with you; curse Him and die!"

In her despair she did not recognise the voice of the Tempter; she fancied these rebellious thoughts originated in her own breast. "Is it possible that I am upbraiding my Lord and Master?" she cried. "Let me fly to Him for refuge from myself."

She fell down on her knees and lifted up her face all wet with tears. Not a word fell from her

lips. Her prayer was a simple looking upward, a groan, a speechless cry. And yet the Master responded to the look, and came and sorrowed with her.

"Do not grieve, my child," He said, "that you cannot take words and come with them to me in this time of sorrow. I have seen thy tears, and I accept them as the only sacrifice thy broken heart can offer. Weep on, here at my feet."

She lay and wept till, for a time, her grief was spent, and when she looked up she saw the compassionate face of Him who had smitten her.

"Ah, how many times I have asked for faith with which to say, 'Thy will be done!' Lord, I can say it now—

> "'My Jesus, as Thou wilt, oh, let Thy will be mine;
> Into Thy hand of love I would my all resign!'"

"Come up hence," said the evil spirits to each other. "We can gain nothing here. This atmosphere is stifling. A curse on prayers, and a curse on those who offer them!"

They darted away, and in the darkness of midnight alighted on a battle-field, where, in the gloom and obscurity, lay hundreds of suffering, maimed, and dying men. A solitary chaplain, with a feeble squad of assistants, was passing from point to point, seeking in the spirit of heaven itself to save somewhat out of this wreck and ruin of humanity. But

"He cried in his despair—
"'Here, Lord, I give myself away;
'Tis all that I can do!'"

few out of that number could his small force bear away. As he carefully picked his way among the dead and dying, a boy cast upon him an imploring glance. But it was seen only by the spirits of evil, who hovered near, awaiting their prey. The salvation of a human soul trembled in the balance. The boy remembered his wild and reckless youth; his mother's prayers; his father's blessings. He knew, as he watched the chaplain's retreating figure, that all hope for this life was over. One refuge alone availed him. He clasped his hands and cried in his despair—

"Here, Lord, I give myself away;
'Tis all that I can do!"

And as the words died on his lips, the two evil spirits stepped aside and gave place to the angels who came to bear the new-born soul into the presence of its Redeemer.

"He entered heaven by prayer."

It was Sunday, and a popular preacher addressed a brilliant assemblage. Outwardly all was devout and serious. Men who through the week had served themselves with diligence, had now come together to serve the Lord. They knelt and called themselves miserable sinners. They joined in songs of praise with decency and order. They listened with decorum to the voice of their favourite, and magnified him in their hearts. But when the service was

over, they rose and passed out into the world. They spoke together of the times, and of business and pleasure. Women studied, as they had done through the hour so outwardly solemn, each other's toilets, and devised their own.

The younger spy congratulated his comrade on the success of the day.

"You look only on the surface," was the reply. "We have friends here, it is true; but we have foes, likewise. Half these people will go home and shut themselves up in that villainous spot cant calls their 'closet,' and pray for the other half. And now let us follow the preacher to his."

"I kept at him through the whole service," said the other, "reminding him of his popularity and plying him with conceited suggestions. We are sure of him in the end."

They followed him to his study, and saw the flush of satisfaction fade from his cheek, the light die out from his eye. He paced his room with clasped hands and uncertain steps. Suddenly he fell upon his knees and raised his eyes to heaven. The spies drew near and listened.

"O my God, search me and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me! If I have preached myself and not my Master, Lord, forgive me! If I have veiled the truth under too plausible words, O my Father, forgive me! If one hungry soul has

gone forth from Thy sanctuary unfed, lay not the sin to my charge! Have pity on my ignorance and weakness, and teach me how to win souls for Thee! Accept my poor attempt to honour Thee in the name and for the sake of Christ Jesus, Thy Son!"

"Baffled again!" cried the spies, exchanging glances. "Let us away!"

They went from clime to clime, from mountain to valley, from the palace to the hovel, from old to young. Wherever they went temptation went too. But everywhere they found themselves met and resisted by the sacred habit of struggling souls, that, conscious of their own weakness and of Divine strength, cast and ventured themselves on God.

"We have learned the fatal secret," was their report on their return to their own infernal abode. "As long as men and women and little children believe in praying and do pray, they are beyond our reach. After visiting thousands and thousands of homes, and penetrated to their most sacred observances, we return disheartened and afraid. For of thousands and tens of thousands our sad report is—

"Behold, he prayeth!"

HAVING NOTHING, YET HAVING ALL.

HAVING NOTHING, YET HAVING ALL.

A BOY sat by the side of a clear stream, listening to its melodious voice in thoughtful silence, while his companions sported on its bank not far away.

"How the fishes dart about!" he said to himself, "and how cool and clear the waters are! I wish I were a fish. It is so hot and dusty here in the sun, and it must be so nice down there!"

The more he watched the waters the more musically their notes fell upon his ear.

"People say that men and women and children cannot live in the water," he went on. "But why can't they? I don't see why. At any rate, I am going to try it for myself."

The stream was not very deep, but the boy was very little, and instead of darting gleefully about, as he had expected to do, he soon began to pant for breath as the fatal waters closed around him. The other children, happening to see the plight he was in, came and pulled him out, and after a time

he was sufficiently recovered to be able to describe the experiment he had been trying. They all laughed at him and ran back to their play. But he sat, thoughtfully, on the bank, pondering the question, "If fishes can live in the water, why cannot I?" At last, an old man came along and said to the child—

"A penny for your thoughts, little boy."

"I was wondering why I could not live in the water, like fishes," was the reply.

"You were not *made* to live in the water," said the old man, and went his way.

Meanwhile the fishes were shyly watching the group of children at their play, noting the bright faces and the merry laughter, and one of them, in his eagerness to see and hear and join in the sport, fairly leaped out of his native element into the throng. But it was to pain, not to pleasure. He lay panting for breath, turning this way and that for relief, suffering almost unto death.

"See that poor little fish!" cried the children. "He has leaped out of the water and is dying. Let us throw him back again."

The fish soon recovered himself, but was thenceforth sadder and wiser.

"Everything up there looked so pleasant," he said to himself. "Why was I so miserable where others were so happy?"

A sage among his companions replied, in passing —"You were not *made* to live on land."

Now there was a young man in those days who, looking upon a certain element in which others disported themselves, naturally imagined that they were as happy as they were merry, and that he could find felicity as they fancied they found it.

And this was not the expectation of a foolish and thoughtless mind. There was not a wiser man in his generation. Nor was it the hope of a merely worldly man. He was a man who, to a certain degree loved and feared God, and was in the habit of praying to Him.

Nor was it the result of a narrow, superficial

character, for he possessed a great, wide heart, capable of unbounded happiness. What he lacked was what all young people lack—experience. He had been told that the element of pleasure in which most men tried to live was not their native element, but he did not believe it. It looked attractive, and he resolved to give it a fair trial.

And he began by getting everything he wanted. Whatever he saw that pleased his eye he seized. If he wanted houses he built them. If he wanted gardens he planted them. Every sort of fruit he could hear of grew in his vineyards and orchards. He ate his food and drank his wine from vessels of pure gold. His ships traversed the seas and poured the treasures of foreign lands into his gorgeous palaces.

If there were any treasures that were considered royal, those treasures he made his peculiar search till they became his own. He was fond of music and feasted himself on it prodigally, gathering its best artists about him, both men and women. He loved knowledge, and acquired it to such a degree that no question could be asked him to which he could not give a ready answer. He loved the natural sciences, and could instruct all men in the habits and history of every beast of the field, every tree in the forest, every flower that grows. He was a poet, and his soul found vent in hundreds of songs.

He was a philosopher, and his words were so full of wisdom that they became proverbs. He loved fame, and even royalty came from afar to honour him. And they who served him were called happy in the privilege of living for such a master.

Surely, all the conditions of happiness are here: youth, learning, wealth, love, fame—not a desire unsatisfied, not a gift denied. And yet all so failed of its end, that while living in this false element, life was such a burden to him that he said of it, '*I hate it!*"

Where was his mistake? Are not many of the innocent, sweet joys of life to be found where he sought and failed to find them? Undoubtedly. The boy who sat by the stream and fancied its waters were cool and agreeable was right in believing them to be so, but wrong in the conclusion that they were, therefore, the element in which he could live. The fish thought the grassy bank a desirable spot because he saw merry faces and heard gay voices there, and so it was; but the air was not the element in which he was formed to exist.

There lies upon a hard bed in an obscure home a poor woman, who had lain there unnoticed by the world eight and twenty years. She had never known what it was to indulge herself in her life. Her childhood was a struggle, and physical existence has long been one. Her resources are very few. The

only landscape she has seen for years is the smoke-stained ceiling of her own room. Her coarse food revolts her invalid appetite. She is not gifted in intellect; has no culture in the sense in which that word is used; there is nothing attractive about her person; she is only a plain, unlearned, suffering woman, whom people would patronise if they knew her wants, and then go away and forget. But she is not trying to live in pleasure, and so is not dead while she liveth. She has learned, not through any might or power or wisdom of her own, that God is the element in which the human soul was formed to live, and in Him she lives and moves and has her being.

Let us hear what she says about it—

"I never had any thoughts about anything. It was just get up in the morning and go to work, and work all day long, and then when it came night go to bed and to sleep. It went on so till I was eighteen years old, and then John Turner began to come to see me, and we got to talking about being married some time. After that the work didn't seem so hard; I would get to thinking about him, and the time would slip away, and when it came night he always came, and we saved and planned and talked about having a snug little home of our own. If anybody had come along then and talked to me about God and heaven, I shouldn't have listened. I should have said, 'I've got John and that's enough.'

