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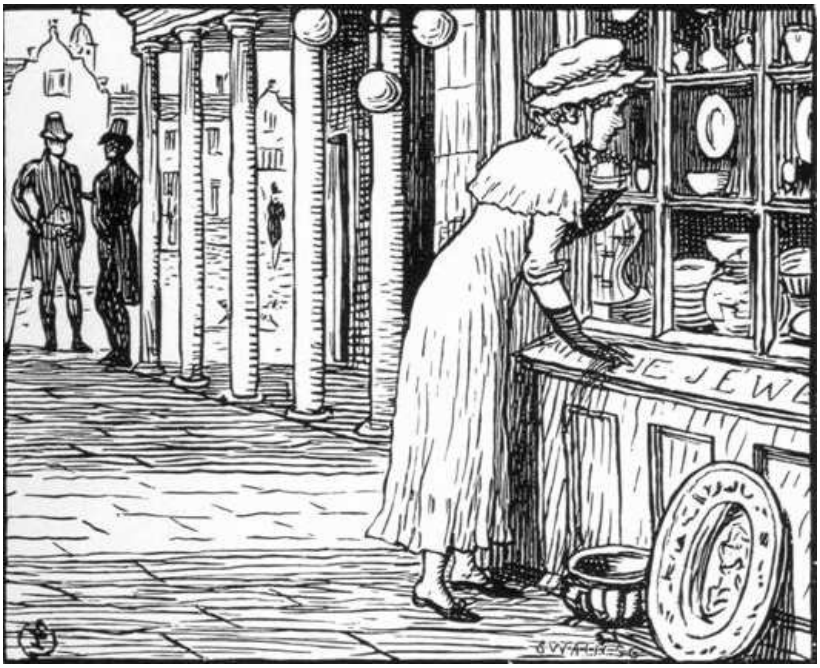
GRANDMOTHER DEAR

A Book for Boys and Girls

BY MRS. MOLESWORTH

AUTHOR OF 'CARROTS,' 'CUCKOO CLOCK,' 'TELL ME A STORY'

ILLUSTRATED BY WALTER CRANE



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'I HOPE IT ISN'T HAUNTED.'

TO
***OUR* 'GRANDMOTHER DEAR,'**
A. J. S.

Maison Du Chanoine,
***October* 1878.**

CONTENTS.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

CHAPTER I.

MAKING FRIENDS.

"Good onset bodes good end."

SPENSER.

"Well?" said Ralph.

"Well?" said Sylvia.

"Well?" said Molly.

Then they all three stood and looked at each other. Each had his or her own opinion on the subject which was uppermost in their minds, but each was equally reluctant to express it, till that of the others had been got at. So each of the three said "Well?" to the other two, and stood waiting, as if they were playing the old game of "Who speaks first?" It got tiresome, however, after a bit, and Molly, whose patience was the most quickly exhausted, at last threw caution and dignity to the winds.

"Well," she began, but the "well" this time had quite a different tone from the last; "*well*," she repeated emphatically, "I'm the youngest, and I suppose you'll say I shouldn't give my opinion first, but I just will, for all that. And my opinion is, that she's just as nice as she can be."

"And I think so too," said Sylvia, "Don't you, Ralph?"

"I?" said Ralph loftily, "you forget. *I* have seen her before."

"Yes, but not to *remember*," said Sylvia and Molly at once. "You might just as well never have seen her before as far as that goes. But isn't she nice?"

"Ye-es," said Ralph. "I don't think she's bad for a grandmother."

"'For a grandmother!'" cried Molly indignantly. "What do you mean, Ralph? What can be nicer than a nice grandmother?"

"But suppose she wasn't nice? she needn't be, you know. There are grandmothers and grandmothers," persisted Ralph.

"Of course I know *that*," said Molly. "You don't suppose I thought our grandmother was everybody's grandmother, you silly boy. What I say is she's just like a real grandmother—not like Nora Leslie's, who is always scolding Nora's mother for spoiling her children, and wears such grand, quite *young lady* dresses, and has *black* hair," with an accent of profound disgust, "not nice, beautiful, soft, silver hair, like *our* grandmother's. Now, isn't it true, Sylvia, isn't our grandmother just like a *real* one?"

Sylvia smiled. "Yes, exactly," she replied. "She would almost do for a fairy godmother, if only she had a stick with a gold knob."

"Only perhaps she'd beat us with it," said Ralph.

"Oh no, not *beat* us," cried Molly, dancing about. "It would be worse than that. If we were naughty she'd point it at us, and then we'd all three turn into toads, or frogs, or white mice. Oh, just fancy! I am so glad she hasn't got a gold-headed stick."

"Children," said a voice at the door, which made them all jump, though it was such a kind, cheery voice. "Aren't you ready for tea? I'm glad to see you are not very tired, but you must be hungry. Remember that you've travelled a good way to-day."

"Only from London, grandmother dear," said Molly; "that isn't very far."

"And the day after to-morrow you have to travel a long way farther," continued her grandmother. "You must get early to bed, and keep yourselves fresh for all that is before you. Aunty says *she* is

very hungry, so you little people must be so too. Yes, dears, you may run downstairs first, and I'll come quietly after you; I am not so young as I have been, you know."

Molly looked up with some puzzle in her eyes at this.

"Not so young as you have been, grandmother dear?" she repeated.

"Of course not," said Ralph. "And you're not either, Molly. Once you were a baby in long clothes, and, barring the long clothes, I don't know but what——"

"Hush, Ralph. Don't begin teasing her," said Sylvia in a low voice, not lost, however, upon grandmother.

What *was* lost upon grandmother?

"And what were you all so busy chattering about when I interrupted you just now?" she inquired, when they were all seated round the tea-table, and thanks to the nice cold chicken and ham, and rolls and butter and tea-cakes, and all manner of good things, the children fast "losing their appetites."

Sylvia blushed and looked at Ralph; Ralph grew much interested in the grounds at the bottom of his tea-cup; only Molly, Molly the irrepressible, looked up briskly.

"Oh, nothing," she replied; "at least nothing particular."

"Dear me! how odd that you should all three have been talking at once about anything so uninteresting as nothing particular," said grandmother, in a tone which made them all laugh.

"It wasn't *exactly* about nothing particular," said Molly: "it was about *you*, grandmother dear."

"Molly!" said Sylvia reproachfully, but Molly was not so easily to be snubbed.

"We were wishing," she continued, "that you had a gold-headed stick, and then you'd be quite *perfect*."

It was grandmother's and aunty's turn to laugh now.

"Only," Molly went on, "Ralph said perhaps you'd beat us with it, and I said no, most likely you'd turn us into frogs or mice, you know."

"'Frogs or mice, I know,' but indeed I don't know," said grandmother; "why should I wish to turn my boy and girl children into frogs and mice?"

"If we were naughty, I meant," said Molly. "Oh, Sylvia, you explain—I always say things the wrong way."

"It was I that said you looked like a fairy godmother," said Sylvia, blushing furiously, "and that put it into Molly's head about the frogs and mice."

"But the only fairy godmother *I* remember that did these wonderful things turned mice into horses to please her god-daughter. Have you not got hold of the wrong end of the story, Molly?" said grandmother.

"The wrong end and beginning and middle too, I should say," observed Ralph.

"Yes, grandmother dear, I always do," said Molly, complacently. "I never remember stories or anything the right way, my head is so funnily made."

"When you can't find your gloves, because you didn't put them away carefully, is it the fault of the shape of the chest of drawers?" inquired grandmother quietly.

"Yes, I suppose so,—at least, no, I mean, of course it isn't," replied Molly, taking heed to her words half-way through, when she saw that they were all laughing at her.

Grandmother smiled, but said no more.

"What a wool-gathering little brain it is," she said to herself.

When she smiled, all the children agreed together afterwards, she looked more like a fairy godmother than ever. She was really a *very* pretty old lady. Never very tall, with age she had grown smaller, though still upright as a dart; the "November roses" in her cheeks were of their kind as sweet as the June ones that nestled there long ago—ah! so long ago now; and the look in her eyes had a tenderness and depth which can only come from a life of unselfishness, of joy and much sorrow too—a life whose lessons have been well and dutifully learnt, and of which none has been more thoroughly taken home than that of gentle judgment of, and much patience with, others.

While they are all finishing their tea, would you, my boy and girl friends, like to know who they were—these three, Ralph, Sylvia, and Molly, whom I want to tell you about, and whom I hope you will love? When I was a little girl I liked to know exactly about the children in my books, each of whom had his or her distinct place in my affections. I liked to know their names, their ages, all about their homes and their relations *most* exactly, and more than once I was laughed at for writing out a sort of genealogical tree of some of my little fancy friends' family connections. We need not go quite so far as *that*, but I will explain to you about these new little friends of yours

enough for you to be able to find out the rest for yourselves.

They had never seen their grandmother before, never, that is to say, in the girls' case, and in Ralph's "not to remember her." Ralph was fourteen now, Sylvia thirteen, and Molly about a year and a half younger. More than seven years ago their mother had died, and since then they had been living with their father, whose profession obliged him often to change his home, in various different places. It had been impossible for their grandmother, much as she wished it, to have had them hitherto with her, for, for several years out of the seven, her hands, and those of aunty, too, her only other daughter besides their mother, had been more than filled with other cares. Their grandfather had been ill for many years before his death, and for his sake grandmother and aunty had left the English home they loved so much, and gone to live in the south of France. And after his death, as often happens with people no longer young, and somewhat wearied, grandmother found that the old dream of returning "home," and ending her days with her children and old friends round her, had grown to be but a dream, and, what was more, had lost its charm. She had grown to love her new home, endeared now by so many associations; she had got used to the ways of the people, and felt as if English ways would be strange to her, and as aunty's only idea of happiness was to find it in hers, the mother and daughter had decided to make their home where for nearly fourteen years it had been. They had gone to England this autumn for a few weeks, finally to arrange some matters that had been left unsettled, and while there something happened which made them very glad that they had done so. Mr. Heriott, the children's father, had received an appointment in India, which would take him there for two or three years, and though grandmother and aunty were sorry to think of his going so far away, they were—oh, I can't tell you how delighted! when he agreed to their proposal, that the children's home for the time should be with them. It would be an advantage for the girls' French, said grandmother, and would do Ralph no harm for a year or two, and if his father's absence lasted longer, it could easily be arranged for him to be sent back to England to school, still spending his holidays at Châlet. So all was settled; and grandmother, who had taken a little house at Dover for a few weeks, stayed there quietly, while aunty journeyed away up to the north of England to fetch the children, their father being too busy with preparations for his own departure to be able conveniently to take them to Dover himself. There were some tears shed at parting with "papa," for the children loved him truly, and believed in his love for them, quiet and undemonstrative though his manner was. There were some tears, too, shed at parting with "nurse," who, having conscientiously spoilt them all, was now getting past work, and was to retire to her married daughter's; there were a good many bestowed on the rough coat of Shag, the pony, and the still rougher of Fusser, the Scotch terrier; but after all, children are children, and for my part I should be very sorry for them to be anything else, and the delights of the change and the bustle of the journey soon drowned all melancholy thoughts.

And so far all had gone charmingly. Aunty had proved to be all that could be wished of aunty-kind, and grandmother promised more than fairly.

"What *would* we have done if she had been very tall and stout, and fierce-looking, with spectacles and a hookey nose?" thought Molly, and as the thought struck her, she left off eating, and sat with wide open eyes, staring at her grandmother.

Though grandmother did not in general wear spectacles—only when reading very small print, or busied with some peculiarly fine fancywork—nothing ever seemed to escape her notice.

"Molly, my dear, what are you staring at so? Is my cap crooked?" she said. Molly started.

"Oh no, grandmother dear," she replied. "I was only thinking——" she stopped short, jumped off her seat, and in another moment was round the table with a rush, which would have been sadly trying to most grandmothers and aunties, only fortunately these special ones were not like most!

"What is the matter, dear?" grandmother was beginning to exclaim, when she was stopped by feeling two arms hugging her tightly, and a rather bread-and-buttery little mouth kissing her valorously.

"Nothing's the matter," said Molly, when she stopped her kisses, "it only just came into my head when I was looking at you, how nice you were, you dear little grandmother, and I thought I'd like to kiss you. I don't want you to have a gold-headed stick, but I do want one thing, and then you *would* be quite perfect. Oh, grandmother dear," she went on, clasping her hands in entreaty, "just tell me this, *do* you ever tell stories?"

Grandmother shook her head solemnly. "I *hope* not, my dear child," she said, but Molly detected the fun through the solemnity. She gave a wriggle.

"Now you're laughing at me," she said. "You *know* I don't mean that kind. I mean do you ever tell real stories—not real, I don't mean, for very often the nicest aren't real, about fairies, you know—but you know the sort of stories I mean. You would look so beautiful telling stories, wouldn't she now, Sylvia?"

"And the stories would be beautiful if I told them—eh, Molly?"

"Yes, I am sure they would be. *Will* you think of some?"

"We'll see," said grandmother. "Anyway there's no time for stories at present. You have ever so much to think of with all the travelling that is before you. Wait till we get to Châlet, and then we'll see."

"I like *your* 'we'll see,'" said Molly. "Some people's 'we'll see,' just means, 'I can't be troubled,' or, 'don't bother.' But I think *your* 'we'll see' sounds nice, grandmother dear."

"I am glad you think so, grand-daughter dear; and now, what about going to bed? It is only seven, but if you are tired?"

"But we are not a bit tired," said Molly.

"We never go to bed till half-past eight, and Ralph at nine," said Sylvia.

The word "bed" had started a new flow of ideas in Molly's brain.

"Grandmother," she said, growing all at once very grave, "that reminds me of one thing I wanted to ask you; do the tops of the beds ever come down now in Paris?"

"'Do the tops of the beds in Paris ever come down?'" repeated grandmother. "My dear child, what *do* you mean?"

"It was a story she heard," began Sylvia, in explanation.

"About somebody being suffocated in Paris by the top of the bed coming down," continued Ralph.

"It was robbers that wanted to steal his money," added Molly.

Grandmother began to look less mystified. "Oh, *that* old story!" she said. "But how did you hear it? I remember it when I was a little girl; it really happened to a friend of my grandfather's, and afterwards I came across it in a little book about dogs. 'Fidelity of dogs,' was the name of it, I think. The dog saved the traveller's life by dragging him out of the bed."

"Yes," said aunty, "I remember that book too. It was among your old child's books, mother. A queer little musty brown volume, and I remember how the story frightened me."

"There now!" said Molly triumphantly. "You see it frightened aunty too. So I'm *not* such a baby after all."

"Yes, you are," said Ralph. "People might be frightened without making such a fuss. Molly declared she would rather not go to Paris at all. *That's* what I call being babyish—it isn't the feeling frightened that's babyish—for people might feel frightened and still *be* brave, mightn't they, grandmother?"

"Certainly, my boy. That is what *moral* courage means."

"Oh!" said Molly, as if a new idea had dawned upon her. "I see. Then it doesn't matter if I am frightened if I don't tell any one."

"Not exactly that," said grandmother. "I would *like* you all to be strong and sensible, and to have good nerves, which it would take a good deal to startle, as well as to have what certainly is best of all, plenty of moral courage."

"And if Molly is frightened, she certainly couldn't help telling," said Sylvia, laughing. "She does *so* pinch whoever is next her."

"There was nothing about a dog in the story of the bed we heard," said Molly. "It was in a book that a boy at school lent Ralph. I wouldn't ever be frightened if I had Fusser, I don't think. I do so wish I had asked papa to let him come with us—just *in case*, you know, of the beds having anything funny about them: it would be so comfortable to have Fusser."

At this they all laughed, and aunty promised that if Molly felt dissatisfied with the appearance of her bed, she would exchange with her. And not long after, Sylvia and Molly began to look so sleepy, in spite of their protestations that the dustman's cart was nowhere near *their* door, that aunty insisted they must be mistaken, *she* had heard his warning bell ringing some minutes ago. So the two little sisters came round to say good-night.

"Good night, grandmother dear," said Molly, in a voice which tried hard to be brisk as usual through the sleepiness.

Grandmother laid her hand on her shoulder and looked into her eyes. Molly had nice eyes when you looked at them closely: they were honest and candid, though of too pale a blue to show at first sight the expression they really contained. Just now too, they were blinking and winking a little. Still grandmother must have been able to read in them what she wanted, for her face looked satisfied when she withdrew her gaze.

"So I am *really* to be 'grandmother dear,' to you, my dear funny little girl?" she said.

"Of course, grandmother dear. Really, *really* I mean," said Molly, laughing at herself. "Do you see it in my eyes?"

"Yes, I think I do. You have nice honest eyes, my little girl."

Molly flushed a little with pleasure. "I thought they were rather ugly. Ralph calls them 'cats',' and 'boiled gooseberries,'" she said. "Anyway Sylvia's are much prettier. She has such nice long eyelashes."

"Sylvia's are very sweet," said grandmother, kissing her in turn, "and we won't make

comparisons. Both pairs of eyes will do very well my darlings, if always

'The light within them,
Tender is and true.'

Now good night, and God bless my little grand-daughters. Ralph, you'll sit up with me a little longer, won't you?"

"What nice funny things grandmother says, doesn't she, Sylvia?" said Molly, as they were undressing.

"She says nice things," said Sylvia, "I don't know about they're being funny. You call everything funny, Molly."

"Except you when you're going to bed, for then you're very often rather cross," said Molly.

But as she was only *in fun*, Sylvia took it in good part, and, after kissing each other good night, both little sisters fell asleep without loss of time.

CHAPTER II.

LOST IN THE LOUVRE.

"Oh how I wish that I had lived
In the ages that are gone!"

A CHILD'S WISH.

It was—did I say so before? the children's first visit to Paris. They had travelled a good deal, for such small people quite "a *very* good deal," as Molly used to maintain for the benefit of their less experienced companions. They knew England, "of course," Ralph would say in his lordly, big-boy fashion, Scotland too, and Wales, and they had spent some time in Germany. But they had never been in Paris, and the excitement on finding the journey safely past and themselves really there was very considerable.

"And, Molly," said Sylvia, on their way from the railway station to the hotel where rooms had been engaged for them, "remember you've *promised* not to awake me in the middle of the night if you begin thinking about the top of the bed coming down."

"And, oh, Sylvia! I *wish* you hadn't reminded me of it just now," said Molly pathetically, for which all the satisfaction she received was a somewhat curt observation from Sylvia, that she shouldn't be so silly.

For Sylvia, though in reality the kindest of little elder sisters, was sometimes inclined to be "short" with poor Molly. Sylvia was clever and quick, and very "capable," remarkably ready at putting herself, as it were, in the place of another and seeing for the time being, through his or her spectacles. While Molly had not got further than opening wide her eyes, and not unfrequently her mouth too, Sylvia, practical in the way that only people of lively imagination can be so, had taken in the whole case, whatever it might be, and set her ready wits to work as to the best thing to be said or done. And Molly would wonderingly admire, and wish she could manage to "think of things" the way Sylvia did.

They loved each other dearly, these two—but to-night they were tired, and when people, not children only, big people too, very often—are tried, it is only a very little step to being cross and snappish. And when aunty, tired too, and annoyed by the unamiable tones, turned round to beg them to "*try* to leave off squabbling; it was so thoughtless of them to disturb their grandmother," two or three big tears welled up in Molly's eyes, though it was too dark in the omnibus, which was taking them and their luggage from the station, for any one to see, and she thought to herself what a terrible disappointment it would be if, after all, this delightful, long-talked-of visit to Paris, were to turn out not delightful at all. And through Sylvia's honest little heart there darted a quick sting of pain and regret for her sharpness to Molly. How was it that she could not manage to keep the resolutions so often and so conscientiously made? How was it that she could not succeed in remembering at the time, the very moment at which she was tempted to be snappish and supercilious, her never-*really*-forgotten motive for peculiar gentleness and patience with her younger sister, the promise she had made, now so many years ago, to the mother Molly could scarcely even remember, to be kind, *very* kind, and gentle to the little, flaxen-haired, toddling thing, the "baby" whom that dear mother had loved so piteously.

"Eight years ago," said Sylvia to herself. "I was five and Molly only three and a half then. Poor little Molly, how funny she was!"

And a hand crept in under Molly's sleeve, and a whisper reached her ear.

"I don't mean to be cross or to tease you, Molly."

And Molly in a moment was her own queer, happy, muddle-headed little self again.

"Dear Sylvia," she whispered in return, "of course you don't. You never do, and if the top of the bed *did* come down, I'm sure I'd pull you out first, however sleepy I was. Only of course I know it *won't*, and it's just my silly way, but when I'm as big as you, Sylvia, I'll get out of it, I'm sure."

"You're as big as me now, you silly girl," said Sylvia laughingly, which was true. Molly was tall and well-grown for her age, while Sylvia was small, so that very often, to Molly's delight, they were taken for twins.

"In my body, but not in my mind," rejoined Molly, with a little sigh. "I wish the growing would go into my mind for a little, though I wouldn't like to be *much* smaller than you, Sylvia. Perhaps we shouldn't be dressed alike, then."

"Do be quiet, Molly, you are such an awful chatterbox," growled Ralph from his corner. "I was just having a nice little nap."

He was far too "grown-up" to own to the eagerness with which, as they went along, he had been furtively peeping out at the window beside him—or to join in Molly's screams of delight at the brilliance of the illumined shop windows, and the interminable perspective of gas lamps growing longer and longer behind them as they rapidly made their way.

A sudden slackening of their speed, a sharp turn, and a rattle over the stones, told of their arrival at their destination. And "Oh!" cried Molly, "I *am* so glad. Aren't you awfully hungry, Sylvia?"

And grandmother, who, to tell the truth, had been indulging in a peaceful, *real* little nap—not a sham one like Ralph's—quite woke up at this, and told Molly it was the best sign in the world to be hungry after a journey; she was delighted to find her so good a traveller.

The "dinner-tea" which, out of consideration for the children's home hours, had been ordered for them, turned out delicious. Never had they tasted such butter, such bread, such grilled chicken, and fried potatoes! And to complete Molly's satisfaction the beds proved to have no tops to them at all.

"I told you so," said Ralph majestically, when they had made the tour of the various rooms and settled who was to have which, and though neither Sylvia nor Molly had the slightest recollection of his "telling you so," they were wise enough to say nothing.

"But the little doors in the walls are quite as bad, or worse," Ralph continued mischievously. "There's one at the head of your bed, Molly,"—Molly and Sylvia were to have two little beds in the same room, standing in a sort of alcove—"which I am almost sure opens on to a secret staircase."

Molly gave a little shiver, and looked up appealingly.

"Ralph, you are not to tease her," said aunty. "Remember all your promises to your father."

Ralph looked rather snubbed.

"Let us talk of something pleasant," continued aunty, anxious to change the subject. "What shall we do to-morrow? What shall we go to see first?"

"Yes," said grandmother. "What are your pet wishes, children?"

"Notre Dame," cried Molly.

"The Louvre," said Sylvia.

"Anything you like. I don't care much for sightseeing," said Ralph.

"That's a pity," said aunty drily. "However, as you are the only gentleman of the party, and we are all dependent on you, perhaps it is just as well that you have no special fancies of your own. So to-morrow I propose that we should go a drive in the morning, to give you a general idea of Paris, returning by Notre Dame. In the afternoon I have some calls to make, and a little shopping to do, and you three must not forget to write to your father. Then the next day we can go to the Louvre, as Sylvia wished."

"Thank you, aunty," said Sylvia. "It isn't so much for the pictures I want to go, but I do so want to see the room where poor Henry the Fourth was killed. I am *so* fond of Henry the Fourth."

Aunty smiled, and Ralph burst out laughing.

"What a queer idea!" he said. "If you are so fond of him, I should think you would rather *not* see the room where he was killed."

Sylvia grew scarlet, and Molly flew up in her defence.

"You've no business to laugh at Sylvia, Ralph," she cried. "*I* understand her quite well. And she knows a great deal more history than you do—and about pictures, too. Of course we want to see the pictures, too. There's that beautiful blue and orange one of Murillo's that papa has a little copy of. *It's* at the Louvre."

"I didn't say it wasn't," retorted Ralph. "It's Sylvia's love of horrors I was laughing at."

"She *doesn't* love horrors," replied Molly, more and more indignant.

"*You* needn't talk," said Ralph coolly. "Who was it that took a box of matches in her pocket to

Holyrood Palace, and was going to strike one to look for the blood-stains on the floor? It was the only thing you cared to see, and yet you are such a goose—crying out if a butterfly settles on you. I think girls are——"

"Ralph, my boy," said grandmother, seeing that by this time Molly was almost in tears; "whatever you think of girls, you make me, I am sorry to say, think that boys' love of teasing is utterly incomprehensible—and oh, *so* unmanly!"

The last touch went home.

"I was only in fun, grandmother," said Ralph with unusual meekness; "I didn't mean really to vex Molly."

So peace was restored.

To-morrow turned out fine, deliriously fine.

"Not like England," said Molly superciliously, "where it *always* rains when you want it to be fine."

They made the most of the beautiful weather, though by no means agreeing with aunty's reminder that even in Paris it did sometimes rain, and the three pairs of eager feet were pretty tired by the time bed-time came.

And oh, what a disappointment the next morning brought!

The children woke to a regular, pouring wet day, no chance of fulfilling the programme laid out, for Sylvia was subject to sore throats, and grandmother would not let her go out in the damp, and there would be no fun in going to the Louvre without her. So, as what can't be cured *must* be endured, the children had just to make the best of it and amuse themselves in the house in the hopes of sunshine again for to-morrow. These hopes were happily fulfilled.

"A lovely day," said aunty, "all the brighter for yesterday's rain."

"And we may go to the Louvre," exclaimed Sylvia eagerly.

Aunty hesitated and turned, as everybody did when they were at a loss, to grandmother.

"What do you think?" she said. She was reluctant to disappoint the children—Sylvia especially—as they had all been very good the day before, but yet——"It is Saturday, and the Louvre will be so crowded you know, mother."

"But *I* shall be with you," said Ralph.

"And *I*!" said grandmother. "Is not a little old lady like me equal to taking care of you all?"

"Will you really come too, dear grandmother?" exclaimed Sylvia and Molly in a breath. "*Oh*, how nice!"

"I should like to go," said grandmother. "It is ever so many years since I was at the Louvre."

"Do let us go then. Oh, do let us all go," said the little girls. "You know we are leaving on Tuesday, and something might come in the way again on Monday."

So it was settled.

"Remember, children," said grandmother as they were all getting out of the carriage, "remember to keep close together. You have no idea how easily some of you might get lost in the crowd."

"*Lost!*" repeated Sylvia incredulously.

"LOST!" echoed Molly.

"LOST!" shouted Ralph so loudly that some of their fellow-sight-seers, passing beside them into the palace, turned round to see what was the matter. "How could we *possibly* get lost here?"

"Very easily," replied aunty calmly. "There is nothing, to people unaccustomed to it, so utterly bewildering as a crowd."

"Not to me," persisted Ralph. "I could thread my way in and out of the people till I found you. The *girls* might get lost, perhaps."

"Thank you," said Molly; "as it happens, Master Ralph, I think it would be much harder to lose us than you. For one thing we can speak French ever such a great deal better than you."

"And then there are two of us. If one of us was lost, grandmother and aunty could hold out the other one as a pattern, and say, 'I want a match for this,'" said Sylvia laughing, and a little eager to prevent the impending skirmish between Ralph and Molly.

"Hush, children, you really mustn't chatter so," said aunty. "Use your eyes, and let your tongues, poor things, rest for a little."

They got on very happily. Aunty managed to show the children the special picture or pictures each had most wanted to see—including the "beautiful blue and orange" one of Molly's recollection. She nearly screamed with delight when she saw "how like it was to the one in papa's study," but took in good part Ralph's cynical observation that a thing that was copied from

another was generally supposed to be "like" the original.

Only Sylvia was a little disappointed when, after looking at the pictures in one of the smaller rooms—a room in no way peculiar or remarkable as differing from the others—they suddenly discovered that they were in the famous "Salle Henri II.," where Henry the Fourth was killed!

"I didn't think it would be like this," said Sylvia lugubriously. "Why do they call it 'Salle Henri II.?' It should be called after Henry the Fourth; and I don't think it should have pictures in, and be just like a common room."

"What would you have it? Hung round with black and tapers burning?" said her aunt.

"I don't know—any way I thought it would have had old tapestry," said Sylvia. "I should like it to have been kept just the way it was then."

"Poor Sylvia!" said grandmother. "But we must hurry on, children. We have not seen the 'Petite Galérie' yet—dear me, how many years it is since I was in it!—and some of the most beautiful pictures are there."

They passed on—grandmother leaning on aunty's arm—the three children close behind, through a room called the "Salle des Sept Cheminées," along a vestibule filled with cases of jewellery, leading again to one of the great staircases. Something in the vestibule attracted grandmother's attention, and she stopped for a moment. Sylvia, not interested in what the others were looking at, turned round and retraced her steps a few paces by the way they had entered the hall. A thought had struck her.

"I'd like just to run back for a moment to Henry the Fourth's Room," she said to herself. "I want to notice the shape of it exactly, and how many windows there are, and then I think I can fancy to myself how it looked *then*, with the tapestry and all the old-fashioned furniture."

No sooner thought than done. In a moment she was back in the room which had so curiously fascinated her, taking accurate note of its features.

"I shall remember it now," she said to herself, after gazing round her for a minute or two. "Now I must run after grandmother and the others, or they'll be thinking I am lost."

She turned with a little laugh at the idea, and hastened out of the room, through the few groups of people standing or moving about, looking at the pictures—hastened out, expecting in another moment to see the familiar figures. The room into which she made her way was also filled with pictures, as had been the one through which she had entered the "Salle Henri II." She crossed it without misgiving: she had no idea that she had left the Salle Henri II. by the opposite door from that by which she had entered it!

Poor little Sylvia, she did not know that grandmother's warning was actually to be fulfilled. She was "lost in the Louvre!"

CHAPTER III.

"*WHERE* IS SYLVIA?"

"What called me back?
A voice of happy childhood,

"Yet might I not bewail the vision gone,
My heart so leapt to that dear loving tone."

Mrs. HEMANS, "An Hour of Romance."

She did not find out her mistake. She passed through the room and entered the vestibule into which it led, quite confident that she would meet the others in an instant. There were several groups standing about this vestibule as there had been in the other, but none composed of the figures she was looking for.

"They must have passed on," said Sylvia to herself; "I wish they hadn't; perhaps they never noticed I wasn't beside them."

Then for the first time a slight feeling of anxiety seized her. She hurried quickly across the ante-room where she was standing, to find herself in another "salle," which was quite unlike any of the others she had seen. Instead of oil-paintings, it was hung round with colourless engravings. Here, too, there were several people standing about, but none whom, even for an instant, Sylvia could have mistaken for her friends.

"How quickly they must have hurried on," she thought, her heart beginning to beat faster. "I do think they might have waited a little. They must have missed me by now."

No use delaying in *this* room. Sylvia hurried on, finding herself now in that part of the palace devoted to ancient pottery and other antiquities, uninteresting to a child. The rooms through

which she passed were much less crowded than those containing pictures. At a glance it was easy to distinguish that those she was in search of were *not* there. Still she tried to keep up heart.

"There is nothing here they would much care about," she said to herself. "If I could get back to the picture rooms I should be sure to find them."

At last, to her delight, after crossing a second vestibule, from which descended a great staircase which she fancied she had seen before, she entered another of the long galleries completely hung with paintings. She bounded forward joyously.

"They're sure to be here," she said.

The room was very crowded. She dared not rush through it as fast as hitherto; it was *so* crowded that she felt it would be quite possible to overlook a group of even four. More than once she fancied she caught sight of grandmother's small and aunty's taller figure, both dressed in black. Once her heart gave a great throb of delight when she fancied she distinguished through the crowd the cream-coloured felt hat and feathers of Molly, her double. But no—it was a cream-coloured felt hat, but the face below it was not Molly's. Then at last a panic seized the poor little girl. She fairly lost her head, and the tears blinding her so, that had Molly and all of them been close beside her, she could scarcely have perceived them, she ran half frantically through the rooms. Half frantically in reality, but scarcely so to outward appearance. Her habit of self-control, her unconquerable British dislike to being seen in tears, or to making herself conspicuous, prevented her distress being so visible as to attract general attention. Some few people remarked her as she passed—a forlorn little Evangeline—her pretty face now paler, now more flushed than its wont, as alternations of hope and fear succeeded each other, and wondered if she had lost her party or her way. But she had disappeared before there was time to do more than notice her. More than once she was on the point of asking help or advice from the cocked-hat officials at the doors, but she was afraid. In some ways she was very ignorant and childish for her age, notwithstanding her little womanlinesses and almost precocious good sense, and to tell the truth, a vague misty terror was haunting her brain—a terror which she would hardly have confessed to Molly, not for worlds untold to *Ralph*—that, being in France and not in England, she might somehow be put in prison, were the state of the case known to these same cocked-hat gentlemen! So, when at last one of these dignitaries, who had been noticing her rapid progress down the long gallery "Napoléon III.," stopped her with the civil inquiry, "Had Mademoiselle lost her way? was she seeking some one?" she bit her lips tight and winked her eyes briskly not to cry, as she replied in her best French, "Oh no," she could find her way. And then, as a sudden thought struck her that possibly he had been deputed by grandmother and aunty, who *must* have missed her by now, to look for her, she glanced up at him again with the inquiry, had he, perhaps, seen a little girl like her? *just* like her?

SYLVIA LOST IN THE LOUVRE

"Une petite fille comme Mademoiselle?" replied the man smiling, but not taking in the sense of the question. "No, he had not." How could there be two little demoiselles, "tout-à-fait pareilles?" He shook his head, good-natured but mystified, and Sylvia, getting frightened again, thanked him and sped off anew.

The next doorway—by this time she had unconsciously in her panic and confusion begun actually to retrace her steps round the main court of the palace—brought her again into a room filled with statuary and antiquities. She was getting so tired, so out of breath, that the excitement now

deserted her. She sat down on the ledge of one of the great marble vases, in a corner where her little figure was almost hidden from sight, and began to think, as quietly and composedly as she could, what she should do. The tears were slowly creeping up into her eyes again; she let two or three fall, and then resolutely drove the others back.

"What shall I do?" she thought, and joined to her own terrors there was now the certainty of the anxiety and misery the others must, by this time, be suffering on her account. "Oh, poor little Molly," she said to herself. "How dreadfully she will be crying! What shall I do?"

Two or three ideas struck her. Should she go down one of the staircases which every now and then she came upon, and find her way out of the palace, and down in the street try to call a cab to take her back to the hotel? But she had no money with her, and no idea what a cab would cost. And she was frightened of strange cabmen, and by no means sure that she could intelligibly explain the address. Besides this, she could not bear to go home without them all, feeling certain that they would not desert the palace till they had searched every corner for her.

"If I could but be sure of any place they *must* pass," she said to herself, with her good sense reviving; "it would be the best way to wait there till they come."

She jumped up again. "The door out!" she exclaimed. "They *must* pass it. Only perhaps," her hopes falling, "there are several doors. The best one to wait at would be the one we came in by, if I could but tell which it was. Let me see—yes, I remember, as we came upstairs, aunty said, 'This is the Grand Escalier.' If I ask for the 'Grand Escalier.'"

Her courage returned. The very next cocked hat she came upon, she asked to direct her to the "Grand Escalier." He sent her straight back through a vestibule she had just left, at the other entrance to which she found herself at the head of the great staircase.

"I am sure this is the one we came up," she thought, as she ran down, and her certainty was confirmed, when, having made her way out through the entrance hall at the foot of the staircase, she caught sight, a few yards off, of an old apple woman's stall in the courtyard.

"I remember that stall quite well," thought Sylvia, and in her delight she felt half inclined to run up to the apple-woman and kiss her. "She looks nice," she said to herself, "and they must pass that way to get to the street we came along. I'll go and stand beside her."

Half timidly the little girl advanced towards the stall. She had stood there a minute or two before its owner noticed her, and turned to ask if mademoiselle wanted an apple.

Sylvia shook her head. She had no money and did not want any apples, but might she stand there to watch for her friends, whom she had lost in the crowd. The old woman, with bright black eyes and shrivelled-up, yellow-red cheeks, not unlike one of her own apples that had been thrown aside as spoilt, turned and looked with kindly curiosity at the little girl.

"Might Mademoiselle wait there? Certainly. But she must not stand," and as she spoke she drew out a little stool, on which Sylvia was only too glad to seat herself, and feeling a little less anxious, she mustered courage to ask the old woman if every one came out at this door.

"To go where?" inquired the old woman, and when Sylvia mentioned the name of the hotel and the street where they were staying, "Ah, yes!" said her informant; "Mademoiselle might be quite satisfied. It was quite sure Madame, her mother, would come out by that entrance."

"Not my mother," said Sylvia. "I have no mother. It is my grandmother."

"The grandmother of Mademoiselle," repeated the old woman with increased interest. "Ah, yes I too had once a grand-daughter."

"Did she die?" said Sylvia.

"Poor angel, yes," replied the apple-seller; "she went to the good God, and no doubt it is better. She was orphan, Mademoiselle, and I was obliged to be out all day, and she would come too. And it is so cold in Paris, the winter. She got a bad bronchitis and she died, and her old grandmother is now alone."

"I am so sorry," said Sylvia. And her thoughts went off to her own grandmother, and Molly, and all of them, with fresh sympathy for the anxiety they must be suffering. She leant back on the wall against which the old woman had placed the stool, feeling very depressed and weary—so weary that she did not feel able to do anything but sit still, which no doubt from every point of view was the best thing she could do, though but for her weariedness she would have felt much inclined to rush off again to look for them, thus decidedly decreasing her chance of finding them.

"Mademoiselle is tired," said the old woman, kindly. "She need not be afraid. The ladies are sure to come out here. I will watch well those who pass. A little demoiselle dressed like Mademoiselle? One could not mistake. Mademoiselle may feel satisfied."

Somehow the commonplace, kindly words did make Sylvia feel less anxious. And she was very tired. Not so much with running about the Louvre; that, in reality, had not occupied more than three quarters of an hour, but with the fright and excitement, and the excitement of a different kind too, that she had had the last few days, poor little Sylvia was really quite tired out.

She laid her head down on the edge of the table on which the apples were spread out, hardly taking in the sense of what the old woman was saying—that in half-an-hour at most Mademoiselle

would find her friends, for then the doors would be closed, and every one would be obliged to leave the palace. She felt satisfied that the old woman would be on the look-out for the little party she had described to her, and she thought vaguely that she would ask grandmother to give her a sixpence or a shilling—no, not a sixpence or a shilling,—she was in France, not in England—what should she say? A franc—half a franc—how much was equal to a sixpence or a shilling? She thought it over mistily for a moment or two, and then thought no more about it—she had fallen fast asleep!

But how was this? She had fallen asleep with her head on the apple-woman's stall; when she looked round her again where was she? For a minute or two she did not in the least recognise the room—then it suddenly flashed upon her she was in the Salle Henri II., the room where poor Henry the Fourth was killed! But how changed it was—the pictures were all gone, the walls were hung with the tapestry she had wished she could see there, and the room was but dimly lighted by a lamp hanging from the centre of the roof. Sylvia did not feel in any way surprised at the transformation—but she looked about her with great interest and curiosity. Suddenly a slight feeling of fear came over her, when in one corner she saw the hangings move, and from behind the tapestry a hand, a very long white hand, appear. Whose could it be? Sylvia's fear increased to terror when it suddenly struck her that this must be the night of the 14th of May, the night on which Henry of Navarre was to be killed. She gave a scream of terror, or what she fancied a scream; in reality it was the faintest of muffled sounds, like the tiny squeal of a distressed mouse, which seemed to startle the owner of the hand into quicker measures. He threw back the hangings and came towards Sylvia, addressing her distinctly. The voice was so kind that her courage returned, and she looked up at the new comer. His face was pale and somewhat worn-looking, the eyes were bright and sparkling, and benevolent in expression; his tall figure was curiously dressed in a fashion which yet did not seem quite unfamiliar to the little girl—a sort of doublet or jacket of rich crimson velvet, with lace at the collar and cuffs, short trousers fastened in at the knees, "very like Ralph's knickerbockers," said Sylvia to herself, long pointed-toed shoes, like canoes, and on the head a little cap edged with gold, half coronet, half smoking cap, it seemed to her. Where had she ever seen this old-world figure before? She gazed at him in perplexity.

"Why are you so frightened, Mademoiselle?" said the stranger, and curiously enough his voice sounded very like that of the most amiable of her cocked-hat friends.

Sylvia hesitated.

"I don't think I am frightened," she said, and though she spoke English and the stranger had addressed her in French, he seemed quite to understand her. "I am only tired, and there was something the matter. I can't remember what it was."

"I know," replied her visitor. "You can't find Molly and the others. Never mind. If you come with me I'll take you to them. I know all the ins and outs of the palace. I have lived here so long, you see."

He held out his hand, but Sylvia hesitated. "Who are you?" she said.

A curious smile flickered over the face before her.

"Don't you know?" he said. "I am surprised at that. I thought you knew me quite well."

"Are you?" said Sylvia—"yes, I am sure you must be one of the pictures in the long gallery. I remember looking at you this afternoon. How did you get down?"

"No," said the stranger, "Mademoiselle is not quite right. How could there be two 'tout à fait pareils'?" and again his voice sounded exactly like that of the cocked-hat who would not understand when she had asked him if he had seen Molly. Yet she still felt sure he was mistaken, he *must* be the picture she remembered.

"It is very queer," she said. "If you are not the picture, who are you then?"

"I pass my time," said the figure, somewhat irrelevantly, "between this room, where I was killed and the 'Salle des Caryatides,' where I was married. On the whole I prefer this room."

"Are you—can you be—Henry the Fourth?" exclaimed Sylvia. "Oh! poor Henry the Fourth, I am so afraid of them coming to kill you again. Come, let us run quick to the old apple-woman, she will take care of you till we find grandmother."

She in turn held out her hand. The king took it and held it a moment in his, and a sad, very sad smile overspread his face.

"Alas!" he said, "I cannot leave the palace. I have no little grand-daughter like Mademoiselle. I am alone, always alone. Farewell, my little demoiselle. Les voilà qui viennent."

The last words he seemed to speak right into her ears, so clear and loud they sounded. Sylvia started—opened her eyes—no, there was no king to be seen, only the apple-woman, who had been gently shaking her awake, and who now stood pointing out to her a little group of four people hurrying towards them, of whom the foremost, hurrying the fastest of all, was a fair-haired little girl with a cream-coloured felt hat and feathers, who, sobbing, threw herself into Sylvia's arms, and hugged and hugged as if she never would let go.

"Oh, Sylvia, oh, my darling!" she cried. "I thought you were lost for always. Oh, I have been so

frightened—oh, we have all been so frightened. I thought perhaps they had taken you away to one of the places where the tops of the beds come down, or to that other place on the river, the Morgue, where they drown people, only I didn't say so, not to frighten poor grandmother worse. Oh, grandmother *dear*, aren't you glad she's found?"

Sylvia was crying too by this time, and the old apple-woman was wiping her eyes with a corner of her apron. You may be sure grandmother gave her a present, I rather think it was of a five-franc piece, which was very extravagant of grandmother, wasn't it?

They had been of course hunting for Sylvia, as people always do for anything that is lost, from a little girl to a button-hook, *before they find it*, in every place but the right one. I think it was grandmother's bright idea at last to make their way to the entrance and wait there. There had been quite a commotion among the cocked-hats who had *not* seen Sylvia, only unfortunately they had not managed to communicate with the cocked-hats who *had* seen her, and they had shown the greatest zeal in trying to "match" the little girl in the cream-coloured hat, held out to them as a pattern by the brisk old lady in black, who spoke such beautiful French, that they "demanded themselves" seriously if the somewhat eccentric behaviour of the party could be explained, as all eccentricities should of course *always* be explained, by the fact of their being English! Aunty's distress had been great, and she had not "kept her head" as well as grandmother, whose energies had a happy knack of always rising to the occasion.

"What *will* Walter think of us," said aunty piteously, referring to the children's father, "if we begin by losing one of them?" And she unmercifully snubbed Ralph's not unreasonable suggestion of "detectives;" he had always heard the French police system was so excellent.

Ralph had been as unhappy as any of them, especially as grandmother had strenuously forbidden his attempting to mend matters by "threading his way in and out," and getting lost himself in the process. And yet when they were all comfortably at the hotel again, their troubles forgotten, and Sylvia had time to relate her remarkable dream, he teased her unmercifully the whole evening about her description of the personal appearance of Henry the Fourth. He was, according to Ralph, neither tall nor pale, and he certainly could not have had long thin hands, nor did people—kings, that is to say, at that date—wear lace ruffles or pointed shoes. Had Molly not known, for a fact, that all their lesson books were unget-at-ably packed up, she would certainly have suspected Ralph of a sly peep at Mrs. Markham, just on purpose "to set Sylvia down." But failing this weapon, her defence of Sylvia was, it must be confessed, somewhat illogical.