"But one day I had a fall. I was sitting in the waggon, on a chair, and the chair upset and I fell out backwards. At first they thought I wasn't hurt much, and I kept expecting and expecting to get well. But instead of that I grew more helpless every day. My mother had led a hard life before, but now she had my work to do, and had me to take care of. But when she began to break down John came and lived here as if he was her own son and help lift me when I had to be moved, and was kind and gentle, like a woman.

"So it went on a good while, and then it began to come to me that I should never get well, and never be John's wife. I lay and cried about it when nobody was by, and I said to myself, 'Other girls are well and strong, and get married to ones they love, but I've got to lie here, and it's hard, its hard."

"And then I noticed how loving John was to little children, how he was always bringing them in on his shoulder, and making much of them. And one day I said to him—it came out the minute I thought of it—'John, you'll never marry me; I shall never be well enough. And you ought not to be tied to me. You ought to find a nice, tidy girl, and get married to her.' He said he never could or would, and got up and went and sat on the doorstep, and I heard him sigh twice. And I lay

all night wishing I hadn't spoken those words, for I thought if they drove him away from me to some other girl, I should die.

"So years went by, and he was as kind and gentle as ever, but I began to miss something out of him. It isn't worth while to make a long story of it. He was ever so much ashamed and cried about it; but he wanted a lass who could make a home for him, and I made it easy for him; and he went and got married to Huldy Jones. The first time he brought her to see me I felt as if I could strike her dead. But, after they'd gone, I asked mother to bring me a little looking-glass. I hadn't thought to look at myself for a long time. Well, what did I see? Not the wholesome young thing John used to court, but a faded, worn-out, uncomely, oldish woman. My forehead, that once was white and smooth, was nothing but a set of wrinkles; my eyes, that used to laugh so, had grown dull and leaden; and where I was sound and plump, I was now long and lean. I lay and looked at myself a whole hour, and then I forgave John, and I forgave Huldy, and said, 'I've got *mother* left, and there's nobody after all, like a mother.'

"But somehow I pined for John, and the more I broke down the more I wore on mother. I'll make it as short as I can; mother died. It seemed strange that I didn't die, too, but I didn't; I just lived and suffered.

"Somebody had got to take care of me, but nobody wanted to do it; I was so fractious and complaining. But at last an old woman came, for the sake of earning her living, poor thing. And John sometimes brought Huldy to see me. She had no reason to be jealous of what little there was left of me, and she wasn't. But when I saw those two young things together, I realised that John was not *my* John any longer, and I missed his love and missed mother's. And I said to myself, 'What is the reason we have hearts if the things we love change and die? Is it to torment us?' I used to lay awake nights, thinking and moaning; only I had to moan softly, lest they should hear. And I began to remember that my grandmother, who was a godly woman, used to say, and keep saying, that any one who had God for a Friend had got all he needed. Then I began to feel 'round after Him, but in the dark: for this is a lonesome neighbourhood, and it's seldom that I see any one except the family. Of course, I had a Bible, but hadn't read it much. I never took to books. But now I began to read it all the time. I wanted to find out what I must do to get God to like me and be my Friend.

"I don't suppose anybody in the world was so lonesome as I was; for, though to look at me lying here like one dead, it would seem as if I had got too old and too sick to want somebody to love me,

I never had cared so much—not even when I was a girl. And I thought if I left off fretting and crying, and grew patient and quiet and good, that perhaps God would be sorry for me, and perhaps come in time to give me a kind thought now and then. But I couldn't make myself good. The more I tried the worse I grew. And, though I left off fretting with words, the fret was in me just the same, and as I got no comfort out of God, I began to get angry with Him. I said to myself, 'If it hadn't been for that fall I should be John's wife. It's too bad.'

"You see, I was kicking against the pricks. One day John brought his two boys to see me. One of them was four years old, and the other just beginning to walk and to get into mischief. He was shy at first and clung to his father's neck; but after a time he got down and ran about the room, meddling, as children will, with everything. John took away things he ought not to have several times. At last the child got a knife off the table, and when his father tried to make him give it up, screamed and ran away with it. John caught him, took away the knife, and struck his hands twice. It hurt me to see the child's lip quiver, and I said, 'A moment ago you couldn't fondle Johnny enough, and now you strike him.'

"'Yes, I strike him just as I fondle him because

I love him. Isn't it my duty to make an obedient boy of him?'

"The words went right through me. Was it because God loved me that He let me get the fall? Should I ever have thought of Him if I had kept strong and well? And then I opened my Bible and came to the text, 'We love Him because He first loved us;' and it seemed as if God's Holy Spirit took pity on my ignorance and set me to reading all the verses that taught that He loved us, not because He saw anything good in us, but because loving is just *His way*. The very heart in me leaped up for joy, and I began to love Him that minute. I saw as plain as day, that though I'd grown so sickly and cross-grained and tiresome that nobody in the world could bear me, He was sorry that I was sick, and sorry that I had grown to be fretful and peevish and disagreeable. It astonished me so, and I was so taken up with it, that I never knew when John went away. To think that God could love *me!* I couldn't make it out. The next time John came, he stood by the side of the bed and says to me, 'How are you today, Sarah? As bad as ever?'—meaning my pain.

"'Yes, as bad as ever,' says I, 'but I've got acquainted with God since you were here, and if I'm bad, *He's* good; I can't tell you how good.'

"John looked at the old woman, then, who takes

care of me, and put his finger up to his forehead, as much as to say 'There's something wrong with her mind.'

"'Let her be,' says she; 'I've heard people talk this way before.'

"'You think I'm having a hard time, John,' says I, 'but I'm having the best time in the world. I've got everything I want.'

"'Don't you want to be well?' says he

"'No, I want everything just as it is.'

"John is a great, strong man, as tall and straight as a poplar tree, and I never saw him cry but once before; but now the tears began to run down his cheeks.

"Well, it went on so that I never had a lonesome moment. When I wasn't reading my Bible, or speaking to God, He was speaking to me, saying such kind and comforting and loving things! I don't think He could seem so tender to people who are well and strong.

"I used to lie awake thinking how poor I was, and what a hard bed this was to lie on so many years, and to wish I could have a little change in my food, or some one come in to talk to me and cheer me a bit. But now I can't think of anything I want. If I could have all the money in the world, and everything money could buy, and ever so many friends, and be young and well and strong again, but have to give up what I've learned in this

sick-room, I wouldn't give up an atom of it. We read in the Bible about Jesus going around among poor people and sick people and dying people, and how sorry He was for them, and what He said to them, and what He did for them. Well, He hasn't changed a bit since then. He comes here into this poor little room and sits down here by the bed, and makes me so happy that I'm ashamed. And I'm going to thank Him as long as I live that He never gave me many of the things people call good, and even took away what He did give, because now I've got nothing but Him, and He is enough."

"Isn't this all a delusion?"

"Well, suppose it is; what harm has it done me? It has made a palace out of this hovel, and a happy woman out of a miserable one. But it isn't a delusion. It's all in the Bible, every word of it, and more too. You just take it and sit down and read the promises, and then push everything out of the way that you love better than you love God, and take Him at His word, and you'll see what He is, and that I haven't said half enough about Him, not half enough. Oh, how I thank Him that He took away the use of my young limbs and laid me on this bed of pain; that He took away John; that He took away mother—all I had!

"And now I know what the Bible means when it says, 'As having nothing, and yet possessing all things!'"

SUCCESS AND DEFEAT.

SUCCESS AND DEFEAT.

Two young men, Robert Neale and William Collier, entered college together, and during the four succeeding years a warm friendship sprang up between them. Fellow-students wondered what points of congeniality there were between them, and would have sneered at their Quixotic union, but for the fact that everything Neale said and did appeared right in all eyes. He was a brilliant, attractive, popular young fellow. Nature had done for him all she could. She seemed to have been amusing herself by giving him so many varied talents, so genial a humour, so noble and manly a person. When William Collier, rather small for his age, found that the college favourite accepted his homage graciously, he could hardly believe his senses, and he often asked himself what he had done that entitled him to favours others sought in vain. Neale often asked himself what bound him to Collier, who possessed none of the originality and freshness that make an agreeable companion. The fact was, that the latter understood him better than

any other classmate did, and that on the principle that "it is the inferior natures that appreciate, indulge, reverence, and even comprehend genius the most." Perhaps the philosophy of this principle may be found in the fact, that the "inferior nature" finding little to admire in itself, naturally seeks something to admire out of and above itself. But be that as it may, the two were almost constantly together—the one adoring, the other adored.

Neale had leisure to make himself agreeable to many another besides his chum. It cost him little time to prepare himself for his recitations, and, while Collier plodded painfully at his task, he was here, there, and everywhere, the life of every festivity. It came to be understood that he was to receive all the encomiums and bear off all the honours, and he had such a joyous way of accepting the situation, was so free from any superior airs, that his success was rather enjoyed than envied.

As the years passed, his friends at home were kept in a state of constant elation by the accounts they received of him, and during his vacations he was treated as a hero and caressed and looked up to in a way that might easily have turned any head.

Meanwhile, Collier was not making his mark in any way. He was doing the best he could, and his family loved him and made much of him, and, as

he shone in the reflected light of Robert Neale, fancied him a good deal of a man. But they felt it to be a great misfortune when, during his last year in college, he fell in love with a very young girl and became engaged to her. "What business had a mere boy like our Will to do such an imprudent thing?" they cried. "He can't be married for years and years. Besides, his tastes may entirely change; what satisfies him now may not please him in the least in the future." All this was true, but it did not alter the fact that "our Will," having hitherto been called a man, did not consider himself a boy, and was not disposed to make concessions which might seem due to that title. So that, when the two young men graduated, one went off with flying colours to a more than satisfied circle of friends, the other with no honours and to a disappointed family.