She didn't care, she declared, whether Henry the Fourth was big or little, or how he was dressed. It was very clever of Sylvia to dream such a nice dream about real history things, and Ralph couldn't dream such a dream if he tried ever so hard.

Boys are aggravating creatures, are they not?

CHAPTER IV.

THE SIX PINLESS BROOCHES.

> "They have no school, no governess, and do just what they please,
> No little worries vex the birds that live up in the trees."
>
> THE DISCONTENTED STARLINGS.

Not many days after this thrilling adventure of Sylvia's, the little party of travellers reached their destination, grandmother's pretty house at Châlet. They were of course delighted to be there, everything was so bright, and fresh, and comfortable, and grandmother herself was glad to be again settled down at what to her now represented home. But yet, at the bottom of their hearts, the children were a little sorry that the travelling was over. True, Molly declared that, though their passage across the Channel had really been a very good one as these dreadful experiences go, nothing would *ever* induce her to repeat the experiment; whatever came of it, there was no help for it, live and die in France, at least on this side of the water, she *must*.

"I am never going to marry, you know," she observed to Sylvia, "so for that it doesn't matter, as of course I *couldn't* marry a Frenchman. But you will come over to see me sometimes and bring your children, and when I get very old, as I shall have no one to be kind to me you see, I daresay I shall get some one to let me be their concierge like the old woman in our lodge. I shall be very poor of course, but *anything* is better than crossing the sea again."

It sounded very melancholy. Sylvia's mind misgave her that perhaps she should offer to stay with Molly "for always" on this side of the channel, but she did not feel quite sure about it. And the odd thing was that of them all Molly had most relished the travelling, and was most eager to set off again. She liked the fuss and bustle of it, she said; she liked the feeling of not being obliged to do any special thing at any special hour, for regularity and method were sore crosses to Molly.

"It is so nice," she said, "to feel when we get up in the morning that we shall be out of one bustle into another all day, and nobody to say 'You will be late for your music,' or, 'Have you finished your geography, Molly?'"

"Well," said Sylvia, "I am sure you haven't much of that kind of thing just now, Molly. We have *far* less lessons than we had at home. It is almost like holidays."

This was quite true. It had been settled between grandmother and their father that for the first two or three months the children should not have many lessons. They had been working pretty hard for a year or two with a very good, but rather strict, governess, and Sylvia, at no time exceedingly strong, had begun to look a little fagged.

"They will have plenty to use their brains upon at first," said their father. "The novelty of everything, the different manners and customs, and the complete change of life, all that will be enough to occupy and interest them, and I don't want to overwork them. Let them run wild for a little."

It sounded very reasonable, but grandmother had her doubts about it all the same. "Running wild" in her experience had never tended to making little people happier or more contented.

"They are always better and more able to enjoy play-time when they feel that they have done some work well and thoroughly," she said to aunty. "However, we must wait a little. If I am not much mistaken, the children themselves will be the first to tire of being too much at their own disposal."

For a few weeks it seemed as if Mr. Heriott had been right. The children were so interested and amused by all they saw that it really seemed as if there would not be room in their minds for anything else. Every time they went out a walk they returned, Molly especially, in raptures with some new marvel. The bullocks who drew the carts, soft-eyed, clumsy creatures, looking, she declared, so "sweet and patient;" the endless varieties of "sisters," with the wonderful diversity of caps; the chatter, and bustle, and clatter on the market-days; the queer, quaint figures that passed their gates on horse and pony back, jogging along with their butter and cheese and eggs from the mountain farms—all and everything was interesting and marvellous and entertaining to the last degree.

"I don't know how other children find time to do lessons here," she said to Sylvia one day. "It is quite difficult to remember just practising and French, and think what lots of other lessons we did at home, and we seemed to have much more time."

"Yes," said Sylvia, "and do you know, Molly, I think I liked it better. Just now at the end of the day I never feel as if I had done anything nicely and settledly, and I think Ralph feels so too. *He* is going to school regularly next month, every day. I wish we were too."

"*I* don't," said Molly, "and it will be very horrid of you, Sylvia, if you go putting anything like that into grandmother's head. There now, she is calling us, and I am not *nearly* ready. Where *are* my gloves? Oh, I cannot find them."

"What did you do with them yesterday when you came in?" said Sylvia. "You ran down to the lodge to see the soldiers passing; don't you remember, just when you had half taken off your things?"

"Oh yes, and I believe I left them in my other jacket pocket. Yes, here they are. There is grandmother calling again. Do run, Sylvia, and tell her I'm just coming."

Molly was going out alone with grandmother to-day, and having known all the morning at what time she was to be ready, there was no excuse for her tardiness.

"My dear child," said grandmother, who, tired of waiting, just then made her appearance in their room, "what have you been doing? And you don't look half dressed now. See, your collar is tumbling off. I must really tell Marcelline never to let you go out without looking you all over."

"It wasn't Marcelline's fault, grandmother dear," said Molly. "I'm so sorry. I dressed in such a hurry."

"And why in such a hurry?" asked grandmother. "This is not a day on which you have any lessons."

"No-o," began Molly; but a new thought struck grandmother. "Oh, by the by, children, where are your letters for your father? I told you I should take them to the post myself, you remember, as I wasn't sure how many stamps to put on for Cairo."

Sylvia looked at Molly, Molly looked at Sylvia. Neither dared look at grandmother. Both grew very red. At last,

"I am *so* sorry, grandmother dear."

"I am *so* sorry, dear grandmother."

"We are both *so* sorry; we *quite* forgot we were to write them this morning."

Grandmother looked at them both with a somewhat curious expression.

"You both forgot?" she said. "Have you so much to do, my dear little girls, that you haven't room in your minds to remember even this one thing?"

"No, grandmother, it isn't that. I should have remembered," said Sylvia in a low voice.

"I don't know, grandmother dear," replied Molly, briskly. "My mind does seem very full. I don't know how it is, I'm sure."

Grandmother quietly opened a drawer in a chest of drawers near to which she was standing. It was very neat. The different articles it contained were arranged in little heaps; there were a good many things in it—gloves, scarfs, handkerchiefs, ribbons, collars, but there seemed plenty of room for all.

"Whose drawer is this?" she asked.

'WHOSE DRAWER IS THIS?'

"Mine," said Sylvia.

"Sylvia's," answered Molly in the same breath, but growing very red as she saw grandmother's hand and eyes turning in the direction of the neighbour drawer to the one she had opened.

"I am so sorry, grandmother dear," she exclaimed; "I wish you wouldn't look at mine to-day. I was going to put it tidy, but I hadn't time."

It was too late. Grandmother had already opened the drawer. Ah, dear! what a revelation! Gloves, handkerchiefs, scarfs, ribbons, collars; collars ribbons, scarfs, handkerchiefs, gloves, in a sort of *pot-pourri* all together, or as if waiting to be beaten up into some wonderful new kind of pudding! Molly grew redder and redder.

"Dear me!" said grandmother. "This is your drawer, I suppose, Molly. How is it it is so much smaller than Sylvia's?"

"It isn't, grandmother dear," said Molly, rather surprised at the turn of the conversation. "It is just the same size exactly."

"Then how is it you have so many more things to keep in it than Sylvia?"

"I haven't, grandmother dear," said Molly. "We have just exactly the same of everything."

"And yet yours looks crowded to the last degree—far too full—and in hers there seems plenty of room for everything."

"Because, grandmother dear," said Molly, opening wide her eyes, "hers is neat and mine isn't."

"Ah," said grandmother. "See what comes of order. Suppose you try a little of it with that mind of yours, Molly, which you say seems always too full. Do you know I strongly suspect that if everything in it were very neatly arranged, you would find a very great deal of room in it; you would be surprised to find how little, not how much, it contains."

"*Would* I, grandmother dear?" said Molly, looking rather mystified. "I don't quite understand."

"Think about it a little, and then I fancy you will understand," said grandmother. "But we really must go now, or I shall be too late for what I wanted to do. There is that collar of yours loose again, Molly. A little brooch would be the proper thing to fasten it with. You have several."

Poor Molly—her unlucky star was in the ascendant this afternoon surely! She grew very red again, as she answered confusedly,

"Yes, grandmother dear."

"Well then, quick, my dear. Put on the brooch with the bit of coral in the middle, like the one that Sylvia has on now."

"Please, grandmother dear, that one's pin's broken."

"The pin's broken! Ah, well, we'll take it to have it mended then. Where is it, my dear? Give it to me."

Molly opened the unlucky drawer, and after a minute or two's fumbling extracted from its depths a little brooch which she handed to grandmother. Grandmother looked at it.

"This is not the one, Molly. This is the one Aunty sent you on your last birthday, with the little turquoises round it."

Molly turned quickly.

"Oh yes. It isn't the coral one. It must be in the drawer."

Another rummage brought forth the coral one.

"But the turquoise one has no pin either!"

"No, grandmother dear. It broke last week."

"Then it too must go to be mended," said grandmother with decision. "See, here is another one that will do for to-day."

She, in turn, drew forth another brooch. A little silver one this time, in the shape of a bird flying. But as she was handing it to Molly, "Why, this one *also* has no pin!" she exclaimed.

"No, grandmother dear. I broke it the day before yesterday."

Grandmother laid the three brooches down in a row.

"How many brooches in all have you, Molly?" she said.

"Six, grandmother dear. They are just the same as Sylvia has. We have each six."

"And where are the three others?"

Molly opened a little box that stood on the top of the chest of drawers.

"They're here," she said, and so they were, poor things. A little mosaic brooch set in silver, a mother-of-pearl with steel border, and a tortoise-shell one in the shape of a crescent; these made up her possessions.

"I meant," she added naïvely, "I meant to have put them all in this box as I broke them, but I left the coral one, and the turquoise one, and the bird in the drawer by mistake."

"*As you broke them?*" repeated grandmother. "How many are broken then?"

"All," said Molly. "I mean the pins are."

It was quite true. There lay the six brooches—brooches indeed no longer—for not a pin was there to boast of among them!

"Six pinless brooches!" said grandmother drily, taking them up one after another. "Six pinless brooches—the property of one careless little girl. Little girls are changed from the days when I was young! I shall take these six brooches to be mended at once, Molly, but what I shall do with them when they are mended I cannot as yet say."

She put them all in the little box from which three of them had been taken, and with it in her hand went quietly out of the room. Molly, by this time almost in tears, remained behind for a moment to whisper to Sylvia,

"Is grandmother dreadfully angry, do you think, Sylvia? I am so frightened, I wish I wasn't going out with her."

"Then you should not have been so horribly careless. I never knew any one so careless," said Sylvia, in rather a Job's comforter tone of voice. "Of course you must tell grandmother how sorry you are, and how ashamed of yourself, and ask her to forgive you."

"Grandmother dear," said Molly, her irrepressible spirits rising again when she found herself out in the pleasant fresh air, sitting opposite grandmother in the carriage, bowling along so smoothly —grandmother having made no further allusion to the unfortunate brooches—"Grandmother dear, I am so sorry and so ashamed of myself. Will you please forgive me?"

"And what then, my dear?" said grandmother.

"I will try to be careful; indeed I will. I will tell you how it is I break them so, grandmother dear. I am always in such a hurry, and brooches *are* so provoking sometimes. They won't go in, and I give them a push, and then they just squock across in a moment."

"They just *what*?" said grandmother.

"Squock across, grandmother dear," said Molly serenely. "It's a word of my own. I have a good many words of my own like that. But I won't say them if you'd rather not. I've got a plan in my head—it's just come there—of teaching myself to be more careful with brooches, so *please*, grandmother dear, do try me again when the brooches are mended. *Of course* I'll pay them out of my own money."

"Well, we'll see," said grandmother, as the carriage stopped at the jeweller's shop where the poor brooches were to be doctored.

During the next two days there was a decided improvement in Molly. She spent a great part of them in putting her drawers and other possessions in order, and was actually discovered in a quiet corner mending a pair of gloves. She was not once late for breakfast or dinner, and, notwithstanding the want of the brooches, her collars retained their position with unusual docility. All these symptoms were not lost on grandmother, and to Molly's great satisfaction, on the evening of the third day she slipped into her hand a little box which had just been left at the door.

"The brooches, Molly," said grandmother. "They have cost just three francs. I think I may trust you with them, may I not?"

"Oh yes, grandmother dear. I'm sure you may," said Molly, radiant. "And do you know my drawers are just *beautiful*. I wish you could see them."

"Never fear, my dear. I shall be sure to take a look at them some day soon. Shall I pay them an unexpected visit—eh, Molly?"

"If you like," replied the little girl complacently. "I've quite left off being careless and untidy; it's so much nicer to be careful and neat. Good-night, grandmother dear, and thank you so much for teaching me so nicely."

"Good-night, grand-daughter dear. But remember, my little Molly, that Rome was not built in a day."

"Of course not—how could a big town be built in a day? Grandmother dear, what funny things you do say," said Molly, opening wide her eyes.

"*The better to make you think, my dear*," said grandmother, in a gruff voice that made Molly jump.

"Oh dear! how you do frighten me when you speak like that, grandmother dear," she said in such a piteous tone that they all burst out laughing at her.

"My poor little girl, it is a shame to tease you," said grandmother, drawing her towards her. "To speak plainly, my dear, what I want you to remember is this: Faults are not cured, any more than big towns are built, in a day."

"No, I know they are not. I'm not forgetting that. I've been making a lot of plans for making myself remember about being careful," said Molly, nodding her head sagaciously. "You'll see, grandmother dear."

And off to bed she went.

The children went out early the next morning for a long walk in the country. It was nearly luncheon time when they returned, and they were met in the hall by aunty, who told them to run upstairs and take off their things quickly, as a friend of their grandmother's had come to spend the day with her.

"And make yourselves neat, my dears," she said. "Miss Wren is a particular old lady."

Sylvia was down in the drawing-room in five minutes, hair brushed, hands washed, collar straight. She went up to Miss Wren to be introduced to her, and then sat down in a corner by the window with a book. Miss Wren was very deaf, and her deafness had the effect, as she could not in the least hear her own voice, of making her shout out her observations in a very loud tone, sometimes rather embarrassing for those to whom they were addressed, or, still worse, for those concerning whom they were made.

"Nice little girl," she remarked to grandmother, "very nice, pretty-behaved little girl. Rather like poor Mary, is she not? Not so pretty! Dear me, what a pretty girl Mary was the first winter you were here, twelve, no, let me see, fourteen years ago! Never could think what made her take a fancy to that solemn-looking husband of hers."

Grandmother laid her hand warningly on Miss Wren's arm, and glanced in Sylvia's direction, and greatly to her relief just then, there came a diversion in the shape of Molly. Grandmother happened to be asked a question at this moment by a servant who just came into the room, and had therefore turned aside for an instant as Molly came up to speak to Miss Wren. Her attention was quickly caught again, however, by the old lady's remarks, delivered as usual in a very loud voice.

"How do you do, my dear? And what is your name? Dear me, is this a new fashion? Laura," to aunty, who was writing a note at the side-table and had not noticed Molly's entrance, "Laura, my dear, I wonder your mother allows the child to wear so much jewellery. In *my* young days such a thing was never heard of."

Aunty got up from her writing at this, and grandmother turned round quickly. What could Miss Wren be talking about? Was her sight, as well as her hearing, failing her? Was grandmother's own sight, hitherto quite to be depended upon, playing her some queer trick? There stood Molly, serene as usual, with—it took grandmother quite a little while to count them—one, two, three, yes, *six* brooches fastened on to the front of her dress! All the six invalid brooches, just restored to health, that is to say *pins*, were there in their glory. The turquoise one in the middle, the coral and the tortoise-shell ones at each side of it, the three others, the silver bird, the mosaic and the mother-of-pearl arranged in a half-moon below them, in the front of the child's dress. They were placed with the greatest neatness and precision; it must have cost Molly both time and trouble to put each in the right spot.

Grandmother stared, aunty stared, Miss Wren looked at Molly curiously.

"Odd little girl," she remarked, in what she honestly believed to be a perfectly inaudible whisper, to grandmother. "She is not so nice as the other, not so like poor Mary. But I wonder, my dear, I really do wonder at your allowing her to wear so much jewellery. In *our* young days——"

For once in her life grandmother was *almost* rude to Miss Wren. She interrupted her reminiscences of "our young days" by turning sharply to Molly.

"Molly," she said, "go up to your room at once and take off that nonsense. What *is* the meaning of it? Do you intend to make a joke of what you should be so ashamed of, your own carelessness?"

Molly stared up in blank surprise and distress.

"Grandmother dear," she said confusedly. "It was my *plan*. It was to make me careful."

Grandmother felt much annoyed, and Molly's self-defence vexed her more.

"Go up to your room," she repeated. "You have vexed me very much. Either you intend to make a joke of what I hoped would have been a lesson to you for all your life, or else, Molly, it is as if you had not all your wits. Go up to your room at once."

Molly said no more. Never before had grandmother and aunty looked at her "like that." She turned and ran out of the room and up to her own, and throwing herself down on the bed burst into tears.

"I thought it was such a good plan," she sobbed. "I wanted to please grandmother. And I do believe she thinks I meant to mock her. Oh dear! oh dear! oh dear!"

Downstairs the luncheon bell rang, and they all seated themselves at table, but no Molly appeared.

"Shall I run up and tell her to come down?" suggested Sylvia, but "no," said grandmother, "it is better not."

But grandmother's heart was sore.

"I shall be so sorry if there is anything of sulkiness or resentfulness in Molly," she said to herself. "What *could* the child have had in her head?"

CHAPTER V.

MOLLY'S PLAN.

> "... Such a plague every morning with buckling shoes,
> gartering, and combing."
>
> THE TWIN RIVALS.

Soon after luncheon Miss Wren took her departure. Nothing more was said about Molly before her, but on leaving she patted Sylvia approvingly on the back.

"Nice little girl," she said. "Your grandmother must bring you to see me some day. And your sister may come, too, if she leaves her brooches at home. Young people in *my* young days——"

Aunty saw that Sylvia was growing very red, and looking as if she were on the point of saying something; Molly's queer behaviour had made her nervous: it would never do for Sylvia, too, to shock Miss Wren's notion of the proprieties by bursting out with some speech in Molly's defence. So aunty interrupted the old lady by some remark about her shawl not being thick enough for the drive, which quite distracted her attention.

As soon as she had gone, grandmother sent Sylvia upstairs to look for Molly. Sylvia came back looking rather alarmed. No Molly was there. Where could she be? Grandmother began to feel a little uneasy.

"She is nowhere in the house," said Sylvia. "Marcelline says she saw her go out about half-an-hour ago. She is very fond of the little wood up the road, grandmother: shall I go and look for her

there?"

Grandmother glanced round. "Ralph," she said. "Oh, I forgot, he will not be home till four;" for Ralph had begun going to school every day. "Laura," she went on, to aunty, "put on your hat and go with Sylvia to find the poor child."

Sylvia's face brightened at this. "Then you are not so vexed with Molly now, grandmother," she said. "I know it seemed like mocking you, but I am sure she didn't mean it that way."

"What did she mean, then, do you think?" said grandmother.

"I don't quite know," said Sylvia. "It was a plan of her own, but it wasn't anything naughty or rude, I am sure."

Aunty and Sylvia went off to the little wood, as the children called it—in reality a very small plantation of young trees, where any one could be easily perceived, especially now when the leaves were few and far between. No, there was no Molly there. Hurriedly, aunty and Sylvia retraced their steps.

"Let us go round by the lodge," said aunty—they had left the house by the back gate—"and see if old Marie knows anything of where she is."

As they came near to the lodge they saw old Marie coming to meet them.

"Is Mademoiselle looking for the little demoiselle?" she said with a smile. "Yes, she is in my kitchen—she has been there for half-an-hour. Poor little lady, she was in trouble, and I tried to console her. But the dear ladies have not been anxious about her? Ah yes! But how sorry I am! I knew it not, or I would have run up to tell Marcelline where she was."

"Never mind, Marie," said aunty. "If we had known she was with you, we should have been quite satisfied. Run in, Sylvia, and tell Molly to come back to the house to speak to your grandmother."

Sylvia was starting forward, but Marie touched her arm.

"A moment, Mademoiselle Sylvie," she said,—Sylvia liked to be called "Mademoiselle Sylvie," it sounded so pretty—"a moment. The little sister has fallen asleep. She was sitting by the fire, and she had been crying so hard, poor darling. Better not wake her all at once."

She led the way into the cottage, and they followed her. There, as she had said, was Molly, fast asleep, half lying, half sitting, by the rough open fireplace, her head on a little wooden stool on which Marie had placed a cushion, her long fair hair falling over her face and shoulders—little sobs from time to time interrupting her soft, regular breathing.

Sylvia's eyes filled with tears.

"Poor Molly," she whispered to aunty, "she must have been crying so. And do you know, aunty, when Molly does cry and gets really unhappy, it is dreadful. She seems so careless, you know, but once she does care, she cares more than any one I know. And look, aunty." She pointed to a little parcel on the floor at Molly's side. A parcel very much done up with string, and an unnecessary amount of sealing-wax, and fastened to the parcel a little note addressed to "dear grandmother."

"Shall I run with it to grandmother?" said Sylvia: and aunty nodding permission, off she set. She had not far to go. Coming down the garden-path she met grandmother, anxiously looking for news of Molly.

"She's in old Marie's kitchen," said Sylvia, breathlessly, "and she's fallen fast asleep. She'd been crying so, old Marie said. And she had been writing this note for you, grandmother, and doing up this parcel."

Without speaking, grandmother broke the very splotchy-looking red seal and read the note.

> "My dear, dear grandmother," it began, "Please do forgive me. I send you all my brooches. I don't *deserve* to keep them for vexing you so. Only I didn't, oh, indeed, I didn't mean to *mock* you, dear grandmother. It is that that I can't bear, that you should think so. It was a plan I had made to teach me to be careful, only I know it was silly—I am always thinking of silly things, but oh, *believe* me, I would not make a joke of your teaching me to be good.—Your own dearest
>
> "Molly."

"Poor little soul," said grandmother. "I wish I had not been so hasty with her. It will be a lesson to me;" and noticing that at this Sylvia looked up in surprise, she added, "Does it seem strange to you my little Sylvia, that an old woman like me should talk of having lessons? It is true all the same—and I hope, do you know, dear?—I hope that up to the very last of my life I shall have lessons to learn. Or rather I should say that I shall be able to learn them. That the lessons are there to be learnt, always and everywhere, we can never doubt."

"But," said Sylvia, and then she hesitated.

"But what, dear?"

"I can't quite say what I mean," said Sylvia. "But it is something like this—I thought the difference between big people and children was that the big people *had* learnt their lessons, and that was

why they could help us with ours. I know what kind of lessons you mean—not *book* ones—but being kind and good and all things like that."

"Yes," said grandmother, "but to these lessons there is no limit. The better we have learnt the early ones, the more clearly we see those still before us, like climbing up mountains and seeing the peaks still rising in front. And knowing and remembering the difficulties we had long ago when *we* first began climbing, we can help and advise the little ones who in their turn are at the outset of the journey. Only sometimes, as I did with poor Molly this morning, we forget, we old people who have come such a long way, how hard the first climbing is, and how easily tired and discouraged the little tender feet get."

Grandmother gave a little sigh.

"Dear grandmother," said Sylvia, "I am sure *you* don't forget. But those people who haven't learnt when they were little, they can't teach others, grandmother, when they don't know themselves?"

"Ah, no," said grandmother. "And it is not many who have the power or the determination to learn to-day the lessons they neglected yesterday. We all feel that, Sylvia, all of us. Only in another way we may get good out of that too, by warning those who have still plenty of time for all. But let us see if Molly is awake yet."

No, she was still fast asleep. But when grandmother stooped over her and gently raised her head, which had slipped half off the stool, Molly opened her eyes, and gazed up at grandmother in bewilderment. For a moment or two she could not remember where she was; then it gradually came back to her.

"Grandmother, will you forgive me?" she said. "I wrote a note, where is it?"—she looked about for it on the floor.

"I have got it, Molly," said grandmother. "Forgive you, dear? of course I will if there is anything to forgive. But tell me now what was in your mind, Molly? What was the 'plan'?"

"I thought," said Molly, sitting up and shaking her hair out of her eyes, "I thought, grandmother dear, that it would teach me to be careful and neat and not hurried in dressing if I wore *all* my brooches every day for a good while—a month perhaps. For you know it is very difficult to put brooches in quite straight and neat, not to break the pins. It has always been such a trouble to me not to stick them in, in a hurry, any how, and that was how I broke so many. But I'll do just as you like about them. I'll leave off wearing them at all if you would rather."

She looked up in grandmother's face, her own looking so white, now that the flush of sleep had faded from it, and her poor eyelids so swollen, that grandmother's heart was quite touched.

"My poor little Molly," she said. "I don't think that will be necessary. I am sure you will try to be careful. But the next time you make a plan for teaching yourself any good habit, talk it over with me first, will you, dear?"

Molly threw her arms round grandmother's neck and hugged her, and old Marie looked quite pleased to see that all was sunshine again.

Just as they were leaving the cottage she came forward with a basketful of lovely apples.

"They came only this morning, Madame," she said to grandmother. "Might she send them up to the house? The little young ladies would find them good."

Grandmother smiled.

"Thank you, Marie," she said. "Are they *the* apples? oh, yes, of course. I see they are. Is there a good crop this year?"

"Ah, yes, they seem always good now. The storms are past, it seems to me, Madame, both for me and my tree. But a few years now and they will be indeed all over for me. 'Tis to-morrow my fête day, Madame; that was why they sent the apples. They are very good to remember the old woman—my grand-nephews—I shall to-morrow be seventy-five, Madame."

"Seventy-five!" repeated grandmother. "Ah, well, Marie, I am not so very far behind you, though it seems as if I were growing younger lately—does it not?—with my little girls and my boy beside me. You must come up to see us to-morrow that we may give you our good wishes. Thank you for the beautiful apples. Some day you must tell the children the history of your apple-tree, Marie."

Marie's old face got quite red with pleasure. "Ah, but Madame is too kind," she said. "A stupid old woman like me to be asked to tell her little stories—but we shall see—some day, perhaps. So that the apples taste good, old Marie will be pleased indeed."

"What is the story of Marie's apple-tree, grandmother?" said Sylvia, as they walked back to the house.

"She must tell you herself," said grandmother. "She will be coming up to-morrow morning to see us, as it is her birthday, and you must ask her about it. Poor old Marie."

"Has she been a long time with you, grandmother dear?" said Molly.

"Twelve or thirteen years, soon after we first came here. She was in great trouble then, poor thing; but she will tell you all about it. She is getting old, you see, and old people are always fond

of talking, they say—like your poor old grandmother—eh, Molly?"

"*Grandmother*," said Molly, flying at her and hugging her, for by this time they were in the drawing-room again, and Molly's spirits had quite revived.

The apples turned out very good indeed. Even Ralph, who, since he had been in France, had grown so exceedingly "John Bull," that he could hardly be persuaded to praise anything not English, condescended to commend them.

"No wonder they're good," said Molly, as she handed him his second one, "they're *fairy* apples I'm sure," and she nodded her head mysteriously.

"Fairy rubbish," said Ralph, taking a good bite of the apple's rosy cheek.

"Well, they're something like that, any way," persisted Molly. "Grandmother said so."

"*I* said so! My dear! I think your ears have deceived you."

"Well, grandmother dear, I know you didn't exactly say so, but what you said made me think so," explained Molly.

"Not quite the same thing," said grandmother. "You shall hear to-morrow all there is to tell—a very simple little story. How did you get on at school, to-day, Ralph?"

"Oh, right enough," said Ralph. "Some of the fellows are nice enough. But some of them are awful cads. There's one—he's about thirteen, a year or so younger than I—his name's Prosper something or other—I actually met him out of school in the street, carrying a bundle of wood! A boy that sits next me in the class!" he added, with considerable disgust.

"Is he a poor boy?" asked Sylvia.

"No—at least not what you'd call a poor boy. None of them are that. But he got precious red, I can tell you, when he saw me—just like a cad."

"Is he a naughty boy? Does he not do his lessons well?" asked grandmother.

"Oh I daresay he does; he is not an ill-natured fellow. It was only so like a cad to go carrying wood about like that," said Ralph.

"Ralph," said grandmother suddenly. "You never saw your uncle Jack, of course; has your father ever told you about him?"

Ralph's face lighted up. "Uncle Jack who was killed in the Crimea?" he said, lowering his voice a little. "Yes, papa has told me how brave he was."

"Brave, and gentle, and good," said grandmother, softly. "Some day, Ralph, I will read you a little adventure of his. He wrote it out to please me not long before his death. I meant to have sent it to one of the magazines for boys, but somehow I have never done so."

"What is it about, grandmother? What is it called?" asked the children all together, Molly adding, ecstatically clasping her hands. "If you tell us stories, grandmother, it'll be *perfect*."

"What is the little story about?" repeated grandmother. "I can hardly tell you what it is about, without telling the whole. The *name* of it—the name your uncle gave to it, was 'That Cad Sawyer.'"

Ralph said nothing, but somehow he had a consciousness that grandmother did not agree with him that carrying a bundle of wood through the streets proved that "a fellow" must certainly be a cad.

CHAPTER VI.

THE APPLE-TREE OF STÉFANOS.

> "And age recounts the feats of youth."
>
> THOMSON.

"I was the only daughter among nine children," began old Marie, when the girls and Ralph had made her sit down in their own parlour, and they had all drunk her "good health and many happy returns" in raspberry vinegar and water, and then teased her till she consented to tell them her story. "That is to say, my little young ladies and young Monsieur, I had eight brothers. Not all my own brothers: my father had married twice, you see. And always when the babies came they wanted a little girl, for in the family of my grandfather too, there were but three boys, my father and his two brothers, and never a sister. And so one can imagine how I was fêted when I came, and of all none was so pleased as the old 'bon papa,' my father's father. He was already very old: in our family we have been prudent and not married boy and girl, as so many do now, and wish often they could undo it again. Before he had married he had saved and laid by, and for his sons there was something for each when they too started in life. For my father there was the cottage

and the little farm at Stéfanos."

"Where is Stéfanos, Marie?" interrupted Ralph.

"Not so far, my little Monsieur; nine kilometers perhaps from Châlet."

"Nine kilomètres; between five and six miles? We must have passed it when we were driving," said Ralph.

"Without doubt," replied Marie. "Well, as I was saying, my father had the paternal house at Stéfanos for his when he married, and my uncles went to the towns and did for themselves with their portions. And the bon papa came, of course, to live with us. He was a kind old man—I remember him well—and he must have had need of patience in a household of eight noisy boys. They were the talk of the country, such fine men, and I, when I came, was such a tiny little thing, you would hardly believe there could be a child so small! And yet there was great joy. 'We have a girl at last,' they all cried, and as for the bon papa he knew not what to do for pleasure.

"I shall have a little grand-daughter to lead me about when my sight is gone, I shall live the longer for this gift of thine,' he said to my mother, whom he was very fond of. She was a good daughter-in-law to him. She shall be called 'Marie, shall she not? The first girl, and so long looked for. And, Eulalie,' he told my mother, 'this day, the day of her birth, I shall plant an apple-tree, a seedling of the best stock, a 'reinette,' in the best corner of the orchard, and it shall be her tree. They shall grow together, and to both we will give the best care, and as the one prospers the other will prosper, and when trouble comes to the one, the other will droop and fade till again the storms have passed away. The tree shall be called 'le pommier de la petite.'"

"My mother smiled; she thought it the fancy of the old man, but she was pleased he should so occupy himself with the little baby girl. And he did as he said: that very day he planted the apple-tree in the sunniest corner of the orchard. And he gave it the best of his care; it was watered in dry weather, the earth about its roots was kept loose, and enriched with careful manuring; no grass or weeds were allowed to cling about it, never was an apple-tree better tended."

Marie paused. "It is not always those that get the most care that do the best in this world," she said, with a sigh. "There was my Louis, our eldest, I thought nothing of the others compared with him! and he ran away to sea and nearly broke my heart."

"Did he ever come back again?" asked the children. Old Marie shook her head.

"Never," she said. "But I got a letter that he had got the curé somewhere in the Amérique du sud—I know not where, I have not learnt all about the geography like these little young ladies—to write for him, before he died of the yellow fever. And he asked me to forgive him all the sorrows he had caused me: it was a good letter, and it consoled me much. That was a long time ago; my Louis would have been in the fifties by now, and my other children were obedient. The good God sends us comfort."

"And about the apple-tree, tell us more, Marie," said Molly. "Did it do well?"

"Indeed yes. Mademoiselle can judge, are not the apples good? Ah, yes, it did well, it grew and it grew, and the first walk I could take with the hand of the bon papa was to the apple-tree. And the first words I could say were 'Mi pommier à Malie.' Before many years there were apples, not so fine at the first, of course, but every year they grew finer and finer, and always they were for me. What we did not eat were sold, and the money given to me to keep for the Carnival, when the bon papa would take me to the town to see the sights."

"And did you grow finer and finer too, Marie?" said Sylvia.

Marie smiled.

"I grew strong and tall, Mademoiselle," she said. "As for more than that it is not for me to say. But *they* all thought so, the father and mother and the eight brothers, and the bon papa, of course, most of all. And so you see, Mademoiselle, the end was I got spoilt."

"But the apple-tree didn't?"

"No, the apple-tree did its work well. Only I was forgetting to tell you there came a bad year. Everything was bad—the cows died, the harvest was poor, the fruit failed. To the last, the bon papa hoped that 'le pommier de la petite' would do well, though nothing else did, but it was not so. There was a good show of blossom, but when it came to the apples, *every one* was blighted. And the strange thing was, my little young ladies and little Monsieur, that that was the year the small-pox came—ah, it was a dreadful year!—and we all caught it."

"*All?*" exclaimed Sylvia.

"Yes, indeed, Mademoiselle—all the seven, that is to say, that were at home. I cannot remember it well—I was myself too ill, but we all had it. I was the worst, and they thought I would die. It was not the disease itself, but the weakness after that nearly killed me. And the poor bon papa would shake his head and say he might have known what was coming, by the apple-tree. And my mother would console him—she, poor thing, who so much needed consoling herself—by saying, 'Come, now, bon papa, the apple-tree lives still, and doubtless by next year it will again be covered with beautiful fruit. Let us hope well that our little one will also recover.' And little by little I began to mend—the mother's words came true—by the spring time I was as well as ever

again, and the six brothers too. All of us recovered; we were strong, you see, very strong. And after that I grew so fast—soon I seemed quite a young woman."

"And did the small-pox not spoil your beauty, Marie?" inquired Sylvia with some little hesitation. It was impossible to tell from the old woman's face now whether the terrible visitor had left its traces or not; she was so brown and weather worn—her skin so dried and wrinkled—only the eyes were still fine, dark, bright and keen, yet with the soft far-away look too, so beautiful in an old face.

"No, Mademoiselle," Marie replied naïvely, "that was the curious part of it. There were some, my neighbour Didier for one, the son of the farmer Larreya——"

"Why, Marie, that's *your* name," interrupted Molly. "'Marie Larreya,'—I wrote it down the other day because I thought it such a funny name when grandmother told it me."

"Well, well, Molly," said Sylvia, "there are often many people of the same name in a neighbourhood. Do let Marie tell her own story."

"As I was saying," continued Marie, "many people said I had got prettier with being ill. I can't tell if it was true, but I was thankful not to be marked: you see the illness itself was not so bad with me as the weakness after. But I got quite well again, and that was the summer I was sixteen. My eldest brother was married that summer,—he was one of the two sons of my father's first marriage and he had been away for already some time from the paternal house. He married a young girl from Châlet; and ah, but we danced well at the marriage! I danced most of all the girls—there was my old friend Didier who wanted every dance, and glad enough I would have been to dance with him—so tall and straight he was—but for some new friends I made that day. They were the cousins of my brother's young wife—two of them from Châlet, one a maid in a family from Paris, and with them there came a young man who was a servant in the same family. They were pleasant, good-natured girls, and for the young man, there was no harm in him; but their talk quite turned my silly head. They talked of Châlet and how grandly the ladies there were dressed, and still more of Paris—the two who knew it—till I felt quite ashamed of being only a country girl, and the fête-day costume I had put on in the morning so proudly, I wished I could tear off and dress like my new friends. And when Didier came again to ask me to dance, I pushed him away and told him he tired me asking me so often. Poor Didier! I remember so well how he looked—as if he could not understand me—like our great sheep-dog, that would stare up with his soft sad eyes if ever I spoke roughly to him!

"That day was the beginning of much trouble for me. I got in the way of going to Châlet whenever I could get leave, to see my new friends, who were always full of some plan to amuse themselves and me, and my home where I had been so happy I seemed no longer to care for. I must have grieved them all, but I thought not of it—my head was quite turned.

"One day I was setting off for Châlet to spend the afternoon, when, just as I was leaving, the bon papa stopped me.

"'Here, my child,' he said, holding out to me an apple; 'this is the first of this season's on thy pommier. I gathered it this morning—see, it is quite ripe—it was on the sunny side. Take it; thou mayest, perhaps, feel tired on the way.'

"I took it carelessly.

"'Thanks, bon papa,' I said, as I put it in my pocket. Bon papa looked at me sadly.

"'It is never now as it used to be,' he said. 'My little girl has never a moment now to spare for the poor old man. And she would even wish to leave him for ever; for thou knowest well, my child, I could not live with the thought of thee so far away. When my little girl returned she would find no old grandfather, he would be lying in the cold church-yard.'

"The poor old man held out his arms to me, but I turned away. I saw that his eyes were filled with tears—he was growing so feeble now—and I saw, too, that my mother, who was ironing at the table—work in which I could have helped her—stooped to wipe away a tear with the corner of her apron. But I did not care—my heart was hard, my little young ladies and young Monsieur—my heart was hard, and I would not listen to the voices that were speaking in my conscience.

"'It is too bad,' I said, 'that the chances of one's life should be spoilt for such fancies;' and I went quickly out of the cottage and shut the door. But as I went I saw my poor bon papa lift his head, which he had bent down on his hands, and say to my mother,

"'There will be no more apples this year on the pommier de la petite. Thou wilt see, my daughter, the fortune of the tree will leave it.'

"I heard my mother say something meant to comfort him, but I only hurried away the faster.

"What my grandfather meant about my wishing to leave him was this,—my new friends had put it in my head to ask my parents to consent to my going to Paris with the family in which the two that I told you of were maid and valet. They had spoken of me to their lady; she knew I had not much experience, and had never left home. She did not care for that, she said. She wanted a nice pretty girl to amuse her little boy, and walk out with him. And of course the young man, the valet, told me he knew she could not find a girl so pretty as I anywhere! I would find when I got to Paris, he said, how I would be admired, and then I would rejoice that I had not stayed in my

stupid little village, where it mattered not if one had a pretty face or not. I had come home quite full of the idea—quite confident that, as I had always done exactly what I wished, I would meet with no difficulty. But to my astonishment, at the paternal house, one would not hear of such a thing!

"'To leave us—thou, our only girl—to go away to that great Paris, where one is so wicked—where none would guard thee or care for thee? No, it is not to be thought of,' said my father with decision; and though he was a quiet man who seldom interfered in the affairs of the house, I knew well that once that he had said a thing with decision, it was done with—it would be so.

"And my mother said gently,

"'How could'st thou ask such a thing, Marie?'

"And the bon papa looked at me with sad reproach; that was worse than all.

"So this day—the day that bon papa had given me the first apple of the season—I was to go to Châlet to tell my friends it could not be, I felt very cross and angry all the way there.

"'What have I done,' I said to myself, 'to be looked at as if I were wicked and ungrateful? Why should my life be given up to the fancies of a foolish old man like bon papa?'

"And when I got to Châlet and told my friends it was not to be, their regret and their disappointment made me still more displeased.

"'It is too much,' they all said, 'that you should be treated still like a bébé—you so tall and womanly that one might think you twenty.'

"'And if I were thee, Marie,' said one, 'I would go all the same. They would soon forgive thee when they found how well things would go with thee at Paris. How much money thou wouldst gain!'

"'But how could I go?' I asked.

"Then they all talked together and made a plan. The family was to leave Châlet the beginning of the week following, sooner than they had expected. I should ask leave from my mother to come again to say good-bye the same morning that they were to start, and instead of returning to Stéfanos I should start with them for Paris. I had already seen the lady, a young creature who, pleased with my appearance, concerned herself little about anything else, and my friends would tell her I had accepted her offer. And for my clothes, I was to pack them up the evening before, and carry the parcel to a point on the road where the young man would meet me. They would not be many, for my pretty fête costumes, the dress of the country, which were my best possessions, would be of no use in Paris.

"'And once there,' said my friend, 'we will dress thee as thou should'st be dressed. For the journey I can lend thee a hat. Thou could'st not travel with that ridiculous foulard on thy head, hiding all thy pretty hair.'

"I remember there was a looking-glass in the room, and as Odette—that was the girl's name—said this, I glanced at myself. My poor foulard, I had thought it so pretty. It had been the 'nouvel an' of the bon papa! But I would not listen to the voice of my heart. I set out on my return home quite determined to carry out my own way.

"It was such a hot walk that day. How well I remember it! my little young ladies and little Monsieur, you would hardly believe how one can remember things of fifty years ago and more, as if they were yesterday when one is old as I am! The weather had been very hot, and now the clouds looked black and threatening.

"'We shall have thunder,' I said to myself, and I tried to walk faster, but I was tired, and oh, so hot and thirsty. I put my hand in my pocket and drew out the apple, which I had forgotten. How refreshing it was!

"'Poor bon papa,' I said to myself. 'I wish he would not be so exacting. I do not wish to make him unhappy, but what can I do? One cannot be all one's life a little child.'

"Still, softer thoughts were coming into my mind, I began to wish I had not given my decision, that I had said I would think it over. Paris was so far away; at home they might all be dead before I could hear, the poor bon papa above all; it was true he was getting very old.

"Just then, at a turn in the road, I found myself in face of Didier, Didier Larreya. He was walking fast, his face looked stern and troubled. He stopped suddenly on seeing me; it was not often of late that we had spoken to each other. He had not looked with favour on my new friends, who on their side had made fun of him (though I had noticed the day of the wedding that Odette had been very ready to dance with him whenever he had asked her), and I had said to my silly self that he was jealous. So just now I would have passed him, but he stopped me.

"'It is going to thunder, Marie,' he said. 'We shall have a terrible storm. I came to meet thee, to tell thee to shelter at our house; I told thy mother I would do so. I have just been to thy house.'

"I felt angry for no reason. I did not like his watching me, and going to the house to be told of all my doings. I resented his saying 'thou' to me.

"'I thank you, Monsieur Didier,' I said stiffly. 'I can take care of myself. I have no wish to rest at your house. I prefer to go home,' and I turned to walk on.

"Didier looked at me, and the look in his eyes was very sad.

"'Then it is true,' he said.

"'What is true?'

"'That you are so changed'—he did not say 'thou'—'that you wish to go away and leave us all. The poor bon papa is right.'

"'What has bon papa been saying?' I cried, more and more angry, 'What is it to you what I do? Attend to your own affairs, I beg you, Monsieur Didier Larreya, and leave me mine.'

"Didier stopped, and before I knew what he was doing, took both my hands in his.

"'Listen, Marie,' he said. 'You *must*. You are scarcely more than a child, and I was glad for you to be so. It would not be me that would wish to see you all wise, all settled down like an old woman at your age. But you force me to say what I had not wished to say yet for a long time. I am older than you, eight years older, and I know my own mind. Marie, you know how I care for you, how I have always cared for you, you know what I hope may be some day? Has my voice no weight with you? I do not ask you now to say you care for me, you are too young, but I thought you would perhaps learn, but to think of you going away to Paris? Oh, my little Marie, you would never return to us the same!"

"He stopped, and for a moment I stood still without speaking. In spite of myself he made me listen. He seemed to have guessed that though my parents had forbidden it, I had not yet given up the thoughts of going away, and in spite of my silly pride and my temper I was much touched by what he said, and the thought that if I went away he would leave off caring for me came to me like a great shock. I had never thought of it like that; I had always fancied that whatever I did I could keep Didier devoted to me; I had amused myself with picturing my return from Paris quite a grand lady, and how I would pretend to be changed to Didier, just to tease him. But now something in his manner showed me this would not do; if I defied him and my friends now, he would no longer care for me. Yet—would you believe it, my little young ladies and young Monsieur?—my naughty pride still kept me back. I turned from Didier in a rage, and pulled away my hands.

"'I wish none of your advice or interference,' I said. 'I shall please myself in my affairs.'

"I hurried away; he did not attempt to stop me, but stood there for a moment watching me.

"'Good-bye, Marie,' he said, and then he called after me, 'Beware of the storm.'

"I had still two miles to go. I hurried on, passing the Larreyas' farm, and just a minute or two after that the storm began. I heard it come grumbling up, as if out of the heart of the mountains at first, and then it seemed to rise higher and higher. I was not frightened, but yet I saw it was going to be a great storm—you do not know, my young ladies, what storms we have here sometimes—and I was so hot and so tired, and when the anger began to pass away I felt so miserable. I could not bear to go home and see them all with the knowledge in my heart of what I intended to do. When I got near to the orchard, which was about a quarter of a mile from the house, I felt, with all my feelings together, as if I could go no farther. The storm seemed to be passing over—for some minutes there had been no lightning or thunder.