Neale's delighted father now sent him abroad, where he spent as much money as he pleased, fascinated everybody he met, and found life charming in every aspect. Collier entered a Theological Seminary, feeling himself a little under a cloud. His family were not entirely pleased with him, and he found his love-affair a clog to his student-life. At the same time, he was too far in for it to recede. His beloved admired him, if nobody else did; she had never complained that he did not

shine in college; one of these days, when he should stand in his pulpit, he should see that sweet face turned reverently upward toward his. He wished he had a higher motive for diligence in his studies than to please this little unfledged bird; but he said to himself that she was a rare bird, and so she was, and that one day his family would admire his choice.

But that day was never to come. He was suddenly stunned by the news that this rare bird had spread her wings and flown upward out of his reach. When his family saw how grief unmanned him they wished they could recall her, and did for him everything affectionate, sympathising friends could do. But a sorrow Robert Neale could soon have thrown off his joyous nature, clung to this opposite one with leaden hands. He could not study, could not interest himself in anything. An inward voice whispered, at least to say, "God's will be done." But he could not say it; and, alarmed for his health, his friends sent him abroad. It was an important point in his history; perhaps, if he had stayed at home, his sorrow would have wrought for him an exceeding joy. It certainly had a somewhat elevating effect. But foreign travel is not favourable to reflection or to prayer. He joined his old friend Neale, admired his sallies of wit, and was cheered by his overflowing spirits. For a pure man Neale

was intensely human. His health was perfect and he loved to live for the sake of living. He intended to go to heaven when he died, of course, but wanted to have a good time on earth first, and when Collier, who could not help speculating about the place to which his Mary had gone, spoke of the next life, he would become quite serious for the moment and add his own speculations, which were quaint enough.

Measuring Collier's piety by his own, he fancied him quite a saint, and respected him as such.

"If such trouble as yours had come upon me," he said, "I should see some sense in it. No doubt, a whipping would do me good. But why an exemplary fellow like you should have such a disappointment, I can't see." Yet in a thoughtless moment, speaking of Collier to a mutual friend, he said, "I love the boy, and it hurts me to see him suffer so. But what a pity he hasn't sense enough *to curse God and die.* I should, in his place."

Two years later the friends returned home. Neale began to study law; Collier returned to the seminary. Time had tempered, but not healed, his sorrow. He had come back a disciplined man expecting far less from life than he had done, and disposed to take what came quietly. Neale still fascinated him; they met often, and the friendship absorbed his leisure; so that he formed no intimate one among his fellow-students until the

last year of his course. Then a very different man crossed his path. His name was Bruce. He one day read a sermon before his class for their criticism. It was on the subject of chastisement. Collier had suffered enough to know that even the young can speak on this subject experimentally, but he had not made the wise use of his discipline that this sermon enjoined. He sought Bruce at the earliest opportunity, and in a long conversation with him began to understand, for the first time, that the brilliant man is not necessarily the most useful, nor the prosperous the happiest. Bruce had been in a hard school—the school of poverty, of disappointment, of bereavement; there he had learned to get down on his knees and to pray, and to suffer in faith and patience. From that moment a new life began to open itself to Collier's darkened understanding. He saw that to get all one wants out of life is not necessarily success; that to be thwarted, disappointed, bereaved, is not necessarily defeat. Taking this thought for his text, he began to understand what had befallen him and to face the future with fresh courage. And he needed this courage, for his way was hedged up. He "candidated" here and candidated there; he grew less ambitious, had less faith in himself, every day. His father was not a rich man and had made great sacrifices in educating him, and he felt that it was high time to

support himself. But the door of success was closed to him; he was not popular.

Meanwhile, Robert Neale had become established as a lawyer, with most brilliant prospects. He was finding time to write humorous poems that were welcomed in private and public, was going to marry a "splendid" girl, and was the very picture of a prosperous, talented, satisfied man. But while Collier admired his genius as much as ever, they were imperceptibly drifting apart. The one was drinking joyfully at earthly fountains and finding the waters sparkling, exhilarating, and sweet. The other found these fountains sealed to him, and was drinking, in silent ecstasy and amazement, those waters of which if a man drink he shall never thirst.

Robert Neale's marriage took place about this time with great pomp and ceremony. But shortly after that event, Collier was startled by a great change in his hitherto genial, care-free friend. All the brightness that had charmed him in the past was gone, though there was an assumed gaiety that deceived the world. Collier's sympathies were at once aroused, and he caught his friend affectionately by the hand, expecting his confidence—

"What is it, dear Robert? What is going wrong?" he inquired.

"Nothing is going wrong, old fellow. Take off that long face."

"You can't deceive me. Something is wearing on you."

"Let me alone. Nobody lives on roses. I've thrown away my chance of being a saint, like you, and all *that's* up."

Thus repulsed, Collier went his way, perplexed and troubled. There was only one thing he could do, and that was to pray, and pray he did. He had another chance to candidate in a remote country village, and went with fresh hopes. But his sermon, full of plain common-sense, and for a man of his age, wonderfully experienced, did not take. They wanted a wide-awake, talented man, who would stir them up and interest the young people. This new rebuff sent him where all disappointments sent him now, right to his God and Saviour, with the silent cry, "Thy will be done, Thy will be done."

"It is strange that our Will cannot find a set of people who can appreciate him," said his mother. "I know he isn't one of your noisy, clap-trap men, but he's made a good use of his troubles, and, for my part, I like to hear him preach."

"Being his mother, that's rather peculiar," said one of her daughters, to whom the remark was made.

"Well, Mrs. Peck isn't his mother, and she said the last sermon she heard him preach was really wonderful."

"It sounded wonderful to her because she has known Will ever since he was a baby; and besides, her judgment isn't worth a straw. The truth is, Will is a dear, good boy, but he never will reach or stir the popular heart. I almost wish he had studied some other profession."

"Would you rather have him like Robert Neale?"

"I would not have him like Robert Neale, but being just what he is, I should be glad if he had some of his genius besides. I feel so sorry for him when he comes dragging himself home from his unsuccessful expeditions, looking so patient, yet so disappointed. Why should Robert Neale and such as he have all the good times, and Will all the bad ones? Why should other men get into lucrative, honourable positions, settle down in life, have all they want, and our Will stand out in the cold?"

"'Even so, Father: for it so seems good in Thy sight,'" was the reply.

"Well, I will own I should like a brother to be proud of."

"You *have* a brother to be proud of. When you are so old as I am, you will value goodness more than you value intellect and worldly advantages now. I would rather be the mother of my Will, just as he is, than the mother of Robert Neale. And Will will find his place yet. The stone that is fit for the wall is never left in the road. I am

thankful that I have never sought great things for my children. All I have ever desired for any of you is that you may be 'content to fill a little space, if God be glorified.'"

The conversation was interrupted, and not resumed for some days, when it was renewed, on this wise, the mother and daughter sitting together at their work—

"Have you heard the dreadful stories they are whispering about Robert Neale, mother?"

"Yes I have heard them, and am sorry you have."

"Of course they are not true?"

The mother was silent.

"They are too dreadful to be true."

"Let us hope so."

"Mother," said Will, entering the room, "can I see you alone a moment?"

"Always some secret between you and mother," said the sister gaily. "I suppose that is a gentle hint for me to retreat. Well, I'm off!"

"I need not ask you what you have come to tell, Will," said his mother when they were alone. "That gifted young man has fallen. I had heard it whispered, but could not believe it."

"Yes, his name is stained; he is a fallen star. I could not have believed it. Everything looked so full of promise for him, he was so bright, had

always been so pure! How proud we all were of him! O mother! how thankful it makes me feel that God has kept me down! If I had had Robert's genius, I should have gone to ruin just as he has. He was too richly endowed; too strong in his own strength! O Robert! Robert!"

"Do not let us think of him as ruined. Let us pray for him day and night, that he may pass out of this cloud a wiser and a better man. While he was so full of earthly prosperity, he felt no need of God; now that he has stumbled and fallen on the threshold of life, he will call upon Him."

"I hope so; I do hope so. Mother, I have one chance more to preach as a candidate. I have seen the time when I should have felt that a man of my education ought not to look at such a field of labour. But my Lord and Master has humbled me, and taught me to go anywhere He went. And He went among the very poor, and the very ignorant. Pray, while I am gone, that if I am the right man, I may be going to the right people."

He went, and the people heard him gladly. The right man had found the right place at last. He had a lowly home, his name was never heard of outside of his own little parish, but it was loved there, and he was happy in his obscurity. He was happy, for amid his many trials and sorrows, and hopes long deferred, he had learned Christ as few

learn Him, and preached Him as few preach: not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but through the teachings of the Spirit, and out of his own experience.

As I am not writing a romantic, aimless fiction, but painting life as it really is, I shall have to own that he found a wife to share his new home. Of course, sentimental people will say he ought to have remained that one-sided, one-winged creature, an old bachelor, and had himself carefully labelled, "Sacred to a memory." But he had an honest heart, and gave it to an honest woman, who blessed him, and whom he blessed.

And while peace nestled in his heart and settled on his face, while in all lowliness and meekness he was adorning the Gospel of Christ, Robert Neale envied him his pure conscience, and walked the earth an unhappy, dishonoured man, feeling his great gifts little better than mockery. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. The life of the defeated was a success; the life of the successful a defeat.

"ON THE BANKS OF THE RIVER OF LIFE."

"ON THE BANKS OF THE RIVER OF LIFE."

An earnest teacher of a Bible class of young ladies brought them together, one evening, in her own house. She had for years watched over these souls, praying for and with them individually, and her labours had been crowned with a certain success. But she felt herself, and had taught them to feel, that the work of life does not consist in merely entering the kingdom of God, enjoying a comfortable hope of final salvation, and sitting down at ease, or letting things drift as they might. No, they know that in coming out on the Lord's side, they had taken only one step; that there was yet a race to run, and a prize to win. But they were young, and their aims were indefinite, and for this reason they now sat around their beloved friend and teacher, seeking her counsel, listening to the voice of her experience.

They had been associated together thus from early childhood, hence much of the reserve and shyness under which young people suffer had gradually dis-

appeared. And Miss Graham was so very much in earnest that they had caught an inspiration from her, and in various degrees were in earnest too.

"People say," remarked Agnes W., "that it is not necessary to be so very strict, and try to be so very good. Even the saints have to be saved through Christ, just like the worst sinners; and one is not more sure of getting to heaven at last than another. I never know how to answer them when they say such things."

Miss Graham smiled.

"Let us take up one thing at a time," she said. "In the first place, is getting to heaven the great work of life?"

"I always thought it was," said one.

"So did I," declared a second.

"We shall have to go back to our Catechism," continued Miss Graham. "We are taught there that 'man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.' To enjoy Him is subordinate to glorifying Him. Now, who best fulfils the object of his existence—he who loves God just enough to furnish him with a faint hope that he shall be finally saved, or he who loves Him so amply, so generously, that he is far more intent on finding out ways in which his devotion may give itself expression, than in asking the question, 'Have I been born again?—on how little love and faith can I be saved?'"

There was silence for some minutes, as the young people pondered the thought thus suggested.

"And now for another point," proceeded Miss Graham. "What proof has the worst sinner that he is in a state of grace, if he builds his hope of salvation on the fact that he once passed through certain exercises which he, at the time, believed—or rather hoped than believed—resulted in his conversion to God? The Bible says, 'By their fruits ye shall know them,' and the best fruit of regeneration is sanctification."

"Oh, I see it now," said Agnes, in a tone of relief and pleasure. "But I have another difficulty. After every conversation with you, and almost every Sunday when I have heard a particularly stirring sermon, I resolve that I will lead a better life. I seem, to myself, to be truly in earnest: but by Monday, or at farthest by Tuesday, I have fallen back again."

"By the time you are as old as I am, you will find that good resolutions are little less than fallacies. They pacify the conscience, and help it over the ground somewhat as crutches help a lame man."

"But the lame man gets over the ground, even though he has to hobble over it," objected Mary H.

"But suppose he has a friend powerful enough, and kind enough, to carry him wherever he wants to go, is he wise in rejecting his aid, and in saying,

'You may help me, but my crutches will help me too'?"

The girls were silent, not seeing the drift of the remark.

"I compare you, Agnes," continued Miss Graham, "to a lame man, who wants to get over a certain piece of ground, but does it spasmodically, and on crutches. But he falls back from his progress, and is continually starting afresh, or having new crutches made, and ignores the fact that if he would yield to the solicitations of his friend, he need never halt, or fall back, or need any other support."

"Do you mean that God is such a friend?" asked Agnes.

"Yes. And if, instead of resolving to go on valiantly yourself, you remember that you have always failed and come short of your own best purposes, and let Him sanctify you, instead of trying to sanctify yourself, you will have learned one of the great lessons of life. Our sanctification is His will, and it is He who worketh in us to do His good pleasure."

"Then I do not see that there is anything for us to do, but just sit and wait to see what God will do with us. Isn't that fatalism?"

"Suppose you had no reason to believe that your soul was safe, but was, at this moment, liable to be for ever lost, what would you do?"

"I would go the Cross, and if I perished, perish only there," was the vehement reply.

"And why not go to the Cross for sanctification, as you once did for salvation? When the children of Israel were told to look at the brazen serpent, they were not taught that there was any merit in their obedience; but still, they were saved by faith. Now, suppose the next time you have a new desire for a holier life, instead of saying, 'Well, I resolve to begin anew this day,' you say, 'Lord, I thank Thee for putting this desire into my heart; it did not originate with me: it is Thy gift. But give me yet more. I cannot make myself what I desire to be; then condescend to make me such.'"

For some moments no one uttered a word. When the Holy Spirit speaks, man keeps silence. And this Spirit was now brooding over every youthful heart, solemnising, and ready to sanctify it.

"There is another thing that puzzles me," said one who had not yet spoken. "It is the different creeds held by good people. Why isn't truth made so clear that everybody will see it alike? Now, I have an aunt who says she knows she is old-fashioned, but that she believes nobody is made holy except through tribulation. She has had a great deal of trouble herself, and says she thanks God for it, every day, because it explains life to her. But when she talks that way, I shrink back, and feel

that I never could bear such afflictions as she has had. Then my mother never says much about trials. She is one of the sunshiny sort, always comfortable and pleasant. I don't see but she is as good as my aunt, but she has never had things go wrong with her. She says the good things of life were given us for our enjoyment, and that we honour God by enjoying them."

"So we may and do, as long as He gives them. But they are to be enjoyed in moderation. As long as we are rich and increased in goods, we are tempted to rest in them, and to seek nothing higher. But God leads His children in varied ways. He sees that one *will* not come to Him till He has taken away everything in which he delights. He shows His love, then, by taking away or marring the idols that would otherwise ruin the soul, and in this He does well.

"He has another child whom His gifts draw nearer to Himself in love and gratitude; therefore He can afford to treat him with lavish indulgence."

"But these people who claim that they grow perfect in a minute; what do you think of them, Miss Graham?"

"I know of no persons who make such professions," was the reply.

Several voices eagerly assured her that they did.

"We will not judge them," said Miss Graham.

"If they have had an experience that we have not, we are not in a position to condemn it, for we know not of what we speak. But of one thing we may be sure: God just as seriously calls us to holiness as He does to regeneration. He does it in His Word, He does it by His providences, He does it by His Holy Spirit. And the result is that a great many of His children are longing to respond to His claims, and a great many others are preaching and praying and writing books and tracts and letters, instructing those who are seeking righteousness in what they consider the right way. But these human guides are all fallible. God's secret remains with Himself. But He will reveal it to all who ask in faith. My own opinion—I give it for what it is worth—is, that while we are led by the Spirit of God, it is by diversities of operation."

"But wouldn't it be delightful," said Agnes, "to be made holy at once, instead of living a whole lifetime of conflict and dismay? For my part, I feel as if I could not wait another day. I go to all the meetings where this doctrine is advocated, and keep hoping that it will be made clearer to me. It makes me perfectly miserable when I do anything wrong. Yes, perfectly *miserable.* And these people say there is no need of being miserable."

"Nor do I think so, either, my dear Agnes. Our misery is quite as often wounded, defeated self-love,

as genuine repentance; perhaps oftener. Repentance makes us leave off sinning, or when we fall into it, at once makes us forsake it and fly in humble confession to the cross."

"But some people claim to have made such attainments in grace that they never sin."

"I do not like that word *attainments*. It sounds as if a Christian could lay up a stock of grace to which he could resort in an emergency and supply himself at pleasure. But the truth is, we are all want and weakness; God is all grace and strength. We can, of ourselves, do nothing aright. 'As the eyes of a maiden look unto the hand of her mistress, so must our eyes be continually turned to Christ. And He is our peace. No one who possesses Him ought to be miserable!"

"Not if he is living in sin?"

"He who possesses Christ does not live in sin. His sinful nature remains, but the indwelling Christ controls it just in proportion to the hold He has there."

"But I often get angry," objected Agnes, "and I see good people guilty of such faults every day. Is there no remedy? Must it always go on so?"

"There is a remedy, and that is Christ. The more perfectly He dwells in the soul by faith, the more sin will be crowded out by His divine presence. Try it, my dear girls. Let Him come and take up

His abode in you, and then see how peaceful, how happy, you will be!"

"I *will* try it!" said Agnes fervently.

"And so will I! so will I!" added other voices.

"Miss Graham, are you sure this blessing is for everybody?" asked one, more timid than the rest. "I have desired it above everything else on earth; have desired to be wholly the Lord's, but I am not."

"Let me read to you what I believe to be the truth," said Miss Graham, taking a book from her table, "and you will perhaps find encouragement in these earnest words—

"'You may now understand when it is that you may regard yourself as standing upon the very banks of the river of life, when God is about to become the everlasting light of your soul. It is when, and only when, you have such a quenchless thirst for God, for holiness and the indwelling of the presence of Christ in your heart, that nothing else will satisfy you or divert your thoughts or desire from this one infinite good, and when your whole being is centred in the immutable purpose to attain it. Are you in this state? Then lift up your head; your redemption draweth nigh.'"

Miss Graham closed and laid aside the book, and for a time nothing was heard but the ticking of the clock and the far-off sounds of city life. The

ardent, impetuous Agnes was at length the first to speak.

"Miss Graham," she said, "do you believe anybody on earth feels that way?"

"I *know* that many do," was the reply.

"And how did they get there?"

"Some by one path, and some by another; but of each individual soul it may be said, 'Behold, he prayeth.' God gives us the spiritual gifts we ask for, and we certainly may ask Him to enlarge our desires and to intensify our longings after Himself. I will not say that He calls every soul to such an experience as that I have just read to you, but I do say that He calls each of you to it through me. He has committed the care of your souls in a great degree to me; I have prayed for you each, by name, day after day, year after year. I may not live to see these prayers answered, but I believe that each of you will become, sooner or later, wholly consecrated to God."

"I hope so, I hope so," said Agnes; "but yet I almost dread it. I see so many things God will have to take away first. And I do cling so to those I love!"

"He always gives a great deal more than He takes away. Try to trust Him, dear child."

"I do trust Him to a degree; but it is so much

easier to love friends whose words and looks and tones assure us of their affection, than an invisible Being about whose friendship one's imperfections make one doubt."