"'Perhaps after all it will only skirt round about us,' I said. And as I thought this I entered the orchard and sat down on my own seat, a little bench that—now many years ago—the bon papa had placed for me with his own hands beside my pommier.

"I was so tired and so hot and so unhappy, I sat and cried.

"'I wish I had not said I would go,' I thought. 'Now if I change one will mock so at me.'

"I leaned my head against the trunk of my tree. I had forgotten about the storm. Suddenly, more suddenly than I can tell, there came a fearful flash of lightning—all about me seemed for a moment on fire—then the dreadful boom of the thunder as if it would shake the earth itself to pieces, and a tearing crashing sound like none I had ever heard before. I screamed and threw myself on the ground, covering my eyes. For a moment I thought I was killed—that a punishment had come to me for my disobedience. 'Oh! I will not go away. I will do what you all wish,' I called out, as if my parents could hear me. 'Bon papa, forgive me. Thy little girl wishes no longer to leave thee;' but no one answered, and I lay there in terror. Gradually I grew calmer—after that fearful crash the thunder claps seemed to grow less violent. I looked up at last. What did I see? The tree next to my pommier—the one but a yard or two from my bench—stood black and charred as if the burning hand of a great giant had grasped it; already some of its branches strewed the ground. And my pommier had not altogether escaped; one branch had been struck—the very branch on the sunny side from which bon papa had picked the apple, as he afterwards showed me! That my life had been spared was little less than a miracle." Marie paused....

UNDER THE APPLE-TREE.

"I left the orchard, my little young ladies and young Monsieur," she went on after a moment or two, "a very different girl from the one that had entered it. I went straight to the house, and confessed all—my naughty intention of leaving them all, my discontent and pride, and all my bad feelings. And they forgave me—the good people—they forgave me all, and bon papa took me in his arms and blessed me, and I promised him not to leave him while he lived. Nor did I—it was not so long—he died the next year, the dear old man! What would my feelings have been had I been away in Paris?"

Old as she was, Marie stopped to wipe away a tear. "It is nearly sixty years ago, yet still the tears come when I think of it," she said. "He would not know me now if he saw me, the dear bon papa," she added. "I am as old as he was then! How it will be in heaven I wonder often—for friends so changed to meet again? But that we must leave to the good God; without doubt He will arrange it all."

"And Didier, Marie?" said Sylvia, after a little pause. "Did you also make friends with him?"

Marie smiled, and underneath her funny old brown wrinkled skin I almost think she blushed a little.

"Ah yes, Mademoiselle," she said. "That goes without saying. Ah yes—Didier was not slow to make friends again—and though we said nothing about it for a long time, not till I was in the twenties, it came all as he wished in the end. And a good husband he made me."

"Oh!" cried Molly, "I see—then *that's* how your name is 'Larreya' too, Marie."

They all laughed at her.

"But grandmother said you had many more troubles, Marie," said Sylvia. "Long after, when first she knew you. She said you would tell us."

"Ah yes, that is because the dear lady wishes not herself to tell how good she was to me!" said Marie. "I had many troubles after my husband died. I told you my son Louis was a great grief, and we were poor—very poor—I had a little fruit-stall at the market—"

"Like my old woman in Paris," said Molly, nodding her head.

"And there it was the dear lady first saw me," said Marie. "It was all through the apples—bon papa did well for me the day he planted that tree! They were so fine—Madame bought them for the poor gentleman who was ill—and then I came to tell her my history; and when she took this house she asked me to be her concierge. Since then I have no troubles—my daughter married, long ago of course, but she died, and her husband died, and the friends were not good for her children, and it was these I had to provide for—my grand-daughters. But now they are very well off—each settled, and so good to me! The married one comes with her bébé every Sunday, and the other, in a good place, sends me always a part of her wages. And my son too—he that went to Paris—he writes often. Ah yes, I am well satisfied! And always my great-nephews send me the apples—every year—their father and their grandfather made the promise, and it has never been broken. And still, my little young ladies and little Monsieur—still, the old apple-tree at the paternal house at Stéfanos, is called 'le pommier de la petite.'"

"How nice!" said the children all together. "Thank you, Marie, thank you so much for telling us the story."

CHAPTER VII.

GRANDMOTHER'S GRANDMOTHER.

"I'll tell you a story of Jack-o-my-nory,
And now my story's begun.
I'll tell you another of Jack and his brother,
And now my story's done."

OLD NURSERY RHYME.

Marie's story was the subject of much conversation among the children. Sylvia announced her intention of writing it down.

"She tells it so nicely," she said. "I could have written it down beautifully while she was talking, if she would have waited."

"She would not have been able to tell it so nicely if she had known you were waiting to write down every word as she said it," remarked grandmother. "At least in her place I don't think *I* could."

A shriek from Molly here startled them all, or perhaps I should say, *would* have done so, had they been less accustomed to her eccentric behaviour.

"What is the matter now, my dear?" said aunty.

"Oh," said Molly, gasping with eagerness, "grandmother's saying that *reminded* me."

"But what about, my dear child?"

"About telling stories; don't you remember grandmother *dear*, I said you would be *perfect* if you would tell us stories, and you didn't say you wouldn't."

"And what's more, grandmother promised me one," said Ralph.

"*Did* I, my dear boy?"

"Yes, grandmother," said Ralph, looking rather abashed, "don't you remember, grandmother—the day I called Prosper de Lastre a cad? I don't think he's a cad now," he added in a lower voice.

"Ah yes, I remember now," said grandmother. "But do you know, my dears, I am so sorry I cannot find your Uncle Jack's manuscript. He had written it out so well—all I can find is the letter in which he first alluded to the incident, very shortly. However, I remember most of it pretty clearly. I will think it over and refresh my memory with the letter, and some day I will tell it to you."

"Can't you tell it us to-night then, grandmother dear?" said Molly in very doleful tones.

They were all sitting round the fire, for it was early December now, and fires are needed then, even at Châlet! What a funny fire some of you would think such a one, children! No grate, no fender, such as you are accustomed to see—just two or three iron bars placed almost on the floor, which serve to support the nice round logs of wood burning so brightly, but alas for grandmother's purse, so swiftly away! But the brass knobs and bars in front look cheery and sparkling, and then the indispensable bellows are a delightful invention for fidgety fingers like those of Ralph and Molly. How many new "nozzles" grandmother had to pay for her poor bellows that winter I should really be afraid to say! And once, to Molly's indescribable consternation, the bellows got on fire *inside*; there was no outward injury to be seen, but they smoked alarmingly, and internal crackings were to be heard of a fearful and mysterious description. Molly flew to the kitchen, and flung the bellows, as if they were alive, into a pan of water that stood handy. Doubtless the remedy was effectual so far as extinguishing the fire was concerned, but as for the after result on the constitution of the poor bellows I cannot report favourably, as they were never again fit to use. *And*, as this was the fourth pair spoilt in a month, Molly was obliged to give up half her weekly money for some time towards replacing them!

But we are wandering away from the talk by the fire—grandmother and aunty in their low chairs working—the three children lying in various attitudes on the hearthrug, for hearthrug there was, seldom as such superfluities are to be seen at Châlet. Grandmother was too "English" to have been satisfied with her pretty drawing-room without one—a nice fluffy, flossy one, which the children were so fond of burrowing in that grandmother declared she would need a new one by the time the winter was over!

"*Can't* you tell it to us to-night then, grandmother dear?" said Molly.

"I would rather think it over a little first," said grandmother. "You forget, Molly, that old people's memories are not like young ones. And, as Marie says, it is very curious how, the older one gets, the further back things are those that one remembers the most distinctly. The middle part of my life is hazy compared with the earlier part. I can remember the patterns of some of my dresses as a *very* little girl—I can remember words said and trifling things done fifty years ago better than little things that happened last month."

"How queer!" said Molly. "Shall we all be like that, grandmother dear, when we get old?"

Grandmother laid down her knitting and looked at the children with a soft smile on her face.

"Yes, dears, I suppose so. It is the 'common lot.' I remember once asking *my* grandmother a question very like that."

"*Your* grandmother!" exclaimed all the children—Molly adding, "Had *you* ever a grandmother, grandmother dear?"

"Oh, Molly, how can you be so silly?" said Ralph and Sylvia, together.

"I'm not silly," said Molly. "It is you that are silly not to understand what I mean. I am sure anybody might. Of course I mean can grandmother remember her—did she know her? Supposing anybody's grandmother died before they were born, then they wouldn't ever have had one, would they now?"

Molly sat up on the rug, and tossed back her hair out of her eyes, convinced that her logic was unanswerable.

"You shouldn't begin by saying 'anybody's grandmother,'" remarked Ralph. "You put anybody in the possessive case, which means, of course, that the grandmother belonged to the anybody, and *then* you make out that the anybody never had one."

Molly retorted by putting her fingers in her ears and shaking her head vehemently at her brother. "Be quiet, Ralph," she said. "What's the good of muddling up what I say, and making my head feel *so* uncomfortable when you know quite well what I *mean*? Please, grandmother dear, will you go on talking as soon as I take my fingers out of my ears, and then he will have to leave off puzzling me."

"And what am I to talk about?" asked grandmother.

"Tell us about your grandmother. If you remember things long ago so nicely, you must remember story sort of things of then," said Molly insinuatingly.

"I really don't, my dear child. Not just at this moment, anyhow."

"Well, tell us *about* your grandmother: what was she like? was she like you?"

Grandmother shook her head.

"That I cannot say, my dear; I have no portrait of her, nor have I ever seen one since I have been grown up. She died when I was about fifteen, and as my father was not the eldest son, few, if any, heirlooms fell to his share. And a good many years before my grandmother's death—at the time of her husband's death—the old home was sold, and she came to live in a curious old-fashioned house, in the little county town a few miles from where we lived. This old house had belonged to her own family for many, many years, and, as all her brothers were dead, it became hers. She was very proud of it, and even during my grandfather's life they used to come in from the country to spend the worst of the winter there. Dear me! what a long time back it takes us! were my grandmother living now, she would be—let me see—my father would have been a hundred years old by now. I was the youngest of a large family you know, dears. His mother would have been about a hundred and thirty. It takes us back to the middle of George the Second's reign."

"Yes," said Molly so promptly, that every one looked amazed, "George the First, seventeen hundred and fourteen, George the Second, seventeen hundred and twenty-seven, George the Third, seventeen hundred and——"

"When did you learn that—this morning I suppose?" observed Ralph with biting sarcasm.

"No," said Molly complacently, "I always could remember the four Georges. Sylvia will tell you. *She* always remembered the Norman Conquest, and King John, and so when we spoke about something to do with these dates when we were out a walk Miss Bryce used to be as pleased as pleased with us."

"Is that the superlative of 'very pleased,' my dear Molly?" said aunty.

Molly wriggled.

"History is bad enough," she muttered. "I don't think we need have grammar too, just when I thought we were going to have nice story-talking. Did *you* like lessons when you were little, grandmother dear?" she inquired in a louder voice.

"I don't know that I did," said grandmother. "I was a very tom-boy little girl, Molly. And lessons were not nearly so interesting in those days as they are made now."

"Then they must have been—*dreadful*," said Molly solemnly, pausing for a sufficiently strong word.

"What did you like when you were little, grandmother?" said Sylvia. "I mean, what did you like best?"

"I really don't know what I liked *best*," said grandmother. "There were so many nice things. Haymaking was delicious, so were snow-balling and sliding; blindman's buff and snapdragon at

Christmas were not bad, nor were strawberries and cream in summer."

The children drew a long breath.

"Had you all those?" they said. "Oh, what a happy little girl you must have been!"

"And all the year round," pursued grandmother, "there was another delight that never palled. When I look back upon myself in those days I cannot believe that ever a child was a greater adept at it."

"What was that, grandmother?" said the children, opening their eyes.

"*Mischief*, my dears," said grandmother. "The scrapes I got into of falling into brooks, tearing my clothes, climbing up trees and finding I could not get down again, putting my head through window-panes—ah dear, I certainly had nine lives."

"And what did your grandmother say? Did she scold you?" asked Molly—adding in a whisper to Ralph and Sylvia, "Grandmother must have been an *awfully* nice little girl."

"My grandmother was to outward appearance quiet and rather cold," replied *their* grandmother. "For long I was extremely afraid of her, till something happened which led to my knowing her true character, and after that we were friends for life—till her death. It is hardly worth calling a story, but I will tell it to you if you like, children."

"Oh, *please* do," they exclaimed, and Molly's eyes grew round with satisfaction at having after all inveigled grandmother into story telling.

"I told you," grandmother began, "that my grandmother lived in a queer, very old-fashioned house in the little town near which was our home. It was such a queer house, I wish you could have seen it, but long ago it was pulled down, and the ground where it stood used for shops or warehouses. When you entered it, you saw no stair at all—then, on opening a door, you found yourself at the foot of a very high spiral staircase that went round and round like a corkscrew up to the very top of the house. By the by that reminds me of an adventure of my grandmother's which you might like to hear. It happened long before I was born, but she has often told it me. Ah, Molly, I see that twinkle in your eyes, my dear, and I know what it means! You think you have got grandmother started now—wound up—and that you will get her to go on and on; ah well, we shall see. Where was I? Taking you up the corkscrew stair. The first landing, if landing it could be called, it was so small, had several doors, and one of these led into a little ante-room, out of which opened again a larger and very pretty drawing-room. It was a long, rather narrow room, and what I admired in it most of all were wall cupboards with glass doors, within which my grandmother kept all her treasures. There were six of them at least—in two or three were books, of which, for those days, grandmother had a good many; another held Chinese and Indian curiosities, carved ivory and sandal-wood ornaments, cuscus grass fans, a pair or two of Chinese ladies' slippers—things very much the same as you may see some of now-a-days in almost every prettily furnished drawing-room. And one, or two perhaps, of the cupboards contained treasures which are rarer now than they were then—the *loveliest* old china! Even I, child as I was, appreciated its beauty—the tints were so delicate and yet brilliant. My grandmother had collected much of it herself, and her taste was excellent. At her death it was divided, and among so many that it seemed to melt away. All that came to my share were those two handleless cups that are at the top of that little cabinet over there, and those were by no means the most beautiful, beautiful as they undoubtedly are. I was never tired of feasting my eyes on grandmother's china when I used to be sent to spend a day with her, which happened every few weeks. And *sometimes*, for a great treat, she used to open the wall cupboards and let me handle some of the things—for it is a curious fact that a child *cannot* admire anything to its perfect satisfaction without touching it too, and looking back upon things now, I can see that despite her cold manner, my grandmother had a very good knowledge of children and a real love and sympathy for them.

"One day—it was a late autumn day I remember, for it was just a few days after my ninth birthday—my birthday is on the fifteenth of November,—my mother told me that my father, having to drive to the town the following day, would take me with him to spend the day with grandmother.

"'And Nelly,' said my mother, 'do try to be very good and behave prettily. I really fear, my dear, that you will never be like a young lady—it is playing so much with your brothers, I suppose, and you know grandmother is very particular. The last time you were there you know you dressed up the cat and frightened poor old Betsy (my grandmother's cook) so. Do try to keep out of mischief this time.'

"'I can't,' I said. 'There is no one to play with there. I would rather stay at home;' and I teased my mother to say I need not go. But it was no good; she was firm about it—it was right that I, the only girl at home, should go to see my grandmother sometimes, and my mother repeated her admonitions as to my behaviour; and as I really loved her dearly I promised to 'try to be very good;' and the next morning I set off with my father in excellent spirits. There was nothing I liked better than a drive with him, especially in rather cold weather, for then he used to tuck me up so beautifully warm in his nice soft rugs, so that hardly anything but the tip of my nose was to be seen, and he would call me his 'little woman' and pet me to my heart's content.

"When we reached my grandmother's I felt very reluctant to descend from my perch, and I said to my father that I wished he would take me about the town with him instead of leaving me there.

"He explained to me that it was impossible—he had all sorts of things to do, a magistrate's meeting to attend, and I don't know all what. Besides which he liked me to be with my grandmother, and he told me I was a silly little goose when I said I was afraid of her.

"My father entered the house without knocking—there was no need to lock doors in the quiet streets of the little old town, where everybody that passed up and down was known by everybody else, and their *business* often known better by the everybody else than by themselves. We went up to the drawing-room, there was nobody there—my father went out of the room and called up the staircase, 'Mother, where are you?'

"Then I heard my grandmother's voice in return.

"'My dear Hugh—is it you? I am so sorry. I cannot possibly come down. It is the third Tuesday of the month. My wardrobe day.'

"'And the little woman is here too. What shall I do with her?' said my father. He seemed to understand, though I did not, what 'wardrobe day' meant.

"'Bring her up here,' my grandmother called back. 'I shall soon have arranged all, and then I can take her downstairs again.'

"I was standing on the landing by my father by this time, and, far from loth to discover what my grandmother was about, I followed him upstairs. You have no idea, children, what a curious sight met me! My grandmother, who was a very little woman, was perched upon a high stool, hanging up on a great clothes-horse ever so many dresses, which she had evidently taken out of a wardrobe, close by, whose doors were wide open. There were several clothes-horses in the room, all more or less loaded with garments,—and oh, what queer, quaint garments some of them were! The clothes my grandmother herself had on—even those I was wearing—would seem curious enough to you if you could see them now,—but when I tell you that of those she was hanging out, many had belonged to *her* grandmother, and mother, and aunts, and great-aunts, you can fancy what a wonderful array there was. Her own wedding-dress was among them, and all the coloured silks and satins she had possessed before her widowhood. And more wonderful even than the dresses were a few, not very many, for indeed no room or wardrobe would have held *very* many, bonnets, or 'hats,' as I think they were then always called. Huge towering constructions, with feathers sticking straight up on the top, like the pictures of Cinderella's sisters in old-fashioned fairy-tale books—so enormous that any ordinary human head must have been lost in their depths."

"Did you ever try one on, grandmother?" said Molly.

Grandmother shook her head.

"I should not have been allowed to take such a liberty," she said. "I stood and stared about me in perfect amazement without speaking for a minute or two, till my grandmother got down from her stool, and my father told me to go to speak to her.

"'Are you going away, grandmother?' I said at last, my curiosity overcoming my shyness. 'Are these all your clothes? You will want a great many boxes to pack them in, and what queer ones some of them are!'

"'Queer, my dear,' said my grandmother. 'They are certainly not like what you get now-a-days, if that is what you mean by queer. See here, Nelly, this is your great-grandmother's wedding dress—white Padusoy embroidered in gold—why, child, it would stand alone! And this salmon-coloured satin, with the pea-green slip—will the stuffs they dye now keep their colour like that a hundred years hence?'

"'It's good strong stuff certainly,' said my father, touching it as he spoke. But then he went on to say to my grandmother that the days for such things were past. 'We don't want our clothes to last a century now, mother,' he said. 'Times are hurrying on faster, and we must make up our minds to go on with them and leave our old clothes behind. The world would get too full if everybody cherished bygone relics as you do.'

"I don't think she much liked his talking so. She shook her head and said something about revolutionary ideas, which I didn't understand. But my father only laughed; his mother and he were the best of friends, though he liked to tease her sometimes. I wandered about the room, peeping in among the rows of quaint costumes, and thinking to myself what fun it would be to dress up in them. But after a while I got tired, and I was hungry too, so I was very glad when grandmother, having hung out the last dress to air, said we must go down to dinner—my father had left some time before——"

"What did you have for dinner, grandmother?" said Sylvia. "It isn't that I care so much about eating," she added, blushing a little, "but I like to know exactly the sort of way people lived, you know."

"Only I wish you wouldn't interrupt grandmother," said Molly. "I'm *so* afraid it'll be bed-time before she finishes the story."

"Which isn't yet begun—eh, Molly?" said grandmother. "I warned you my stories were sadly deficient in beginning and end, and middle too—in short they are not stories at all."

"Never mind, they're *very* nice," said Molly; "and if I may sit up till this one's done I don't mind

your telling Sylvia what you had for dinner, grandmother dear."

"Many thanks for your small majesty's gracious permission," said grandmother. "But as to what we had for dinner, I really can't say. Much the same as you have now, I fancy. Let me see—it was November—very likely a roast chicken and rice pudding."

"Oh!" said Sylvia, in a tone of some disappointment; "go on then, please, grandmother."

"Where was I?" said grandmother. "Oh yes—well, after dinner we went up to the drawing-room, and grandmother, saying she was a good deal tired by her exertions of the morning, sat down in her own particular easy chair by the fire, and, spreading over her face a very fine cambric handkerchief which she kept, I strongly suspect, for the purpose, prepared for her after-dinner nap. It was really a regular institution with her—but I noticed she always made some little special excuse for it, as if it was something quite out of the common. She told me to amuse myself during her forty winks by looking at the treasures in the glass-doored cupboards, which she knew I was very fond of admiring, and she told me I might open the book cupboard if I wanted to take out a book, but on no account any of the others.

"Now I assure you, children, and by your own experience you will believe what I say, that, but for my grandmother's warnings, the idea of opening the glass doors when by myself would never have come into my head. I had often been in the drawing-room alone and gazed admiringly at the treasures without ever dreaming of examining them more closely. I had never even *wished* to do so, any more than one wishes to handle the moon or stars or any other un-get-at-able objects. But now, unfortunately, the idea was suggested, it had been put into my head, and there it stayed. I walked round the room gazing in at the cupboards in turn—the book ones did not particularly attract me—long ago I had read, over and over again, the few books in my grandmother's possession that I could feel interested in, and I stood still at last in front of the prettiest cupboard of all, wishing that grandmother had not forbidden my opening it. There were such lovely cups and saucers! I longed to handle them—one in particular that I felt sure I had never seen before. It had a deep rose pink ground, and in the centre there was the sweetest picture of a dear little shepherdess curtseying to an equally dear little shepherd.

"As I gazed at this cup the idea struck me that it would be delicious to dress one of my dolls in the little shepherdess's costume, and, eager to see it more minutely, I opened the glass door, and was just stretching up my hand for the cup, when I again remembered what my grandmother had said. I glanced round at her; she was fast asleep; there was no danger; what harm *could* it do for me to take the cup into my hand for a moment? I stretched up and took it. Yes, it was really most lovely, and the little shepherdess's dress seemed to me a perfect facsimile of the one I had most admired upstairs in my grandmother's wardrobe—a pea-green satin over a pale pink or rather salmon-coloured quilted slip. I determined that Lady Rosabella should have one the same, and I was turning over in my mind the possibilities of getting satin of the particular shades I thought so pretty, when a slight sound in the direction, it seemed to me, of my grandmother's arm-chair, startled me. I turned round hastily—how it was I cannot tell, but so it was—the beautiful cup fell from my hands and lay at my feet in, I was going to say, a thousand fragments."