"Yet here is the voice of experience," said Miss Graham; "the testimony of one who has found in God the near and personal Friend she needs—

> "'So near, so very near to God,
> Nearer I cannot be,
> For in the person of His Son
> I am as near as He.
> So dear, so very dear to God,
> Dearer I cannot be;
> The love with which He loves His Son,
> Such is His love for me.'

"Surely to attain such a sense of nearness and dearness to God, it is worth while to give up every earthly idol."

"I hope He will help me do it!" was the aspiration of each heart, as the little group now broke up, and fathers and brothers came to escort their dear ones home.

And as long as they lived they never forgot that evening and the prophetic words of their beloved friend. For they were her last words to them on earth. A few days later a brief illness became the messenger to call her home to her reward; they caught her mantle as it fell, and now, scattered up

and down in our own and in foreign lands, as wives, as mothers, as missionaries, twelve devoted women are living saintly lives, and knowing, in their own blessed experience, what is that "peace of God, that passeth all understanding." Could life give more?

A MODEL SERVANT.

A MODEL SERVANT.

"WHEN I was a stripling," said an old man to a company of young people, "I was visiting a friend. After a few days I said to him, 'Everything in this house seems to go on like clock-work, and you are, apparently, free from care. How is it?'

"He replied, 'Have I never spoken to you of my faithful servant, Job?'

"'Never.'

"'Then I must do so now. I picked him up at a street corner. He was a miserable object, all rags and squalor. I pitied him, and asked him why he was lounging there, instead of going to work and making a man of himself? He replied that he could not get work, that he had no home, and that mine was the first kind word he had ever heard. This moved my compassion yet more. I said to him—

"'Have you ever been at service?'

"He hung his head and replied, 'Yes, I have served a hard master all my life. He promised me good wages and kind treatment. But he never gave me either; and at last I left him. But in my

ragged, filthy state no one will give me work, and I am perishing with hunger and cold.'

"My heart yearned over him, and I told him so. Then I said, 'Suppose I take you into my house, clothe and feed you, and give you good wages, will you serve me faithfully?'

"He said, 'I am a miserable, good-for-nothing fellow; I don't dare to make any promises. Will you try me?'

"So, with tears in his eyes, he followed me home. I took off his rags, clothed him afresh, and set him to work. He had been serving a bad master so long, that at first I had to watch him closely to see if evil habits did not still cling to him. And he was at that time awkward and inexperienced, and made frequent mistakes. But every morning he came to me to beg for minute directions about the day's work; every night he confessed any fault or failure of which he had been guilty, and entreated forgiveness. And when most busy about his tasks, if he caught my eye, he invariably gave me a look that said he loved the labour for the master's sake?"

"He was probably one of your active sort, who are never so happy as when hard at work."

"Not at all. He was naturally indolent."

"He was fond of money, then."

"Not at all. He refused to take any wages beyond what was needed for his support. And as

he became more and more valuable, he was sought by unscrupulous persons, who would fain have his services at any price. But he steadily refused them all."

"Excuse the query: do you not find it necessary to keep your peculiar hold upon him by flattery?"

"I am glad you asked that question. I reply,

emphatically, *No.* From the outset I have loved, but never spared him. I have enlarged on his mistakes, reproved his faults."

"Oh, you allow that he has faults, then?"

"Certainly. He is a human being. But for many years he has never *wilfully* done anything amiss. My word is law to him. No matter how

distasteful the service I require, he always renders it cheerfully. I have other good servants, as servants go; but they all like to have their own way, and when they can secure it undetected, they do. But my faithful Job's will is to do mine. And finding him thus faithful in the menial tasks to which I at first appointed him, I have gradually promoted him to be ruler over a large portion of my estates."

"Does not this excite the envy of his fellow-servants?"

"Of course it does. But that evil is incident to every earthly position of trust and honour, and it will not hurt him to be thus continually reminded that he is living in a world where the evil spirit ever dogs the footsteps of the good angel."

"Does his elevation never fill him with conceit?"

"I have seen, with regret, that at times this dangerous temper did beset him. Being assured so often by different members of my family that he is beloved and cherished and trusted to a marvellous degree, he gets a fleeting notion that on the whole he is a model man. At such moments, however, I have only to point out the exceeding unloveliness of this self-consciousness and self-applause, to bring him down into the dust. Once or twice I have reminded him of what he was in ignorance and worthlessness and rags before this house became his home. This quickly

brought penitent tears to his eyes; and now he often comes to me and begs me not to spare him if I see him unduly exalted, but to humble him by putting him into a lower position. Only yesterday he said to me, 'Smite me, it shall be a kindness!'"

"You think, then, that he is not working with such scrupulous fidelity to win the favour and approbation of lookers-on, but out of simple love and gratitude to you?"

"Undoubtedly. Since he entered my family, we have had a great deal of sickness. Now after his hard day's work—for I acknowledge that I keep him busy through every working hour—he might naturally say, 'I am not living here as nurse, and am entitled to my night's rest.' On the contrary, he will not sleep while another wakes. Without ostentation, and as if it were a matter of course, he watches by every sick-bed in pure self-forgetfulness. This is literally a service of love; no money can pay for it."

"That is true. How long has he been with you?"

"Many years. I really think he makes no distinction between his interests and my own. All he wants to make him happy is something to do for me or mine. And his love for my children is only secondary to his love for me. The younger ones have trespassed on this sentiment, and at times made a perfect slave of him."

"Do you feel justified in keeping such a treasure all to yourself? Is he not above his position? Ought he not to fill some high, public office?"

"He has had such offered him. He could have more ease and leisure, far more human applause, should he accept offices almost thrust upon him. At one time the temptation was very great. He laid the case before me, and asked me to decide for him. But I did not give free expression to my opinion. I wanted him to act as a free agent. I felt that he was worthy of all that was offered him, but that an elevated position would bring with it new and powerful temptations. At last he came to me and said that he would rather fill a little space near, than a large one remote from me, and must stay where he was."

"That must have touched you."

"It touched, but did not surprise me. It was like the man."

"What would be the effect upon him, should you, arbitrarily, as it would seem, reduce him to the menial position he occupied at first?"

"When I took him into my service, my design was not merely to secure my own comfort. I loved him, and wanted to make a true man of him. To this end I kept him under discipline. Sometimes I made of him a mere household drudge, as if that were all he was fit for. Then I would exalt him and

set him above his fellows. He would look surprised, perhaps, but never displeasd, when abased; and as I have said before, I never saw any elation that was not transient."

All this interested me, and I determined to watch this remarkable man, of whom it might be asked, "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, that escheweth evil?" The first thing I observed was a constant study of his master's face, as if he would read there the wish not yet expressed. This seemed to have become such a habit as to be like a second nature. And this was no youthful infatuation, for he was now past his prime, almost an old man. Every look, every act, said plainly, "I belong, not to myself, but to my master; my time, my strength are his." Then when an order was given, he obeyed promptly, yet without servility. There was nobility in his very subservience, for he rendered service freely and with a cheerful whole-heartedness that was pleasant to behold.

Again, I noticed his reverent demeanour to the visitors of the house. When I entered the room set apart for his use, where he retired to attend to the business devolving on him when other household tasks were finished, he rose from his desk and stood respectfully before me as he did before his master.

I said to him, "Keep your seat, Job, I have only come to ask a question or two."

He replied gently, but decidedly, "I stand before my master's guest."

"But you are a good deal older than I, and besides I am interrupting you."

"My master's guest has a right to interrupt me," he returned. But as I turned to go, he eagerly pursued his work with the old air of "I am not my own."

A little later some one spoke slightingly of his master. It touched him to the quick, and he reproved the speaker with dignity and propriety, but with a good deal of spirit. Yet when himself reproved, he bore the rebuke in silence, making no attempt to defend himself.

"How is this, Job?" I asked; "can you bear to be reviled yourself, while you cannot bear to hear a slighting word about your master?"

He looked at me in surprise.

"Perhaps you do not know how good he is," he said; and after a pause, "how bad I was when he took me in."

I was struck, too, with his fidelity in little things, though entrusted with the charge of great ones. Everything was done thoroughly and done at the right time. There was no procrastination, no idling, no putting his own duty on another man's shoulders.

And when performing a homely task he sang cheerily at his work, just as he did when nobler ones were assigned him.

I heard it said to him, "Job, you are laying up nothing against your old age. How is that?"

"You don't know my master! If you did, you would not ask such a question," he cried.

"He certainly makes you work very hard for very poor wages."

"He does not make me work. I work of my own free will. And I have wages that you know not of."

"But you are fitted for a position of high trust and usefulness. Why does he not give you one?"

"He gives me just what is best for me, and I like it because he gives it. I had rather work hard for him and with him in a garret, than have all the world can give in a palace without him."

"You are a foolish enthusiast. What has your master done that you should forsake all else and cleave only to him?"

"Don't you know? Then let me tell you. I was bound to a bad master, and the first thing I can remember was trying to do all he bid me do, and always getting into mischief and trouble by it. He was a hard master, and do what I could, there was

no pleasing him. He fed me on husks and clothed me with rags. He made me swear and lie and steal. He was always making promises and always breaking them. I got so that I was little better than a beast, ignorant, foolish, filthy, so that no decent person would take me into his house. And one day I was standing in the street, wretched and lonely, everybody treating me as if I had the leprosy, and a man came along and gave me a look of love and pity! Yes, you may well wonder. I never expect to stop wondering if I live for ever. And he took me home with him just as I was, washed me, clothed me, fed me, and gave me what little work my awkward hands could do. I was lazy and did as little as I possibly could, and that only when I knew he was watching me. I wasted his time and wasted his food, and when he put work on me I did not like, I complained. And when he invited guests to the house whom I had to wait on, I was secretly ungracious to them, not realising that caring for them was caring for him. But I loved him, and, stranger still, he loved me, and was never impatient with me, but bore with all my faults, encouraging me to think I should some time get rid of them. The more I saw of him, the more I saw how good he was, and the faint little love I had at first began to grow into a great fire, that ate up my old, hateful ways. Once I got sick by giving way to my

greedy appetite, and he took care of me just as if I had been one of his own children. Another time I was in great trouble; we poor folks have got hearts just like yours, and they can ache just as hard. I was a young fellow then, and I loved a girl, and she died. Some of my fellow-servants laughed at me for making such an ado. But my master came all the way up four flights of stairs and said, 'Job, my poor fellow, this is very hard for you. I am sorry for you. Cry away, it will do you good. And you know I shall always be a true and faithful friend to you.' I thought I knew him before that, but I didn't. My mind was so distracted with my trouble that I neglected my work, and blundered over it, but he never reproached me once, but kept right on pitying me and giving me kind, tender looks that melted me all down. Since then it has been easy to work for him; all I wish is that I had ten hands and ten feet, and could do ten times as much for him as I do now."

"Still, you are nothing but a servant, and in all these years you have been preparing for something higher."

"I reckon I shall get higher when the time comes, but it hasn't come yet, for my master has never said, 'Job, go up higher.' He's always said, 'Go, if you think best, but it's safer to obey than to govern,' and 'he that is low need fear no fall.'"

While we listened and marvelled, this beloved servant was suddenly stricken down. His faithful feet would no longer bear him to the post of duty; his busy hands were paralysed and helpless. At first his uselessness tried him sorely. His intense love for his master had not nearly spent itself; he longed for work, more work, and lay and thought of a thousand things he fancied he might have done. He groaned aloud and bemoaned himself on his bed.

At last his master said to him, "Job, you have often been called to come up higher, and now you have come. Suffering is a nobler vocation than work, when one is ordained to it. I utter no complaint that you can no longer serve me; if you lie here in silent patience, not complaining that you cannot do the work I do not require, you are still doing my good pleasure. I did not take you into my house in order to get all I could out of you; I gave you work to do that would check your slothfulness, develop your fidelity, and be the channel in which your love could safely flow. Suffering is your servitude now; it is your master, and you owe to it the humble obedience you have hitherto rendered me. I want nothing better than to see you as faithful to its claims as you have been to mine."

"I will be faithful," murmured the trembling lips.

"And, master, if I can't work for you, I can love you, and so I will!"

All this happened, as I have said, in the days of my youth, and ever since I have been seriously pondering the question, Am I such a servant to *my* Master?

PLAYING WITH SUNBEAMS

PLAYING WITH SUNBEAMS.

THERE is a story told of a little child sitting on its nursery floor, playing with a sunbeam that lay athwart the carpet. Now he would try to catch it in his fingers, and laugh merrily at each failure; now he would bathe his little hands in its warmth and brightness, and then clasp them for joy.

Now we meet, sometimes, though not often, with charming grown-up children, who can be happy in the enjoyment of the intangible, when the tangible is wanting. They are the opposites of those characters of whom it has been said, that it takes more than everything to make them happy, less than nothing to make them miserable.

Mary Arnold had grown up in an unusually happy home; she never remembered hearing an unkindly word there.

From this home she passed, when quite young, into one of her own, which promised her all the luxuries to which she had been accustomed. But her husband met with heavy losses just as he had won his bride, and she was obliged to live in a

humble style hitherto unknown to her. He thought he knew what a sweet spirit she possessed, when the day of prosperity shone for her without a cloud. But he was astonished and cheered when adversity revealed her true character.

"It is going to be very hard for you, my poor child," he said to her, "to descend with me into all sorts of petty economies, to which you have never been used. This is the trying part of these financial difficulties; I do not care so much for myself."

"We shall see," she returned, with a smile.

"It is easy to smile in advance," he said, in reply to the smile. "But you do not know what it is going to be to you."

It is true, she did not know. She had now to do with her own hands what she had had other hands to do for her; must make a very little money go a great way; must do without luxuries; in short, must have that grim and unpleasing master, Economy, sit with her at her table, reign in her kitchen, preside over her wardrobe, and become general Master of Ceremonies. But her friends found her unchanged by circumstances. When they condoled with her, she would reply—

"But think what a kind husband I have!"

And she played with this sunbeam, and made herself glad with it, and was so genuinely happy, that it was a refreshment to meet her.

"But it will not last," said the ravens. "By and by, when she has children, and must clothe and feed and educate them, we shall have a new tune."

Well, the children came, and she had not a moment of leisure. She had to be nurse and seamstress, never got "her afternoon out," never had her work all done and out of the way; she was

industrious, and arranged her time wisely; but she could not work miracles. She felt, a great deal of the time, like a straw borne hither and thither by the wind; she could not choose what she would do at such a time, but was forced to tasks, with no room for her own volition.

"Now, then," quoth the ravens, "we shall hear

you complain. You have to work like a day-labourer, and see what miserable wages you get!"

"Miserable wages!" she cried, "why, I don't know anybody so rich as I am. With such a husband, and such children, and such friends, I am as happy as the day is long!"

"You have a great deal of leisure for your friends, to be sure."

"Well, I *should* like to see more of them, it is true. And, by and by, when the children are older, I shall."

"By that time you will be so old yourself, that your heart will have grown cold."

"Oh no; it is too busy to grow cold."

So she made sunbeams out of her daily, home-spun tasks, and went on her way, rejoicing.

The ravens were puzzled.

"It must be her perfect health," they whispered to each other.

Time passed; the children grew up, and just as the long-needed prosperity began to flow into the house, the young people began to pass out of it into homes of their own, till father and mother sat at their table alone.

"Now you have spent nearly a lifetime in toiling for your children, and what is the good of it all? As soon as they get old enough to be a comfort to you, they every one of them go off and leave you."

So said the ravens.

"Just what I did at their age!" she replied cheerily. "Why shouldn't they get married, as well as I? And instead of losing, I have gained children. Whereas I had only six, I have now twelve. And I have plenty of time now to see my friends, to read, to take journeys, and to enjoy my husband."

But now long, long days of ill-health came and laid leaden hands upon her. She had twelve children, but they were scattered far and wide, and could only come occasionally, to make her brief visits.

"Very hard!" said the ravens.

"Oh no! It is such a delight to me that they all got away before this illness overtook me. It would have cast such a gloom upon them to be at home and miss 'mother' from the table."

"But the time is so long! What a sad pity that you are not allowed to use your eyes!"

"Oh, do you think so? I was just thanking God that in my days of youth and health, I learned so many passages in the Bible, and so many hymns. I lie here repeating them over, and they are like honey to my taste."

"At all events, it would be a good thing if you could see your friends more."

"I do see them, in imagination. I call in now this one, now that; and make him or her repeat the

pleasant, affectionate words they used to speak. I am never lonely. And I have other delightful things to think of; books I have read, sermons I have heard, little kindnesses shown me by some who are in heaven now. Sometimes I wonder why, when others are so afflicted, I am passed by."

"Have you forgotten that you have wept over little graves?"

"No; I have not forgotten. I lie and think of all the winsome ways my little ones had, and how tenderly the Good Shepherd took them away in His arms. They might have lived to suffer, or what is far, far worse, to sin. I can't help rejoicing that three of my children are safe and happy. So many parents have ungrateful, wild sons, and foolish, worldly daughters."

"Is it no trial to lie here, bound as it were, hand and foot, and often racked with pain?"

"It would be a great trial if I had not such a devoted husband, and if he were not able to get for me everything that can alleviate my condition. But you see I have not a wish ungratified. Think what a delightful room this is! In the summer-time, when the windows are open, I can hear the birds sing, and the voices of little children at their play. In the winter the sun shines in; that cheers me."

"The sun doesn't shine every day."

"No; and that is a mercy, because it is so wel-

come after absence. On cloudy days I think over the sunny ones, and remind myself that clouds never last for ever. It is said that 'the saddest birds find time to sing,' and it's true. Nobody is sad all the time, or suffering all the time."

"You are in the prime of life; others of your age are at work in the Master's vineyard. Doesn't it pain you that you are doing nothing for Him?"

"It did, at one time. I said, all I'm good for is to make trouble for other people, and use up my husband's money. But it was made plain to me that 'they also serve who only stand and wait.' It might be nothing but a cold, flat stone in a side-walk, made to be trodden on, and fit for nothing else. But if the Master's hand put me there, I ought not to complain that He did not let me form a part of a palace instead. We can't all be servants; some of us have got to be served; and I am one of them."

"Do you expect to get well?"

"My physicians do not tell me what to expect. I know that I may live many years; but I also know that I may be called away at any moment."

"How dreadful! Such a life of suspense!"

"I am quite used to it now. At first, I did not know how to act when I found I might die at any moment. But afterwards I reflected that this is true of every human being. I do not expect to do any-

thing it would not be fitting to do, just when the summons came. And it is very sweet to think that I may get my invitation and go, without the grief and commotion my death would have occasioned when my children were all young and needed me."

"But your husband—could you bear to go and leave him alone?"

"My husband is older than I, and I hope he may go first. God has always been so good to us, that I think He will."

"But you could not do without him. You would be left entirely alone."

"Yes. But whenever my heart ached, I could remind myself that it was *my* heart, not his, and rejoice that he was spared this suffering. You see, everything has its good side."

By this time the ravens were exhausted, and flew away.

And now let us see whether this faithful sufferer was doing no work in the great vineyard.