"Oh!" exclaimed Sylvia and Molly—"oh, grandmother, what *did* you do?"

"First of all," grandmother continued, "first of all I stooped down and picked up the pieces. There were not a thousand of them—not perhaps above a dozen, and after all, grandmother was sleeping quietly, but to all appearance soundly. The sound that had startled me must have been a fancied one, I said to myself, and oh dear, what a terrible pity I had been startled!

"I gathered the bits together in my handkerchief, and stood staring at them in perfect despair. I dared not let myself burst out crying as I was inclined to do, for grandmother would have heard me and asked what was the matter, and I felt that I should sink into the earth with shame and terror if she saw what I had done, and that I had distinctly disobeyed her. My only idea was to conceal the mischief. I huddled the bits up together in my handkerchief, and huddled the handkerchief into my pocket—the first pocket I had ever had, I rather think—and then I looked up to see if the absence of the cup was very conspicuous. I thought not; the saucer was still there, and by pulling one or two of the other pieces of china forward a little, I managed to make it look as if the cup was just accidentally hidden. To reach up to do this, I had to draw forward a chair; in getting down from it again I made some little noise, and I looked round in terror to see if grandmother was awake. No, she was still sleeping soundly. *What* a blessing! I got out of one of the book cupboards a book I had read twenty times at least, and sitting down on a stool by the fire I pretended to read it again, while really all my ideas were running on what I should, what I *could* do. For I had no manner of doubt that before long the accident would be discovered, and I felt sure that my grandmother's displeasure would be very severe. I knew too that my having tried to conceal it would make her far less ready to forgive me, and yet I felt that I *could* not make up my mind to confess it all. I was so miserable that it was the greatest relief to me a minute or two afterwards to hear the hall door open and my father's hearty voice on the stair."

"'I have come to fetch you rather sooner than I said, little woman,' he exclaimed, as he came in, and then he explained that he had promised to drive a friend who lived near us home from the town in our gig, and that this friend being in a hurry, we must leave earlier than usual. My grandmother had wakened up of course with my father's coming in. It seemed to me, or was it my fancy?—that she looked graver than usual and rather sad as she bade us good-bye. She kissed me very kindly, more tenderly than was her habit, and said to my father that he must be sure to bring me again very soon, so that as I was going downstairs with him, he said to me that he was

glad to see how fond grandmother was getting of me, and that he would bring me again next week. *I* did not feel at all pleased at this—I felt more unhappy than ever I had done in my life, so that my father, noticing it, asked what was the matter. I replied that I was tired and that I did not care for going to grandmother's, and then, when I saw that this ungracious answer vexed my kind father, I felt more and more unhappy. Every moment as we walked along—we were to meet the carriage at the inn where it had been left—the bits of broken china in my pocket bumped against my leg, as if they would not let themselves be forgotten. I wished I could stop and throw them away, but that was impossible. I trudged along, gloomy and wretched, with a weight on my heart that it seemed to me I would never get rid of. Suddenly—so suddenly that I could hardly believe my own senses, something caught my eye that entirely changed my whole ideas. I darted forward, my father was a few steps in front of me—the footpath was so narrow in the old town that there was often not room for two abreast—*and*——"

Just at this moment the door opened, and grandmother's maid appeared with the tea-tray. Molly gave an impatient shake.

"Oh, *what* a bother!" she said. "I quite forgot about tea. And immediately after tea it is always time for us to go to bed. It is eight o'clock now, oh grandmother, *do* finish the story to-night."

"And why cannot my little girl ask it without all those shakes and 'bothers?'" said grandmother. She spoke very gently, but Molly looked considerably ashamed.

"Yes, grandmother dear," she replied meekly. Then she got up from the rug and stood by aunty patiently, while she poured out the tea, first "grandmothering" each cup to keep it from slipping about, then warming them with a little hot water, then putting in the beautiful yellow cream, the sugar, and the nice rich brown tea, all in the particular way grandmother liked it done. And during the process, Molly did not once wriggle or twist with impatience, so that when she carried grandmother's tea to her, very carefully and steadily, without a drop spilling over into the saucer in the way grandmother disliked to see, she got a kiss by way of reward, and what was still better perhaps, grandmother looked up and said,

"That's *my* good little woman. There is not much more of what you call 'my story,' to tell, but such as it is, you may sit up to hear it, if you like."

CHAPTER VIII.

GRANDMOTHER'S STORY——(*continued*).

> "O while you live, tell truth."
>
> HENRY IV., Part 1.

So in a few minutes they were all settled again, and grandmother went on.

"We were walking through a very narrow street, I was telling you—was I not? when I caught sight of something that suddenly changed my ideas. 'What was this something?' you are all asking, I see. It was a china cup in a shop window we were passing, a perfect match it seemed to me of the unfortunate one still lamenting its fate by rattling its bits in my pocket! It was a shabby little old shop, of which there were a good many in the town, filled with all sorts of curiosities, and quite in the front of the window, as conspicuous as if placed there on purpose, stood the cup. I darted forward to beg my father to let me wait a moment, but just then, curiously enough, he had met a friend and was standing talking to him, and when I touched his arm, he turned rather hastily, for, as I told you, he had not been pleased with my way of replying about my grandmother. And he said to me I must not be so impatient, but wait till he had finished speaking to Mr. Lennox. I asked him if I might look in at the shop window, and he said 'Yes, of course I might,' so I flew back, the bits rattle-rattling in my pocket, and stood gazing at the twin-cup. I must tell you that I happened to have in my possession an unusual amount of money just then—ten shillings, actually ten whole shillings, which my father had given me on my birthday, and as I always brought my purse with me when I came into the town, there it was all ready! I looked and looked at the cup till I was satisfied it was a perfect match, then glancing up the street and seeing my father still talking to his friend, I crept timidly into the shop, and asked the price of the pink cup and saucer in the window.

"The old man in the shop was a German; afterwards my grandmother told me he was a Jew, and well accustomed to having his prices beaten down. He looked at me curiously and said to me,

"'Ach! too moch for leetle young lady like you. Zwanzig—twenty schelling, that cup. Old lady bought von, vill come again buy anoder. Zwanzig—twenty schelling.'

"I grew more and more eager. The old lady he spoke of must be my grandmother; I had often heard my father laugh at her for poking about old shops; I felt perfectly certain the cups were exactly alike. I begged the old man to let me have it, and opened my purse to show him all I had—the ten shilling piece, two sixpences and a fourpenny, and a few coppers. That was all, and the old man shook his head. It was too little, 'twenty schelling,' he repeated, or at the very least, to oblige the 'young lady,' fifteen. I said to him I had not got fifteen—eleven and nine-pence was

everything I possessed, and at last, in my eagerness, I nearly burst into tears. I really do not know if the old man was sorry for me, or if he only thought of getting my money; however that may have been, he took my purse out of my hand and slowly counted out the money. I meanwhile, nearly dancing with impatience, while he repeated 'nine-pence, von schelling, zehn schelling ach vell, most be, most be,' and to my great delight he handed me the precious cup and saucer, first wrapping them up in a dirty bit of newspaper.

ZWANZIG—TWENTY SCHELLING, THAT CUP.

"Then he took the ten-shilling piece out of my purse, and handed it back to me, leaving me in possession of my two sixpences, my fourpenny bit, and my five coppers.

"I flew out of the shop, thanking the old man effusively, and rushed up the street clutching my treasure, while rattle-rattle went the bones of its companion in my pocket. My father was just shaking hands with Mr. Lennox and turning round to look for me, when I ran up. Mr. Lennox, it appeared, was the gentleman who was to have driven home with us, but something had occurred to detain him in the town, and he was on his way to explain this to my father when we met him.

"My father was rather silent and grave on the way home; he seemed to have forgotten that I had said anything to vex him; some magistrates' business had worried him, and it was that that he had been talking about to Mr. Lennox. He said to me that he was half afraid he would have to drive into the town again the next day, adding, 'It is a pity Lennox did not know in time. By staying a little later, we might have got all done.'

"To his astonishment I replied by begging him to let me come with him again the next day. He said to me, 'Why, Nelly, you were just now saying you did not care for going to see your grandmother, that it was dull, and tired you. What queer creatures children are.'

"I felt my cheeks grow hot, but I replied that I was sorry I had said that, and that I did want very much to go to see my grandmother again. Of course you will understand, children, that I was thinking about the best chance of putting back the cup, or rather its substitute, but my dear father thought I was sorry for having vexed him, and that I wanted to please him by asking to go again, so he readily granted my request. But I felt far from happy that evening at home, when something was said about my wanting to go again, and one of my brothers remarking that I must surely have enjoyed myself very greatly at my grandmother's, my father and mother looked at me kindly and said that their little Nelly liked to please others as well as herself. Oh how guilty I felt! I hated having anything to conceal, for I was by nature very frank. And oh, what a torment the poor cup and saucer were! I got rid of the bits by throwing them behind a hedge, but I could not tell where to hide my purchase, and I was so terribly afraid of breaking it. It was a relief to my mind the next morning when it suddenly struck me that I need not take the saucer too, the cup was enough, as the original saucer was there intact, and the cup was much easier to carry by itself.

"When we got to the town my father let me down at my grandmother's without coming in himself at all, and went off at once to his business. The door was open, and I saw no one about. I made my way up to the drawing-room as quickly and quietly as possible; to my great satisfaction there was no one there. I stole across the room to the china cupboard, drew forward a chair and climbed upon it, and, in mortal fear and trembling, placed the cup on the saucer waiting for it. They seemed to match exactly, but I could not wait to see any more—the sound of some one coming along the ante-room reached my ears—I had only just time to close the door of the

cupboard, jump down and try to look as if nothing were the matter, when my grandmother entered the room. She came up to me with both her hands out-stretched in welcome, and a look on her face that I did not understand. She kissed me fondly, exclaiming,

"'My own dear little Nelly. I thought you would come. I knew you would not be happy till you had ——.' But she stopped suddenly. I had drawn a little back from her, and again I felt my face get red. Why would people praise me when I did not deserve it? My grandmother, I supposed, thought I had come again because I had felt conscious of having been not particularly gracious the day before—whereas I knew my motive to have been nothing of the kind.

"'Papa was coming again, and he said I might come. I have nothing to do at home just now. It's holidays,' I said abruptly, my very honesty *now* leading me into misrepresentations, as is constantly the case once one has quitted the quite straight path of candour.

"My grandmother looked pained and disappointed, but said nothing. But *never* had she been kinder. It was past dinner time, but she ordered tea for me an hour earlier than her usual time, and sent down word that the cook was to bake some girdle-cakes, as she knew I was fond of them. And what a nice tea we might have had but for the uncomfortable little voice that kept whispering to me that I did not deserve all this kindness, that I was deceiving my grandmother, which was far worse than breaking twenty cups. I felt quite provoked with myself for feeling so uneasy. I had thought I should have felt quite comfortable and happy once the cup was restored. I had spent all, or very nearly all, my money on it. I said to myself, Who could have done more? And I determined not to be so silly and to think no more about it—but it was no good. Every time my grandmother looked at me, every time she spoke to me—worst of all when the time came for me to go and she kissed me, somehow so much more tenderly than usual, and murmured some words I could not catch, but which sounded like a little prayer, as she stroked my head in farewell—it was dreadfully hard not to burst into tears and tell her all, and beg her to forgive me. But I went away without doing so.

"Half way home a strange thought came suddenly into my mind. It seemed to express the unhappiness I was feeling. Supposing my grandmother were to die, supposing I were never to see her again, would I *then* feel satisfied with my behaviour to her, and would I still say to myself that I had done all for the best in spending my money on a new cup? Would I not then rather feel that it would have been less grievous to my grandmother to know of my breaking twenty cups, than to discover the concealment and want of candour into which my cowardliness had led me?

"'If grandmother were *dead*, I suppose she would know all about it,' I said to myself. 'I would not like to think of that. I would rather have told her myself.'

"And I startled my father by turning to him suddenly and asking if grandmother was very old. He replied, 'Not so very. Of course she is not *young*, but we may hope to have her among us many a day yet if God wills it, my little woman.'

"I gave a sigh of relief. 'I know she is very strong,' I said. 'She is very seldom ill, and she can take quite long walks still.'

"Thank God for it,' said my father, evidently pleased with my interest in my grandmother. And although it was true that already I was beginning to love her much more than formerly, still my father's manner gave me again the miserable feeling that I was gaining credit which I did not deserve.

"More than a week passed after this without my seeing my grandmother. It was not a happy week for me. I felt quite unlike my old light-hearted self. And constantly—just as when one has a tender spot anywhere, a sore finger for instance, everything seems to rub against it—constantly little allusions were made which appeared to have some reference to my concealment. Something would be said about my birthday present, and my brothers would ask me if I had made up my mind what I should buy with it, or they would tease me about my sudden fancy for spending two days together with my grandmother, and ask me if I was not in a hurry to go to see her again. I grew irritable and suspicious, and more and more unhappy, and before long those about me began to notice the change. My father and mother feared I was ill—'Nelly is so unlike herself,' I heard them say. My brothers openly declared 'there was no fun in playing with me now, I had grown so cross.' I felt that it was true—indeed both opinions were true, for I really *was* getting ill with the weight on my mind, which never, night or day, seemed to leave it.

"At last one day my father told me that he was going to drive into the little town where my grandmother lived, the next day, and that I was to go with him to see her. I noticed that he did not ask me, as usual, if I would like to go; he just said I must be ready by a certain hour, and gave me no choice in the matter. I did not want to go, but I was afraid of making any objection for fear of their asking my reasons, so I said nothing, but silently, and to all appearance I fear, sulkily, got ready as my father desired. We had a very quiet drive; my father made no remarks about my dullness and silence, and I began to be afraid that something had been found out, and that he was taking me to my grandmother's to be 'scolded,' as I called it in my silly little mind. I glanced up at his face as I sat beside him. No, he did not look severe, only grave and rather anxious. Dear father! Afterwards I found that he and my mother had been really *very* anxious about me, and that he was taking me to my grandmother, by her express wish, to see what she thought of the state of matters, before consulting a doctor or trying change of air, or anything of that kind. And my grandmother had particularly asked him to say nothing more to myself about my own unsatisfactory condition, and had promised him to do her utmost to put things right.

"Well—we got to my grandmother's—my father lifted me out of the carriage, and I followed him upstairs—my grandmother was sitting in the drawing-room, evidently expecting us. She came forward with a bright kind smile on her face, and kissed me fondly. Then she said to my father she was so glad he had brought me, and she hoped I would have a happy day. And my father looked at me as he went away with a sort of wistful anxiety that made me again have that horrible feeling of not deserving his care and affection. And oh, how I wished the long day alone with my grandmother were over! I could not bear being in the drawing-room, I was afraid of seeming to glance in the direction of the china cupboard; I felt miserable whenever my grandmother spoke kindly to me.

"And how kind she was that day! If ever a little girl *should* have been happy, that little girl was I. Grandmother let me look over the drawers where she kept her beautiful scraps of silk and velvet, ever so many of which she gave me—lovely pieces to make a costume such as I had fancied for Lady Rosabelle, but which I had never had the heart to see about. She let me 'tidy' her best work-box—a *wonderful* box, full of every conceivable treasure and curiosity—and then, when I was a little tired with all my exertions, she made me sit down on a footstool at her feet and talked to me so nicely—all about when *she* was a little girl—fancy that, Molly, your great-great-grandmother ever having been a little girl!—and about the queer legends and fairy tales that in those days were firmly believed in in the far-away Scotch country place where her childhood was spent. For the first time for all these unhappy ten days, I began to feel like myself again. Sitting there at my grandmother's feet listening to her I actually forgot my troubles, though I was in the very drawing-room I had learnt so to dread, within a few yards of the cupboard I dared not even glance at.

"There came a little pause in the conversation; I leaned my head against my grandmother's knee.

"'I wish there were fairies now,' I said. 'Don't you, grandmother?'

"Grandmother said 'no, on the whole she preferred things being as they were.' There were *some* fairies certainly she would be sorry to lose, Princess Sweet-temper, and Lady Make-the-best-of-it, and old Madame Tidy, and, most of all perhaps, the beautiful fairy *Candour*. I laughed at her funny way of saying things, but yet something in her last words made the uneasy feeling come back again. Then my grandmother went on talking in a different tone.

"'Do you know, Nelly,' she said, 'queer things happen sometimes that one would be half inclined to put down to fairies if one did not know better?'

"I pricked up my ears.

"'Do tell me what sort of things, grandmother,' I said eagerly.

"'Well'—she went on, speaking rather slowly and gravely, and very distinctly—'the other day an extraordinary thing happened among my china cups in that cupboard over there. I had one pink cup, on the side of which was—or is—the picture of a shepherdess curtseying to a shepherd. Now this shepherdess when I bought the cup, which was only a few days ago, was dressed—I am *perfectly* certain of it, for her dress was just the same as one I have upstairs in my collection—in a pale pink or salmon-coloured skirt, looped up over a pea-green slip—the picture of the shepherdess is repeated again on the saucer, and there it still is as I tell you. But the strangest metamorphosis has taken place in the cup. I left it one morning as I describe, for you know I always dust my best china myself. Two days after, when I looked at it again, the shepherdess's attire was changed—she had on no longer the pea-green dress over the salmon, but a *salmon* dress over a *pea-green* slip. Did you ever hear anything so strange, Nelly?'

"I turned away my head, children; I dared not look at my grandmother. What should I say? This was the end of my concealment. It had done *no* good—grandmother must know it all now, I could hide it no longer, and she would be far, far more angry than if at the first I had bravely confessed my disobedience and its consequences. I tried to speak, but I could not. I burst into tears and hid my face.

"Grandmother's arm was round me in a moment, and her kind voice saying, 'Why, what is the matter, my little Nelly?'

"I drew myself away from her, and threw myself on the floor, crying out to grandmother not to speak kindly to me.

"'You won't love me when you know,' I said. 'You will never love me again. It was *me*, oh grandmother! It was me that changed the cup. I got another for you not to know. I spent all my money. I broke it, grandmother. When you told me not to open the cupboard, I did open it, and I took out the cup, and it fell and was broken, and then I saw another in a shop window, and I thought it was just the same, and I bought it. It cost ten shillings, but I never knew it wasn't quite the same, only now it doesn't matter. You will never love me again, and nobody will. Oh dear, oh dear, what *shall* I do?'

"'Never love you again, my poor dear faithless little girl,' said grandmother. 'Oh, Nelly, my child, how little you know me! But oh, I am so glad you have told me all about it yourself. That was what I was longing for. I did so want my little girl to be true to her own honest heart.'

"And then she went on to explain that she had known it all from the first. She had not been asleep the day that I disobediently opened the cupboard, at least she had wakened up in time to see what had happened, and she had earnestly hoped that I would make up my mind to tell it frankly.

That was what had so disappointed her the next day when she had quite thought I had come on purpose to tell it all. Then when my father had come to consult her about the queer state I seemed to be in, she had not felt surprised. She had quite understood it all, though she had not said so to him, and she had resolved to try to win my confidence. She told me too that she had found out from the old German about my buying the cup, whose reappearance she could not at first explain.

"'I went to his shop the very next morning,' she told me, 'to see if he still had the fellow to the cup I had bought, as I knew he had two of them, and he told me the other had been bought by a little girl. Ten shillings was too much to give for it, Nelly, a great deal too much for you to give, and more than the cup was really worth. It was not a very valuable cup, though the colour was so pretty that I was tempted to buy it to place among the others.'

"'I don't mind about the money, grandmother,' I replied. 'I would have given ever so much more if I had had it. You will keep the cup now?' I added. 'You won't make me take it back to the old man? And oh, grandmother, will you really forgive me?'

"She told me she had already done so, fully and freely, from the bottom of her heart. And she said she would indeed keep the cup, as long as she lived, and that if ever again I was tempted to distrust her I must look at it and take courage. And she explained to me that even if there had been reason for my fears, 'even if I had been a very harsh and severe grandmother, your concealment would have done no good in the end,' she said. 'It would have been like the first little tiny seed of deceit, which might have grown into a great tree of evil, poisoning all your life. Oh, Nelly, never *never* plant that seed, for once it has taken root who can say how difficult it may be to tear it up?'

"I listened with all my attention; I could not help being deeply impressed with her earnestness, and I was so grateful for her kindness that her advice found good soil ready to receive it. And how many, many times in my life have I not recalled it! For, Ralph and Sylvia and Molly, my darlings, remember this—even to the naturally frank and honest there come times of sore temptation in life, times when a little swerving from the straight narrow path of uprightness would seem to promise to put all straight when things have gone wrong, times when the cost seems so little and the gain so great. Ah! yes, children, we need to have a firm anchor to hold by at these times, and woe for us then if the little evil seed has been planted and has taken root in our hearts."

Grandmother paused. The children too were silent for a moment or two. Then Sylvia said gently,

"Did you tell your father and mother all about it, grandmother?"

"Yes," said grandmother, "I did—all about it. I told them everything. It was my own choice. My grandmother left it to myself. She would not tell them; she would leave it to me. And, of course, I did tell them. I could not feel happy till I had done so. They were very kind about it, *very* kind, but still it was to my grandmother I felt the most grateful and the most drawn. From that time till her death, when I was nearly grown up, she was my dearest counsellor and guide. I had no concealment from her—I told her everything. For her heart was so wonderfully young; to the very last she was able to sympathise in all my girlish joys, and sorrows, and difficulties."

"Like you, grandmother dear," said Molly, softly stroking her grandmother's hand, which she had taken in hers. "She must have been just like you."

They all smiled.

"And when she died," pursued grandmother gently, almost as if speaking to herself, "when she died and all her things were divided, I begged them to give me the pink cup. I might have had a more valuable one instead, but I preferred it. It is one of those two over there on the little cabinet."

Molly's eyes turned eagerly in the direction of the little cabinet. "Grandmother dear," she said, solemnly, "when you die—I don't *want* you to die, you know of course, but when you *do* die, I wish you would say that *I* may have that cup—will you? To remind me, you know, of what you have been telling us. I quite understand how you mean: that day all my brooches were broken, I did awfully want not to tell you about them all, and I might forget, you see, about the little bad seed and all that, that you have been telling us so nicely. Please, grandmother dear, *may* I have that cup when you die?"

"Molly," said Sylvia, her face growing very red, "it is perfectly horrible of you to talk that way. I am quite ashamed of you. Don't mind her, grandmother. She just talks as if she had no sense sometimes. How *can* you, Molly?" she went on, turning again to her sister, "how *can* you talk about dear grandmother dying? *Dear* grandmother, and you pretend to love her."

Molly's big blue eyes opened wide with astonishment, then gradually they grew misty, and great tears welled up to their surface.

"I don't *pretend*—I *do* love her," she said. "And I don't *want* you to die, grandmother dear, do I? only we all must die some time. I didn't mean to talk horribly. I think you are very unkind, Sylvia."

"Children, children," said grandmother's gentle voice, "I don't like these words. I am sure Molly did not mean anything I would not like, Sylvia dear, but yet I know how *you* mean. Don't be in such a hurry to judge each other. And about the cup, Molly, I'll consider, though I hope and

believe you will not need it to remind you of the lesson I want to impress on you by the story of my long-ago troubles. Now kiss each other, dears, and kiss me, for it is quite bed-time. Good-night, my little girls. Ralph, my boy, open the door for your sisters, and pleasant dreams to you all."

CHAPTER IX.

RALPH'S CONFIDENCE.

"Sad case it is, as you may think
For very cold to go to bed;
And then for cold not sleep a wink."

WORDSWORTH'S *Goody Blaks*

"Grandmother," said Ralph, when they were all sitting at breakfast the next morning, "didn't you say that your grandmother once had an adventure that we might like to hear? It was at the beginning of the story you told us—I think it was something about the corkscrew staircase. I liked the story awfully, you know, but I'm fearfully fond of adventures."

Grandmother smiled.

"I remember saying something about it," she said, "but it is hardly worth calling an adventure, my boy. It showed her courage and presence of mind, however. She was a very brave little woman."

"Presence of mind," repeated Ralph. "Ah yes! that's a good thing to have. There's a fellow at our school who saved a child from being burnt to death not long ago. It was his little cousin where he lives. It wasn't he that told me about it, he's too modest, it was some of the other fellows."

"Who is he? what's his name?" asked Molly.

"Prosper de Lastre," replied Ralph. "He's an awful good fellow every way."

"Prosper de Lastre!" repeated Molly, who possessed among other peculiarities that of a sometimes most inconveniently good memory. "Prosper de Lastre! I do believe, Ralph, that's the very boy you called a cad when you first went to school."

Ralph's face got very red, and he seemed on the verge of a hasty reply. But he controlled himself.

"Well, and if I did," he said somewhat gruffly, "a fellow may be mistaken, mayn't he? I don't think him a cad *now*, and that's all about it."

Molly was preparing some rejoinder when grandmother interrupted her.

"You are quite right, Ralph, *quite* right not to be above owning yourself mistaken. Who *can* be above it really? not the wisest man that ever lived. And Molly, my dear little girl, why can you not learn to be more considerate? Do you know what 'tact' is, Molly? Did you ever hear of it?"

"Oh yes, grandmother dear," said Molly serenely. "It means—it means—oh I don't quite know, but I'm sure I do know."

"Think of it as meaning the not saying or doing to another person whatever in that other's place you would not like said or done to you—that is *one* meaning of tact anyway, and a very good one. Will you try to remember it, Molly?"

Molly opened her eyes.

"Yes, grandmother dear, I will try. But I *think* all that will be rather hard to remember, because you see people don't feel the same. My head isn't twisty-turny enough to understand things like that, quickly. I like better to go bump at them, quite straight."

"Without, in nine cases out of ten, the faintest idea what you are going to go bump straight at," said aunty, laughing. "Oh, Molly, you are irresistible!"

The laughing at her had laughed back Ralph's good humour anyway, and now he returned to the charge.

"Twisty-turny is like a corkscrew, grandmother," he said slyly, "and once there was an old house with a corkscrew stair——"

"Yes," said grandmother, "and in that old house there once lived an old lady, who, strange to say, was not always old. She was not very old at the time of the 'adventure.' You remember, children, my telling you that during her husband's life, my grandmother and he used to spend part of the winter in the old house where she afterwards ended her days. My grandfather used to drive backwards and forwards to his farms, of which he had several in the neighbourhood, and the town was a sort of central place for the season of bad weather and short days. Sometimes he used to be kept rather late, for besides his own affairs, he had, like his son, my father, a good deal of magistrate's business to attend to. But however late he was detained my grandmother

always sat up for him, generally in a little sitting-room she had on the storey above the long drawing-room I have described to you, almost, that is to say, at the top of the house, from attic to basement of which ran the lung 'twisty-turny, corkscrew staircase.' One evening, about Christmas time it was, I think, my grandfather was very late of coming home. My grandmother was not uneasy, for he had told her he would be late, and she had mentioned it to the servants, and told them they need not sit up. So there she was, late at night, alone, sewing most likely—ah girls, I wish I could show you some of her sewing—in her little parlour. She was not the least nervous, yet it was a little 'eerie' perhaps, sitting up there alone so late, listening for her husband's whistle—he always whistled when he was late, so that she might be *sure* it was he, when she went down to open the door at his knock—and more than once she looked at the clock and wished he would come. Suddenly a step outside the room, coming up the stair, made her start. She had hardly time to wonder confusedly if it could be my grandfather, knowing all the time it could *not* be he—the doors were all supposed to be locked and barred, and could only be opened from the inside—when the door was flung open and some one looked in. Not my grandfather certainly; the man who stood in the doorway was dressed in some sort of rough workman's clothes, and his face was black and grimy. That was all she had time to catch sight of, for, not expecting to see her there, the intruder, startled, turned sharply round and made for the stair. Up jumped my little grandmother; she took it all in in an instant, and saw that her only chance was to take advantage of his momentary surprise and start at seeing her. Up she jumped and rushed bravely after him, making all the clatter she could. Downstairs he flew, imagining very probably in his fright that two or three people instead of one little woman were at his heels, and downstairs, round and round the corkscrew staircase, she flew after him. Never afterwards, she has often since told me, did she quite lose the association of that wild flight, never could she go downstairs in that house without the feeling of the man before her, and seeming to hear the rattle-rattle of a leathern apron he was wearing, which clattered against the banisters as he ran. But she kept her head to the end of the chase; she followed him—all in the dark, remember—down to the bottom of the staircase, and, guided by the clatter of his apron, through a back kitchen in the basement which opened into a yard—there she stopped—she heard him clatter through this cellar, banging the door—which had been left open, and through which he had evidently made his way into the house—after him, as if to prevent her following him farther. Poor thing, she certainly had no wish to do so; she felt her way to the door and felt for the key to lock it securely. But alas, when she pushed the door closely to, preparatory to locking it, it resisted her. Some one or something seemed to push against her from the outside. Then for the first time her courage gave way, and thinking that the man had returned, with others perhaps, she grew sick and faint with fright. She sank down helplessly on the floor for a moment or two. But all seemed quiet; her courage and common sense returned; she got up and felt all about the door carefully, to try to discover the obstacle. To her delight she found that some loose sand or earth driven into a little heap on the floor was what prevented the door shutting. She smoothed it away with her hand, closed the door and locked it firmly, and then, faint and trembling, but safe, made her way back to the little room where her light was burning. You can fancy how glad she was, a very few moments afterwards, to hear my grandfather's cheerful whistle outside."

"But," interrupted Molly, her eyes looking bigger and rounder than usual, "but suppose the man had been waiting outside to catch him—your grandfather—grandmother, when he came in?"

"But the man wasn't doing anything of the sort, my dear Molly. He had gone off in a fright, and when my grandmother thought it over coolly, she felt convinced that he was not a regular burglar, and so it turned out. He was a man who worked at a smithy near by, and this was his first attempt at burglary. He had heard that my grandfather was to be out late, through one of the servants, whom he had persuaded not to lock the door, on the pretense that he might be passing and would look in to say good-night. It all came out afterwards."

"And was he put in prison?" said Molly.

"No," said grandmother. "The punishments for housebreaking and such things in those days were so frightfully severe, that kind-hearted people often refrained from accusing the wrong-doers. This man had been in sore want of money for some reason or other; he was not a dishonest character. I believe the end of it was that my grandfather forgave him, and put him in the way of doing better."

"That was very nice," said Molly, with a sigh of relief.

"Good-bye," said Ralph, who was just then strapping his books together for school. "Thank you for the story, grandmother. If it is fine this afternoon," he added, "may I stay out later? I want to go a walk into the country."

"Certainly, my boy," said grandmother. "But you'll be home by dinner."

"All right," said Ralph, as he marched off.

"And grandmother, please," said Sylvia, "may Molly and I go out with Marcelline this afternoon to do some shopping? The pretty Christmas things are coming in now, and we have lots to do."

"Certainly, my dears," said grandmother again, and about two o'clock the little girls set off, one on each side of good-natured Marcelline, in high spirits, to do their Christmas shopping.

Grandmother watched them from the window, and thought how pretty they looked, and the thought earned her back to the time—not so very long ago did it seem to her now—when their mother had been just as bright and happy as they—the mother who had never lived to see them

more than babies. Grandmother's eyes filled with tears, but she smiled through the tears.

"God is good and sends new blessings
When the old He takes away,"

she whispered to herself. It was a blessing, a very great blessing and pleasure to have what she had so often longed for, the care of her dear little grand-daughters herself.

"And Ralph," she added, "I cannot help feeling the responsibility with him even greater. An old woman like me, can I have much influence with a boy? But he is a dear boy in many ways, and I was pleased with the way he spoke yesterday. It was honest and manly. Ah! if we could teach our boys what *true* manliness is, the world would be a better place than it is."

The days were beginning to close in now. By four o'clock or half-past it was almost dark, and, once the sun had gone down, cold, with a peculiar biting coldness not felt farther north, where the temperature is more equable and the contrasts less sudden.

Grandmother put on her fur-lined cloak and set off to meet the little market-women. Once, twice thrice she walked to the corner of the road—they were not to be seen, and she was beginning to fear the temptations of the shops had delayed them unduly, when they suddenly came in view; and the moment they caught sight of her familiar figure off they set, as if touched at the same instant by an electric thrill, running towards her like two lapwings.

"Dear grandmother, how good of you to come to meet us," said Sylvia. "We have got such nice things. They are in Marcelline's basket," nodding back towards Marcelline, jogging along after them in her usual deliberate fashion.

"*Such* nice things," echoed Molly. "But oh, grandmother dear, you don't know what we saw. We met Ralph in the town, and I'm sure he didn't want us to see him, for what *do* you think he was doing?"

A chill went through poor grandmother's heart. In an instant she pictured to herself all manner of scrapes Ralph might have got into. Had her thoughts of him this very afternoon been a sort of presentiment of evil? She grew white, so white that even in the already dusky light, Sylvia's sharp eyes detected it, and she turned fiercely to Molly, the heedless.

"You naughty girl," she said, "to go and frighten dear little grandmother like that. And only this very morning or yesterday grandmother was explaining to you about tact. Don't be frightened, dear grandmother. Ralph wasn't doing anything naughty, only I daresay he didn't want us to see."

"But what *was* he doing?" said grandmother, and Molly, irrepressible still, though on the verge of sobs, made answer before Sylvia could speak.

"He was carrying wood, grandmother dear," she said—"big bundles, and another boy with him too. I think they had been out to the little forests to fetch it. It was fagots. But I *didn't* mean to frighten you, grandmother; I *didn't* know it was untact to tell you—I have been thinking all day about what you told me."

"Carrying wood?" repeated grandmother, relieved, though mystified. "What can he have been doing that for?"

"I think it is a plan of his. I am sure it is nothing naughty," said Sylvia, nodding her head sagely. "And if Molly will just leave it alone and say *nothing* about it, it will be all right, you will see. Ralph will tell you himself, I'm sure, if Molly will not tease."

"I won't, I promise you I won't," said Molly; "I won't say anything about it, and if Ralph asks me if we saw him I'll screw up my lips as tight as tight, and not say a single word."

"As if that would do any good," said Sylvia contemptuously; "it would only make him think we had seen him, and make a fuss. However, there's no fear of Ralph asking you anything about it. You just see him alone when he comes in, grandmother.

"Oh dear, oh dear," sighed Molly, as they returned to the house, "I shall never understand about tact, never. We've got our lessons to do for to-morrow, Sylvia, and the verbs are very hard."

"Never mind, I'll help you," said Sylvia good-naturedly, and grandmother was pleased to see them go upstairs to their little study with their arms round each other's waists as usual—the best of friends.

Half an hour later, Ralph made his appearance. He looked rather less tidy than his wont—for as a rule Ralph was a particularly tidy boy—his hair was tumbled, and his hands certainly could not have been described as *clean*.

"Well, Ralph, and what have you been doing with yourself?" said grandmother, as he came in.

Ralph threw himself down on the rug.

"My poor rug," thought grandmother, but she judged it wiser not, at that moment, to express her misgivings aloud.

Ralph did not at once reply. Then—

"Grandmother," he said, after a little pause.

"Well, my boy?"

"You remember my calling one of the boys in my class a cad—what Molly began about last night?"

"Well, my boy?" said grandmother again.

"Do you remember what made me call him a cad? It was that I met him carrying a great bundle of wood—little wood they call it—along the street one day. Well, just fancy, grandmother, *I've* been doing it too. That's what I wanted to stay later for this afternoon."

Grandmother's heart gave a bound of pleasure at her boy's frankness. "Sensible child Sylvia is," she said to herself. But aloud she replied with a smile,

"Carrying wood! what did you do that for, and where did you get it?"

"I'll tell you, I'll tell you all about it," said Ralph. "We went out after school to a sort of little coppice where there is a lot of that nice dry brushwood that anybody may take. Prosper knew the place, and took me. It was to please him I went. He does it every Thursday; that is the day we are let out of school early."

"And what does he do it for?" asked grandmother. "Is he—are his people so very poor that he has to do it? I thought all the boys were of a better class," she added, with some inward misgiving as to what Mr. Heriott might say as to his son's present companions.

"Oh, so they are—at least they are not what you would call poor," said Ralph. "Prosper belongs to quite rich people. But he's an orphan; he lives with his uncle, and I suppose he's not rich—Prosper himself, I mean—for he says his uncle's always telling him to work hard at school, as he will have to fight his way in the world. He has got a little room up at the top of the house, and that's what put it into his head about the wood. There's an old woman, who was once a sort of a lady, who lives in the next room to his. You get up by a different stair; it's really a different house, but once, somehow, the top rooms were joined, and there's still a door between Prosper's room and this old woman's, and one morning early he heard her crying—she was really *crying*, grandmother, she's so old and shaky, he says—because she couldn't get her fire to light. He didn't know what she was crying for at first, but he peeped through the keyhole and saw her fumbling away with damp paper and stuff that wouldn't light the big logs. So he thought and thought what he could do—he hasn't any money hardly—and at last he thought he'd go and see what he could find. And he found a *beautiful* place for brushwood, and he carried back all he could, and since then every Thursday he goes out to that place. But, of course, one fellow alone can't carry much, and you should have seen how pleased he was when I said I'd go with him. But I thought I'd better tell you. You don't mind, grandmother?"

IN THE COPPICE.

Grandmother's eyes looked very bright as she replied. "*Mind*, my Ralph? No, indeed. I am only glad you should have so manly and self-denying an example as Prosper's, and still more glad that you should have the right feeling and moral courage to follow it. Poor old woman! is she quite alone in the world? She must be very grateful to her little next-door neighbour."

"I don't know that she is—at least not so very," said Ralph. "The fun of it was, that for ever so long she didn't know where the little wood came from. Prosper found a key that opened the door, and when she was out he carried in the fagots, and laid the fire all ready for her with some of them; and when she came in he peeped through the keyhole. She was so surprised, she couldn't make it out. And the wood he had fetched lasted a week, and then he got some more. But the next time she found him out."

"And what did she say?"

"At first she was rather offended, till he explained how he had got it; and then she thanked him, of course, but not so very much, I fancy. He always says old people are grumpy—doesn't 'grogneur' mean grumpy, grandmother?—that they can't help it, and when his old woman is grumpy he only laughs a little. But *you're* not grumpy, grandmother, and you're old; at least getting rather old."

"Decidedly old, my boy. But why should I be grumpy? And how do you know I shouldn't be so if I were living up alone in an attic, with no children to love and cheer me, my poor old hands swollen and twisted with rheumatism, perhaps, and very little money. Ah, what a sad picture! Poor old woman, I must try to find out some way of helping her."

"She washes lace for ladies, Prosper says," said Ralph, eagerly. "Perhaps if you had some lace to wash, grandmother."

"I'll see what I can do," said grandmother. "You get me her name and address from Prosper. And, Ralph, we might think of something for a little Christmas present for her, might we not? You must talk to your friend about it. I suppose his relations are not likely to interest themselves in his protégée?"

"No," said Ralph. "His aunt is young, and dresses very grandly, and I don't think she takes much notice of Prosper himself. Oh no, *you* could do it much better than any one else, grandmother; find out all about her and what she would like—in a nice sort of way, you know."

Grandmother drew Ralph to her and kissed him. "My own dear boy," she said.

Ralph got rather red, but his eyes shone with pleasure nevertheless. "Grandmother," he said, half shyly, "I've had a lesson about not calling fellows cads in a hurry, but all the same you won't forget about telling us the story of Uncle Jack's cad, will you?"

"What a memory you have, Ralph," said grandmother. "You're nearly as bad for stories as Molly. No, I haven't forgotten. As well as I could remember, I have written out the little story—I only wish I had had it in your uncle's own words. But such as it is, I will read it to you all this evening."

Grandmother went to her Davenport, and took out from one of the drawers some sheets of ruled paper, which she held up for Ralph to see. On the outside one he read, in grandmother's neat, clear handwriting, the words——

CHAPTER X.

—"THAT CAD SAWYER."

> "I do not like thee, Doctor Fell,
> The reason why I cannot tell."
>
> Old Rhyme.

And grandmother of course kept her promise. That evening she read it aloud.

"They were Ryeburn boys—Ryeburn boys to their very heart's core—Jack and his younger brother Carlo, as somehow he had got to be called in the nursery, before he could say his own name plainly."

"That's uncle Charlton, who died when he was only about fifteen," whispered Sylvia to Ralph and Molly; "you see grandmother's written it out like a regular story—not saying 'your uncle this' or 'your uncle that,' every minute. Isn't it nice?"

Grandmother stopped to see what all the whispering was about.

"We beg your pardon, grandmother, we'll be quite quiet now," said the three apologetically.

"They had been at school at Ryeburn since they were quite little fellows, and they thought that nowhere in the world was there a place to be compared with it. Holidays at home were very delightful, no doubt, but school-days were delightful too. But for the sayings of good-byes to the dear people left at home—father and mother, big sister and little one, I think Jack and Carlo started for their return journey to school at the end of the midsummer holidays *very* nearly as cheerfully as they had set off for home eight weeks previously, when these same delightful holidays had begun. Jack had not very many more half-years to look forward to: he was to be a soldier, and before long must leave Ryeburn in preparation for what was before him, for he was

fifteen past. Carlo was only thirteen and small of his age. He *had* known what it was to be homesick, even at Ryeburn, more than three years ago, when he had first come there. But with a big brother—above all a big brother like Jack, great strong fellow that he was, with the kindest of hearts for anything small or weak—little Carlo's preliminary troubles were soon over. And now at thirteen he was very nearly, in his way, as great a man at Ryeburn as Jack himself. Jack was by no means the cleverest boy at the school, far from it, but he did his book work fairly well, and above all honestly. He was honesty itself in everything, scorned crooked ways, or whatever he considered meanness, with the exaggerated scorn of a very young and untried character, and, like most boys of his age, was inclined, once he took up a prejudice, to carry it to all lengths.

"There was but one cloud over their return to school this special autumn that I am telling you of, and that was the absence of a favourite master—one of the younger ones—who, an unexpected piece of good luck having fallen to his share, had left Ryeburn the end of the last half.

"'I wonder what sort of a fellow we shall have instead of Wyngate,' said Jack to Carlo, as the train slackened for Ryeburn station.

"'We shan't have any one as nice, that's certain,' said Carlo, lugubriously. 'There couldn't be any one as nice, could there?'

"But their lamentations over Mr. Wyngate were forgotten when they found themselves in the midst of their companions, most of whom had already arrived. There were such a lot of things to tell and to ask; the unfortunate 'new boys' to glance at with somewhat supercilious curiosity, and the usual legendary caution as to 'chumming' with them, till it should be proved what manner of persons they were; the adventures of the holidays to retail to one's special cronies; the anticipated triumphs in cricket and football and paper-chases of the forthcoming 'half' to discuss. Jack and Carlo soon found themselves each the centre of his particular set, too busy and absorbed in the present to give much thought to the past. Only later that evening, when prayers were over and supper-time at hand, did the subject of their former teacher and his successor come up again.

"A pale, thin, rather starved-looking young man came into the schoolroom desiring them to put away their books, which they were arranging for next morning. His manner was short but ill-assured, and he spoke with a slightly peculiar accent. None of the boys seemed in any hurry to obey him.

"'Cod-faced idiot!' muttered one.

"'French frog!' said another.

"'Is that the new junior?' said Jack, looking up from the pile of books before him.

"'Yes; did you ever see such a specimen?' replied a tall boy beside him, who had arrived the day before. 'And what a fellow to come after Wyngate too.'

"'He can't help his looks,' said Jack quietly; 'perhaps he's better than they are.'

"'Hallo, here's old Berkeley going to stick up for that nice specimen Sawyer!' called out the boy, caring little apparently whether Mr. Sawyer, who had only just left the room, was still within ear-shot or not.

"Jack took it in good part.

"'I'm not 'sticking up' for him, nor 'not sticking up' for him,' he said. 'All I say is, wait a bit till you see what sort of a fellow he is himself, whatever his looks are.'

"'And most assuredly they're *not* in his favour,' replied the tall boy.

"From this Jack could not honestly dissent; Mr. Sawyer's looks were not, in a sense, in his favour. It was not so much that he was downright ugly—perhaps that would have mattered less—but he was *poor* looking. He had no presence, no self-assertion, and his very anxiety to conciliate gave his manner a nervous indecision, in which the boys saw nothing but cause for ridicule. He did not understand his pupils, and still less did they understand him. But all the same he was a capital teacher, patient and painstaking to the last degree, clear-headed himself, and with a great power, when he forgot his nervousness in the interest of his subject, of making it clear to the apprehensions of those about him. In class it was impossible for the well-disposed of his pupils not to respect him, and in time he might have fought his way to more, but for one unfortunate circumstance—the unreasonable and unreasoning prejudice against him throughout the whole school.