Here are six homes where she is quoted every day, almost every hour. Her children have all learned her song as she used to sing it to them in their nest, and they are teaching it to theirs. Cheerful endurance lights up and beautifies every life. And the influences going forth from these lives are beyond computation. And here are friends who love her only less than her husband and children do; who

have watched her all her life long, and have borne the burden and heat of the day, in humble imitation of the patience with which she bore hers. They have never heard a murmuring word fall from her lips. They have always heard her wonder what made God so good to her; wonder that, full of discipline as her life was, she had so few troubles. And they have gone away rebuked, with lessons impressed on their memories that should bear fruit she might never see, but should be refreshing in every weary day. And those who were with her when death stole away three cherubs from her heart, knew that it was not stoicism that made her refuse to complain, but thank God that she had had them for a season, enjoyed them while they were hers, and could feel that they were safer, happier with Him than they were with her. Yes, when she wept over the little graves, she caught sunbeams even then, and said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!"

The truth is, our own hands have more to do with shaping our lives than we fancy. We cannot control Providences, nor ought we to wish to do so. But we can be willing to see the silver lining to the cloud, to "nurse the caged sorrow till the captive sings," to count up our mercies through those dark days when the rain falls and is never weary, knowing that it never rains always.

And now let us go back to the sick-room, which, to its patient occupant, has so long been a prison.

She has grown old, and her strength has greatly declined. She cannot talk much now, and no longer hears earthly voices. But she knows what our eyes say to her when our tongues are silent.

"Yes, I knew you would come to me as soon as you heard of it; so kind of you. Everybody is kind. I wish I had strength to tell you all about it. We had lived together fifty years. He died on our golden wedding-day. He had been unusually well, and we had laughed together over our young married life. The children were all here with their children; the house was like a beehive, every bee humming. He said it renewed his youth to see them; I'm sure it did mine. Well, they all assembled here in this room, and the children gave us their presents. Their father told them all about our wedding-day so long ago, and every time he stopped talking, to rest a little, I said, 'Every milestone on our journey marks a mercy; there's a new one. And it will be so to the end.' Father smiled; for you know I couldn't hear a word he said, but I always did say I had mercies when other people had miseries. At last he had said all he had to say, and Robert—you know my Robert is a minister?—Robert knelt down, with his brothers and sisters and the children about him, to pray. Father

knelt just here by my side, with my hand in his. It was a solemn time. I was with them in spirit, though I could not hear. But when they rose from their knees, father kept on his. We waited a little while, and then Robert and Edgar went and lifted him up. Well, I thought it would be thus! God was always so good to us; he'd slipped away so gently that nobody heard him go.

"Don't grieve for me. The parting will not be for long. My old feet will soon go tottering after. God is keeping me here a little longer to give me time to tell my friends all about this crowning mercy, and then I shall go. It has been a great shaking; but I think I could hardly have borne to go and leave him alone."

As she falters forth these words, slowly and at intervals, her children and a few dear friends standing about her watching the smile that mingles with her tears; a sunbeam darted suddenly into the room and lay, a line of golden light, across the bed. She laid her cold hands in it, in the tender way in which she would clasp that of a friend, and said—

"I've had nothing but mercies all the days of my life."

And so she passed painlessly away, "playing with sunbeams" to the last.

SAVED FROM HIS FRIENDS.

SAVED FROM HIS FRIENDS.

In travelling the streets of a great city like our own, how often our silent thoughts busy themselves with the throngs we meet, or rather, with the individuals who make the multitude. "Have all these human beings *homes?*" we ask. "Is it possible that this repulsive-looking object is a man, has friends, is beloved? And this vapid, simpering woman—is she, perchance, a wife, a mother? has she a husband who cherishes her, children who obey and honour her?" Judged by the common eye, we should say of most of the human beings we meet, "How uninteresting they are!" Yet there are few who are not interesting to somebody. God has "set the solitary in families," and in these contracted circles, at least, there is shelter from the harsh opinions of the world without. Does it turn to a man its cold shoulder? "Well," he retorts, "my mother, my sister, my wife, think well of me, nay, love me, and I can do without the rest." This is the bright side of the question, a merciful side, if it is not abused. But it has its dangers. Take

any of us who are luxuriating in the sweet atmosphere of a happy home, where our faults are dealt with gently, and our virtues magnified by partial affection, and we are liable to a subtle self-complacency which is abhorrent to God, as it would be to man could he see it. It sounds nicely to say of ourselves that we don't know what we have done to deserve the friendship of those we love, and we fancy ourselves sincere in saying it. But the moment one of these very friends begins to neglect us, or to accuse us, we are deeply wounded, and, instead of asking ourselves whether there may not be some reason for the change, some just ground for the accusation, we cry, "You misunderstand me!" In other words, we declare, "You insinuate that I am avaricious, but I am really very generous. You say that I am not conscientious, whereas I am conscientiousness personified!" And so on to the end of the chapter.

At first blush it would seem that "mutual admiration societies" were so little the rule, so much the exception, that neither sermon nor essay warning against conceit born of and nursed at home could be worthy the utterance. But do we not all know such homes? If they are weak, they are amiable in their weakness; why not let them alone, then, and spend one's strength in fighting against greater domestic evils? Simply because there is a time for

all things, and that on a certain time, not a hundred years ago, there entered into a house already full of daughters, a long-coveted son. In the little circle that now clustered about him he seemed nothing less than the ninth wonder of the world. Not only did his parents regard him with the peculiar pride and pleasure that come of hope long deferred, but every one of his sisters, each after her kind, fell down before and worshipped him. All his juvenile words and deeds were chronicled, and as infancy lapsed into boyhood, and boyhood into manhood, he became the household star, around which the whole family revolved. Up to a certain point it is a good thing for a child, it is good for a man, to be loved and caressed; but there are limits to everything. Donald Donaldson was not, naturally, more conceited than the rest of the race; but hearing himself constantly eulogised, finding himself the object of constant rivalry, each wanting his attentions and his affections, he began, by slow degrees, to imagine himself the very rare specimen of humanity he was believed to be. In fact, he was not absolutely common. He had some brilliant talents, could think well, talk well, and write well; he was industrious, and made a good use of his opportunities; and there seemed no reason why he should not make his mark in this world. His sisters took surreptitious copies of his poems, which they read,

in secret triumph, to all their bosom friends, who, being friends, thought them very wonderful productions, and begged for the privilege of taking copies likewise. Then each of these admirers wanted his photograph, and with an air of meek reluctance he presented them right and left, unconscious of the satisfied pride with which he did so. Miss Araminta Fielding wanted him taken for her in the attitude she thought so becoming, namely, seated at his writing-table, absorbed in literary labour, while a background of admiring sisters, engaged in such occupations as became the inferior female sex, enlivened the scene. Miss Arabella Montclair preferred him reclining on the sofa, with a slight headache, and hovered over by half a dozen tender females, each armed with a bottle of cologne. In fact, she wouldn't have minded being one of the females herself.

As to the remaining list of gentle friends, the reader can picture their wishes in his own imagination. Of course, it was an understood thing in the family that their hero would take what position in life he pleased. When, therefore, his first attempt to climb the ladder failed, when publisher after publisher declined to accept his first volume of poems, the whole platoon of sisters fell back in as much amazement as dismay. They soon, however, recovered from the shock, and rallied round him with

sympathising hearts, a holy hatred of publishers, and wide-open purses. Those beautiful poems should not be lost to the world because Randolph said they lacked originality, and Scribner said they wouldn't sell, and Hurd & Houghton shook both their heads. At their own expense, they had them printed on tinted paper, and, of course, each of the admiring friends bought a copy and induced some of their friends to do the same. But somehow the public agreed with the publishers, and the elaborately got-up volume fell dead.

Donald lost some faith in himself in consequence, and was in a fair way to make his escape from the dangerous position into which mistaken friendship had drawn him. But though not in all points a weak character, he had one very weak point, and that was credulity. He believed what his friends said, and they said that he was the genius of the family, and that genius was only recognised after its possessor had departed hence. They posted him up in all the histories of tardy justice, and assured him that years hence his name would be remembered and honoured.

Of course, his matrimonial future formed an equally interesting subject of discussion with his literary career. It was assumed that if there was any absolutely faultless young lady on earth she belonged to him.

"She must be perfectly amiable, of course," said No. One.

"And bright and original and witty," quoth No. Two. "Donald could never bear a stupid wife."

"And a good housekeeper," remarked No. Three.

"Of course," responded No. Four. "And she must be of a yielding disposition. Dear Donald likes so to have his own way."

"Yes, and *very* affectionate. I never could endure to see him tied to a cold nature," declared No. Five.

"Oh, of course, she must be all heart and soul!" cried No. Six ecstatically.

"But prudent, and circumspect, and able to hold her tongue," suggested No. Seven.

"Certainly," No. Eight assented; "and very fond of society, because Donald is so much of a bookworm. He would have to go out with her if she wanted to go, you know."

"Do you think so?" demurred No. Nine. "I think she ought to be domestic and stay at home with him."

"I don't like women who always stay at home," objected No. Two. "They stagnate, and grow fat and stupid."

"Nobody could stagnate with Donald," said No. One.

"And we had agreed to have her all heart and

soul," said No. Six, "and that being the case, how could she stagnate, how could she grow fat?"

Between them all Donald became bewildered. Instead of falling in love in a good, old-fashioned way, he went about among young women as middle-aged females go among sewing-machines. Should it be a Wheeler & Wilson, or a Grover & Baker, or a Finkle & Lyon? And when at last—every one of his sisters dissatisfied with his choice—he selected what seemed to him to be the most desirable article in the market, what was his mortification and wrath to find himself flatly refused. Once more the sisterhood fell back in confusion, but once more they rallied.

"We always said she wasn't half good enough for you!" they cried in chorus. "She would never have let you say your soul was your own!"

"We know fifty girls superior to her! And to think of her refusing you when so many would snatch at the chance!"

And they gathered round him closer than ever, wrote him three-cornered notes, which he found under his pillow, and among his razors and brushes, and in all sorts of unexpected, unheard-of places. One inserted little tracts of a consolatory nature among the leaves of his Bible; another illuminated texts and suspended them from the walls of his room; yet a third descended to the kitchen and

compounded for his broken heart all sorts of good things, which reached it *via* his stomach. As to his mother, she was a good, simple soul, to whom her children never told their secrets, for the same reason that one does not try to make an ocean out of a tea-cup. She went on her way calmly, satisfied that there never was such a family as hers. Probably there never was, but that proves nothing.

Time heals all things, and it healed Donald's wounded affections to such a degree that he resumed his search for a perfect sewing-machine, aided in all feminine ways by his sisters, who warned, who counselled, who got up excursions and parties, went with him to the sea-side and into the mountains, and were, in turn, guide-posts, beacons, and watch-fires. He wrote a good many verses about the forlorn state of his heart, and fancied himself a much-injured man, while he was faithfully performing the three great conditions of healthful life—eating and drinking and sleeping well. But his opinion of his own worth and consequence grew apace; how could it be otherwise, when everything he said was applauded, everything he did admired? He fell into a silly habit of counting up his friends and admirers, and when it occurred to him, as it sometimes did, that persons so remarkable as himself were apt to die young, and that this might be his fate, he felt great compassion for those who should be left to

mourn his loss. He pictured to himself his dying farewell, his imposing funeral, the tears of the multitude who should escort his precious remains to the grave, till he was quite affected and wept over himself as chief mourner. But he had sense enough to keep all these thoughts to himself, and, as he was amiable, agreeable, and pleasing as son, brother, and friend, no one found any flaw in him, especially the gross one of growing self-complacency.

He was approaching his twenty-fifth year, when the death of his father's elder brother brought into the family a number of heirlooms, the most prized of which were the portrait of "grandma Donaldson," and a quantity of manuscript written by that worthy dame. She had been dead several years, and her memory was cherished by her surviving relatives with veneration and pride. She had the tongue of a ready speaker and the pen of a ready writer; people would sit by the hour to hear her talk, and her children thought her a perfect wonder of talent and of learning. Nevertheless, her papers had never been carefully read; they were written in a very minute, almost illegible hand; what was everybody's business was nobody's, and so a barrel stored away in the attic held the result of an industrious, energetic pen. People said, when she died, that her life ought to be written and her writings

preserved. Her sons, of whom she had two, thought so also. But they were both men of business, were not cultivated, had inherited none of her talents, and so, by degrees, she ceased to live, save in their memories. But now, in arranging affairs, her grandson, Donald, had stumbled on her long-neglected papers; a bright sentence had arrested his attention, and he had brought home with him these hidden treasures. Of course everybody wondered why nobody had attended to this business before, and said it was just like Donald to think of it. He thought so too, and, finding himself in such favour, he coolly appropriated the portrait and had it at once suspended in his own room. It was valuable as a picture as well as a portrait; it represented a woman in the bloom of life, with a boy on either side, her face full of soul, of energy, of determination, of sound sense, yet with no want of feminine warmth and gentleness, and was withal the work of a skilful hand.

"How extraordinary a resemblance there is between Donald and grandma!" exclaimed the sisters, as soon as they saw this portrait.

"Yes, I am a chip of that block," he said to himself; "I look like her, and I am like her; all I wish is that she had lived long enough—to see me," he was going to add, but checked himself in what

he fancied a spirit of deep humility, and substituted, "to let me see her."

The papers were now transported to his room, and he proposed to spend his winter evenings in reading, assorting, transcribing, and destroying them, as the case might be.

The task proved an agreeable one, yet not of an unmixed sort. He was proud that this gifted woman was his relative, but not entirely pleased to find how much her intellectual tone was his, how similar were his mind and her own. She had not had one-tenth part of his opportunities; she had not had the advantage of foreign travel as he had done; she had had domestic cares that would have consumed the time and the energies of most women, and yet here was all this work done, and done so well.

He sat up later than usual one evening, absorbed in reading, but the yellow and faded papers fell suddenly from his hand at the sound of a voice just above his head, in the direction of the portrait. He looked up, and lo! the lips were moving, the eyes flashing—"grandma Donaldson" was speaking! He could hardly believe his senses; but he had to believe them, for this is what he heard—

"Yes, young man, it is just as you see. I was but a girl, younger than you are now, when I wrote much of what you are reading. I had fires to make,

and rooms to sweep, and food to cook; I had to bear children and guide the house; but still I read and still I wrote. Two or three fond friends would fain have me believe myself a literary marvel, to neglect my proper business, and get into print. But besides my uncommon sense, I had something far more rare, sound *common* sense. I said to myself, 'Don't believe a word they say. You are not Shakespeare, or John Bunyan, or anybody else, but just a girl who's got the gift of the gab and likes to scribble. The instant minute you're dead, they'll hustle all you ever wrote into some old flour-barrel, and off it will go, up into the attic, and the mice will make nests of the paper, and there'll be the end of it.' And I wasn't one of the kind that needed to be spoke to twice that way. My pride came right down on the spot, and never got up again. I didn't have a father and mother that thought there never was anybody like me on earth, nor nine sisters to puff me up by bowing down to me. My mother used to say, when I got in a conceited fit, 'It's all very well, child; no doubt you write things that sound smart to us; but we ain't the world, and most likely there's thousands of people in it you can't hold a candle to. But there ain't twenty that can make as good a wife and mother as you can, if you've a mind to try.' And then she'd put her arms around me and kiss me, to take off the edge

of what she said, as I would do to you, if you would come near enough."

"Do you mean," cried Donald, with a sinking heart, "that I am to apply your remarks personally to myself? That my friends overrate me, and that I consequently overrate myself?"

"That is exactly what I mean. You see, my boy, that the Donaldson intellect, such as it was, skipped over your father, and descended to you; but after all, it was no great gift. You must allow that at your age I wrote as well as you do, but who cares for what I wrote? Who reads it? I am dead and buried and forgotten, as you will be, sooner or later. Perhaps some curious descendant will pore over your papers as you pore over mine, but it will all end in smoke, literally in smoke; for you will burn these papers, and yours shall be burnt likewise."

"You would have me bury my talent, then, because I have but one?"

"Not at all; I would have you do the very best you can with it, as with the good fortune that makes you so beloved by your family. Only do it in a sensible, manly way. And judge yourself not by the standard of a few partial friends, but by facts in your past history. They would fain have you think yourself undervalued by the public; but if this were the case, you would, by this time, have

been engaged on some work more worthy than that of writing love-verses. And then, as to your domestic virtues, what test have they ever had? Who has thwarted your will? Who has met you coldly on your return home? Who has refused to nurse you when your head ached? Who has ever spoken a harsh or aggravating word to you? Young man, you do not know yourself, and I have had to rise from the dead to tell you so."

The head of Donald Donaldson sunk lower and lower during the delivery of this speech. Its pungent truth sank into his inmost soul. A hundred circumstances, hitherto unnoticed, corroborated all he had now heard, and he felt himself descending from the pinnacle on which he had been placed to his true level.

A new, a tender voice now proceeded from the portrait.

"My dear boy, it would pain me to wound you thus, but that I feel that faithful wounding is the greatest favour that can be shown you. Do not be discouraged at the new view of yourself you have attained. You have talent, you are well educated, you have many good and agreeable qualities. But when you enter the eternal world, the question will not be asked, 'Didst thou shine upon earth? Did men honour; did friends love thee?' but 'Was the image of the Lord Jesus found in thee? Didst thou

live to honour Him, to love Him, to work for Him?' Alas, many who were first shall be last, and last shall be first!"

As the voice died away in the sweet, serious cadence, another fell upon his ear.

"I really believe, Donald, you have set up reading all night; here you are, asleep in your chair, the

gas burning, the fire out, and your face like that of one who had seen a vision."

Thus spake one of the sisters who had done so much to spoil him. He started up, rubbed his eyes and cried—

"Was I really asleep? Then it was all a dream!"

"What was all a dream?"

"That grandma Donaldson read me a lecture, and then a short sermon! I declare it sounded just like

her! That was just the way she talked, as it is just the way she wrote. No wonder it all seemed so real. Well, you'll find me henceforth a wiser, if not a sadder man."

This was all he chose to tell, but from that day he was indeed a wiser man, for he ceased to be wise in his own conceit. He performed the work in life that came to him humbly and faithfully and as to the Lord, and is doing it still.

And he has married a wife whom he dearly loves.

She is not "perfectly amiable," nor "bright, original, and witty," or remarkable as a "good housekeeper," or very "yielding," or "all heart and soul," while, at the same time, "prudent and circumspect, and able to hold her tongue," nor "very fond of society," and "domestic," nor has "stagnated, or grown fat and stupid."

She is simply a nice, good sort of girl, who does not take fire easily, but can be roused if you treat her ill; who knows it if her husband says witty things, and can laugh heartily at them; who keeps house very comfortably; yields sometimes, and sometimes won't; has got a heart and a soul, but then not a little humanity besides; is prudent and imprudent by fits and starts; likes to go out of an evening, and is very happy at home. Donald's mother likes her, and they agree together perfectly. With all the sisters she has occasional "tiffs," which do not amount

to much, but show that they are none of them angels —just as a blot on one's paper proves that the most immaculate sheet is not above getting soiled. She loves Donald far better than his sisters do, but not blindly, as they wish she did. She sees all his little weaknesses, and now and then gets out of patience with him. And she will not let him litter her rooms with his papers, as he was brought up to litter all his mother's. But they get on beautifully together, in the main; he wouldn't change her for any "Wheeler & Wilson" on earth, and she wouldn't give him up to marry a king. And, best of all, if she does not help him in his work, she never hinders him by any selfish claims on his time and attention. And, as for him, his record will be on high, and read thus—

"Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

THE END.

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