"Now our boys—Jack and Carlo—Jack, followed by Carlo, perhaps I should say, for whatever Jack said Carlo thought right, wherever Jack led Carlo came after—to do them justice, I must say, did not at once give in to this unreasonable prejudice. Jack stuck to his resolution to judge Sawyer by what he found him to be on further acquaintance, not to fly into a dislike at first sight. And for some time nothing occurred to shake Jack's opinion that not improbably the new master was better than his looks. But Sawyer was shy and reserved; he liked Jack, and was in his heart grateful to him for his respectful and friendly behaviour, and for the good example he thereby set to his companions, only, unfortunately, the junior master was no hand at expressing his appreciation of such conduct. Unfortunately too, Jack's lessons were not his strong point, and Mr. Sawyer, for all his nervousness, was so rigorously, so scrupulously honest that he found it

impossible to pass by without comment some or much of Jack's unsatisfactory work. And Jack, though so honest himself, was human, and *boy*-human, and it was not in boy-human nature to remain perfectly unaffected by the remarks called forth by the new master's frequent fault-finding.

"'It's just that you're too civil to him by half,' his companions would say. 'He's a mean sneak, and thinks he can bully you without your resenting it. *Wyngate* would never have turned back those verses.'

"Or it would be insinuated how partial Sawyer was to little Castlefield, 'just because he's found out that Castle's father's so rich'—the truth being that little Castlefield, a delicate and precocious boy, was the cleverest pupil in the school, his tasks always faultlessly prepared, and his power of taking in what he was taught wonderfully great, though, fortunately for himself, his extreme good humour and merry nature made it impossible for his companions to dislike him or set him down as a prig.

"Jack laughed and pretended—believed indeed—that he did not care.

"'I don't want him to say my verses are good if they're not good,' he maintained stoutly. But all the same he did feel, and very acutely too, the mortification to which more than once Mr. Sawyer's uncompromising censure exposed him, little imagining that the fault-finding was far more painful to the teacher than to himself, that the short, unsympathising manner in which it was done was actually the result of the young man's tender-hearted reluctance to cause pain to another, and that other the very boy to whom of all in the school he felt himself most attracted.

"And from this want of understanding his master's real feelings towards him arose the first cloud of prejudice to dim Jack's reasonable judgment.

"Now at Ryeburn, as was in those days the case at all schools of old standing, there were legends, so established and respected that no one ever dreamed of calling them into question; there were certain customs tolerated, not to say approved of, which yet, regarded impartially, from the outside as it were, were open to objection. Among these, of which there were several, were one or two specially concerning the younger boys, which came under the junior master's direction, and of them all, none was more universally practised than the feat of what was called 'jumping the bar.' The 'bar,'—short in reality for 'barrier,'—was a railing of five or six feet high, placed so as to prevent any of the junior boys, who were late in the morning, from getting round by a short cut to the chapel, where prayers were read, the proper entrance taking them round the whole building, a matter of at least two minutes' quick walking. Day after day the bar was 'jumped,' day after day the fact was ignored; on no boy's conscience, however sensitive, would the knowledge of his having made his way into chapel by this forbidden route have left any mark. But alas, when Mr. Sawyer came things struck him in a different light.

"I cannot go into the question of how far he was wrong and how far right. He meant well, of that there is no doubt, but as to his judiciousness in the matter, that is another affair altogether. He had never been at a great English school before; he was conscientious to the last degree, but inexperienced. And I, being only an old woman, and never having been at school at all, do not feel myself able to give an opinion upon this or many other matters of which I, like poor Mr. Sawyer, have no experience. I can only, children, 'tell the tale as 'twas told to me,' and not even that, for the telling to me was by an actor in the little drama, and I cannot feel, therefore, that in this case the 'tale will gain by the telling,' but very decidedly the other way.

"To return, however, to the bar-jumping—of all the boys who made a practice of it, no one did so more regularly than Carlo, 'Berkeley minor.' He was not a lazy boy in the morning; many and many a time he would have been quite soon enough in the chapel had he gone round the proper way; but it became almost a habit with him to take the nominally forbidden short cut—so much a habit that Mr. Wyngate, who was perfectly aware of it, said to him jokingly one day, that he would take it as a personal favour, if, *for once*, Carlo would gratify him by coming to chapel by the regular entrance. As for being *blamed* for his bar-jumping, such an idea never entered Carlo's head; he would almost as soon have expected to be blamed for eating his breakfast, and, naturally enough, when Mr. Sawyer's reign began, it never occurred to him to alter his conduct. For some time things went on as usual, Mr. Sawyer either never happening to see Carlo's daily piece of gymnastics, or not understanding that it was prohibited. But something occurred at last, some joke on the subject, or some little remark from one of the other masters, which suddenly drew the new 'junior's' attention to the fact. And two or three mornings afterwards, coming upon Carlo in the very act of bar-jumping, Mr. Sawyer ventured mildly, but in reality firmly, to remonstrate.

"'Berkeley,' he said, in his nervous, jerky fashion, 'that is not the *proper* way from your schoolroom to chapel, is it?'

"Carlo took this remark as a good joke, after the manner of Mr. Wyngate's on the same subject.

"'No, sir,' he replied mischievously, 'I don't suppose it is.'

"'Then,' said Mr. Sawyer, stammering a very little, as he sometimes did when more nervous than usual, 'then will you oblige me for the future by coming the proper way?'

"He turned away before Carlo had time to reply, if indeed he had an answer ready, which is doubtful, for he could not make up his mind if Mr. Sawyer was in earnest or not. But by the next

morning all remembrance of the junior master's remonstrance had faded from Carlo's thoughtless brain. Again he went bar-jumping to chapel, and this time no Mr. Sawyer intercepted him. But two mornings later, just as he had successfully accomplished his jump, he perceived in front of him the thin, uncertain-looking figure of the junior master.

"'Berkeley,' he said gravely, 'have you forgotten what I said to you two or three days ago?'

"Carlo stared. The fact of the matter was that he *had* forgotten, but as his remembering would have made no difference, considering that he had never had the slightest intention of taking any notice of Mr. Sawyer's prohibition, his instinctive honesty forbade his giving his want of memory as an excuse.

"'No,' he replied, 'at least I don't know if I did or not. But I have always come this way—lots of us do—and no one ever says anything.'

"'But *I* say something now,' said Mr. Sawyer, more decidedly than he had ever been known to speak, 'and that is to forbid your coming this way. And I expect to be obeyed.'

"Carlo made no reply. This time there was no mistaking Mr. Sawyer's meaning. It was mortifying to have to give in to the 'mean little sneak,' as Carlo mentally called the new master; still, as next morning he happened to be in particularly good time he went round the proper way. The day after, however, he was late, decidedly late for once, and, throwing to the winds all consideration for Mr. Sawyer or his orders, Carlo jumped the bar and made his appearance in time for prayers. He had not known that he was observed, but coming out of chapel Mr. Sawyer called him aside.

"'Berkeley,' he said, 'you have disobeyed me again. If this happens once more I shall be obliged to report you.'

"Carlo stared at him in blank amazement.

"'Report me?' he said. Such a threat had never been held out to either him or Jack through all their Ryeburn career. They looked upon it as next worst to being expelled. For reporting in Ryeburn parlance meant a formal complaint to the head-master, when a boy had been convicted of aggravated disobedience to the juniors. And its results were very severe; it entirely prevented a boy's in any way distinguishing himself during the half-year: however hard a 'reported' boy might work, he could gain no prize that term. So no wonder that poor Carlo repeated in amazement,

"'*Report* me?'

"'Yes,' said Sawyer. 'I don't want to do it, but if you continue to disobey me, I must,' and he turned away.

"Off went Carlo to his cronies with his tale of wrongs. The general indignation was extreme.

"'I'd like to see him dare to do such a thing,' said one.

"'I'd risk it, Berkeley, if I were you,' said another. 'Anything rather than give in to such a cowardly sneak.'

"In the midst of the discussion up came Jack, to whom, with plenty of forcible language, his brother's woes were related. Jack's first impulse was to discredit the sincerity of Mr. Sawyer's intention.

"He'd never *dare* do such a thing as report you for nothing worse than bar-jumping,' he exclaimed.

"But Carlo shook his head.

"'He's mean enough for anything,' he replied. 'I believe he'll do it fast enough if ever he catches me bar-jumping again.'

"'Well, you'll have to give it up then,' said Jack. 'It's no use hurting yourself to spite him,' and as Carlo made no reply, the elder brother went away, satisfied that his, it must be confessed, not very exalted line of argument, had had the desired effect.

"But Carlo's silence did *not* mean either consent or assent. When Jack had left them the younger boys talked the whole affair over again in their own fashion and according to their own lights—the result being that the following morning, with the aggravation of a whoop and a cry, Carlo defiantly jumped the bar on his way to chapel for prayers.

"When Jack came to hear of it, as he speedily did, he was at first very angry, then genuinely distressed.

"'You will only get what you deserve if he does report you,' he said to Carlo in his vexation, and when Carlo replied that he didn't see that he need give up what he had always done 'for a cad like that,' Jack retorted that if he thought Sawyer a cad he should have acted accordingly, and not trusted to *his* good feeling or good nature. But in his heart of hearts Jack did not believe the threat would be carried out, and, unknown to Carlo, he did for his brother what he would never have done for himself. As soon as morning school was over he went to Mr. Sawyer to beg him to reconsider his intention, explaining to the best of his ability the extenuating circumstances of the case—the tacit indulgence so long accorded to the boys, Carlo's innocence, in the first place, of

any intentional disobedience.

"Mr. Sawyer heard him patiently; whether his arguments would have had any effect, Jack, at that time at least, had not the satisfaction of knowing, for when he left off speaking Mr. Sawyer replied quietly,

"'I am very sorry to seem severe to your brother, Berkeley, but what I have done I believed to be my duty. I have *already* reported him.'

"Jack turned on his heel and left the room without speaking. Only as he crossed the threshold one word of unutterable contempt fell from between his teeth. '*Cad*,' he muttered, careless whether Sawyer heard him or not.

"And from that moment Jack's championship of the obnoxious master was over; and throughout the school he was never spoken of among the boys, big and little, but as 'that cad Sawyer.'

"Though, after all, the 'reporting' turned out less terrible than was expected. How it was managed I cannot exactly say, but Carlo was let off with a reprimand, and new and rigorous orders were issued against 'bar-jumping' under any excuse whatever.

"I think it probable that the 'authorities' privately pointed out to Mr. Sawyer that there might be such a thing as over-much zeal in the discharge of his duties, and if so I have no doubt he took it in good part. For it was not zeal which actuated him—it was simple conscientiousness, misdirected perhaps by his inexperience. He could not endure hurting any one or anything, and probably his very knowledge of his weakness made him afraid of himself. Be that as it may, no one concerned rejoiced more heartily than he at Carlo's acquittal.

"But it was too late—the mischief was done. Day by day the exaggerated prejudice and suspicion with which he was regarded became more apparent. Yet he did not resent it—he worked on, hoping that in time it might be overcome, for he yearned to be liked and trusted, and his motives for wishing to do well at Ryeburn were very strong ones.

"And gradually, as time went on, things improved a little. Now and then the better-disposed of the boys felt ashamed of the tacit disrespect with which one so enduring and inoffensive was treated; and among these better-disposed I need hardly say was our Jack.

"It was the end of October. But a few days were wanting to the anniversary so dear to schoolboy hearts—that of Gunpowder Plot. This year the fifth of November celebration was to be of more than ordinary magnificence, for it was the last at which several of the elder boys, among them Jack, could hope to be present. Fireworks committees were formed and treasurers appointed, and nothing else was spoken of but the sums collected and promised, and the apportionment thereof in Catherine wheels, Chinese dragons, and so on. Jack was one of the treasurers. He had been very successful so far, but the sum total on which he and his companions had set their hearts was still unattained. The elder boys held a committee meeting one day to consider ways and means, and the names of all the subscribers were read out.

"'We *should* manage two pounds more; we'd do then,' said one boy.

"'Are you sure everybody's been asked?' said another, running his eye down the lists. 'Bless me, Sawyer's not in,' he added, looking up inquiringly.

"'No one would ask him,' said the first boy, shrugging his shoulders.

"A sudden thought struck Jack.

"'I'll tell you what, *I'll* do it,' he said, 'and, between ourselves, I shouldn't much wonder if he comes down handsomely. He's been very civil of late—I rather think he'd be glad of an opportunity to do something obliging to make up for that mean trick of his about Carlo, and what's more,' he added mysteriously, 'I happen to know he's by no means short of funds just now.'

"They teased him to say more, but not another word on the subject could be got out of Jack. What he knew was this—that very morning when the letters came, he had happened to be standing beside Mr. Sawyer, who, with an eager face, opened one that was handed to him. He was nervous as usual, more nervous than usual probably, and perhaps his hands were shaking, for as he drew his letter hastily out of the envelope, something fluttered to the ground at Jack's feet.

"It was a cheque for twenty pounds, and conspicuous on the lowest line was the signature of a well-known publishing firm. Instinctively Jack stooped to pick it up and handed it to its owner—it had been impossible for him not to see what he did, but he had thought no more about it, beyond a passing wonder in his own mind, as to 'what on earth Sawyer got to write about,' and had forgotten all about it till the meeting of the fireworks committee recalled it to his memory.

"But it was with a feeling of pleasant expectancy, not unmixed with some consciousness of his own magnanimity in 'giving old Sawyer a chance again,' that Jack made his way to the junior master's quarters, the list of subscribers in his hand.

"He made a pleasant picture, as, in answer to the 'come in' which followed his knock at the door, he opened it and stood on the threshold of Mr. Sawyer's room—his bright, honest, blue-eyed, fair-haired 'English boy' face smiling in through the doorway. With almost painful eagerness the junior master bade him welcome; he liked Jack so much, and would so have rejoiced could the

attraction have been mutual. And this was the first time that Jack had voluntarily sought Mr. Sawyer in his own quarters since the bar-jumping affair. Mr. Sawyer's spirits rose at the sight of him, and hope again entered his heart—hope that after all, his position at Ryeburn, which he was beginning to fear it was nonsense to attempt to retain, in face of the evident dislike to him, might yet alter for the better.

"'I have not a good way with them—that must be it,' he had said to himself sadly that very morning. 'I never knew what it was to be a boy myself, and therefore I suppose I don't understand boys. But if they could but see into my heart and read there how earnestly I wish to do my best by them, surely we could get on better together.'

"'Well, Berkeley—glad to see you—what can I do for you?' said Sawyer, with a little nervous attempt at off-hand friendliness of manner, in itself infinitely touching to any one with eyes to take in the whole situation and judge it and him accordingly. But those eyes are not ours in early life, more especially in *boy*-life. We must have our powers of mental vision quickened and cleared by the magic dew of sad experience—experience which alone can give sympathy worth having, ere we can understand the queer bits of pathos we constantly stumble upon in life, ere we can begin to judge our fellows with the large-hearted charity that alone can illumine the glass through which for so long we see so *very* 'darkly.'

"'I have come to ask you for a subscription for the fifth of November fireworks, Mr. Sawyer,' said Jack, plunging, as was his habit, right into the middle of things, with no beating about the bush. 'We've asked all the other masters, and every one in the school has subscribed, and I was to tell you, sir, from the committee that they'll be very much obliged by a subscription—and—and I really think they'll all be particularly pleased if you can give us something handsome.'

"The message was civil, but hardly perhaps, coming from pupils to a master, 'of the most respectful,' as French people say. But poor Sawyer understood it—in some respects his perceptions were almost abnormally sharp; he read between the lines of Jack's rough-and-ready, boy-like manner, and understood perfectly that here was a chance for him—a chance in a thousand, of gaining some degree of the popularity he had hitherto so unfortunately failed to obtain. And to the bottom of his heart he felt grateful to Berkeley—but alas!

"He grew crimson with vexation.

"'I am dreadfully sorry, Berkeley,' he said, 'dreadfully sorry that I cannot respond as I would like to your request. At this moment unfortunately, I am very peculiarly out of pocket. Stay,'—with a momentary gleam of hope, 'will you let me see the subscription list. How—how much do you think would please the boys?'

"'A guinea wouldn't be—would please them very much, and of course two would be still better,' said Jack drily. Already he had in his own mind pronounced a final verdict upon Mr. Sawyer, already he had begun to tell himself what a fool he had been for having anything more to do with him, but yet, with the British instinct of giving an accused man a fair chance, he waited till all hope was over.

"'A guinea, two guineas?' repeated Mr. Sawyer sadly. 'It is perfectly impossible;' and he shook his head regretfully but decidedly. 'Half-a-crown, or five shillings perhaps, if you would take it,' he added hesitatingly, but stopped short on catching sight of the hard, contemptuous expression that overspread Jack's face, but a moment ago so sunny.

"No thank you, sir,' he replied. 'I should be very sorry to take *any* subscription from you, knowing what I do, and so would all my companions. You're a master, sir, and I'm a boy, but I can tell you I wish you *were* a boy that I might speak out. I couldn't help seeing what came to you by post this morning—you know I couldn't—and yet on the face of that you tell me you're too hard-up to do what I came to ask like a gentleman—and what would have been for your good in the end too. I'm not going to tell what came to my knowledge by accident; you needn't be afraid of that, but I'd be uncommonly sorry to take *anything* from you for our fireworks.'

"And again Jack turned on his heel, and in hot wrath left the under-master, muttering again between his set teeth as he did so the one word 'cad.'

"'Jack,' Mr. Sawyer called after him, but either he did not call loud enough or Jack would not take any notice of his summons, for he did not return. What a pity! Had he done so, Mr. Sawyer, who understood him too well to feel the indignation a more superficial person would have done at his passionate outburst, had it in his heart to take the hasty, impulsive, generous-spirited lad into his confidence and what might not have been the result? What a different future for the poor under-master, had he then and there and for ever won from the boy the respect and sympathy he so well deserved!

"Jack returned to his companions gloomy but taciturn. He gave them to understand that his mission had failed, and that henceforth he would have nothing to say to Sawyer that he could help, and that was all. He entered into no particulars, but there are occasions on which silence says more than words, and from this time no voice was ever raised in the junior master's defence—throughout the school he was never referred to except as 'the cad,' or 'that cad Sawyer.'

"And alone in his own room, Mr. Sawyer, sorrowful but unresentful still, was making up his mind that his efforts had been all in vain. 'I must give it up,' he said. 'And both for myself and the boys the sooner the better, before there is any overt disrespect which would *have* to be noticed. It is

no use fighting on, I have not the knack of it. The boys will never like me, and I may do harm where I would wish to do good. I must try something else.'

"Two or three weeks later—a month perhaps—the boys were one day surprised by the appearance of a strange face at what had been Mr. Sawyer's desk. And on inquiry the new comer proved to be a young curate accidentally in the neighbourhood, who had undertaken to fill for a few weeks the under-master's vacant place. The occurrence made some sensation—it was unusual for any change of the kind to take place during a term. 'Was Sawyer ill?' one or two of the boys asked, as there came before them the recollection of the young man's pale and careworn face, and they recalled with some compunction the Pariah-like life that for some time past had been his.

"No, he was not ill, they were informed, but he had requested the head-master to supply his place and let him leave, for private reasons, as soon as possible.

"What were the private reasons? The head-master and his colleagues had tried in vain to arrive at them. Not one syllable of complaint had fallen from the junior master's lips. He had simply repeated that, though sorry to cause any inconvenience, it was of importance to him to leave at once.

"'At least,' he said to himself, 'I shall say nothing to get any of them into trouble after I am gone.'

"And he had begged, too, that no public intimation of his resignation should be given.

"But one or two of the boys had known it before it actually occurred—and among them the Berkeley brothers. Late one cold evening, for winter had set in very early that year, Mr. Sawyer had stopped them on their way across the courtyard to their own rooms.

"'Berkeley,' he had said, 'I am leaving early to-morrow morning. I should like to say good-bye and shake hands with you before I go. I have not taken a good way with you boys, somehow, and—and the prejudice against me has been very strong. But some day—when you are older perhaps, you may come to think it possible you have misunderstood me. Be that as it may, there is not and never has been any but good feeling towards you on my part.'

"He held out his hand, but a spirit of evil had taken possession of Jack—a spirit of hard, unforgiving prejudice.

"'Good-bye, Mr. Sawyer,' he said, but he stalked on without taking any notice of the out-stretched hand, and Carlo, echoing the cold 'Good-bye, Mr. Sawyer,' followed his example.

"But little Carlo's heart was very tender. He slept ill that night and early, very early the next morning he was up and on the watch. There was snow on the ground, snow, though December had scarcely set in, and it was very cold.

"Carlo shivered as he hung about the door leading to Mr. Sawyer's room, and he wondered why the fly which always came for passengers by the early London train had not yet made its appearance, little imagining that not by the comfortable express, but third class in a slow 'parliamentary' Mr. Sawyer's journey was to be accomplished. And, when at last the thin figure of the under-master emerged from the doorway, it went to the boy's heart to see that he himself was carrying the small black bag which held his possessions.

"'I have come to wish you good-bye again, sir,' said Carlo, 'and I am sorry I didn't shake hands last night. And—and—I believe Jack would have come too, if he'd thought of it.'

"Mr. Sawyer's eyes glistened as he shook the small hand held out to him.

"'Thank you, my boy,' he said earnestly, how much I thank you you will never know.'

"'And is that all your luggage?' asked Carlo, half out of curiosity, half by way of breaking the melancholy of the parting, which somehow gave him a choky feeling about the throat.

"'Oh no,' said Mr. Sawyer, entering into the boy's shrinking from anything like a scene, 'oh no, I sent on my box by the carrier last Saturday. It would have been *rather* too big to carry.' He spoke in his usual commonplace tone, more cheerful, less nervous perhaps than its wont. Then once more, with a second hearty shake of the hand,

"'Good-bye again, my boy, and God bless you." And Carlo, his eyes dim in spite of his intense determination to be above such weakness, stood watching the dark figure, conspicuous against the white-sheeted ground and steel-blue early morning winter sky.

"'I wonder if we've been right about him,' he said to himself. 'I'm glad I came, any way.'

"And there came a day when others beside little Carlo himself were glad, oh so glad, that he had 'come' that snowy morning to bid the solitary traveller Godspeed."

'GOOD-BYE AGAIN, MY BOY, AND GOD BLESS YOU!'

CHAPTER XI.

"THAT CAD SAWYER."—PART II.

"Did the road wind uphill all the way?
Yes to the very end."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

Grandmother's voice had faltered a little now and then during the latter part of her reading. The children looked at each other significantly.

"Uncle Carlo *died* you know," whispered Sylvia again to Ralph and Molly.

"And uncle Jack too," said Ralph.

"Yes, but much longer after. Uncle *Carlo* was only a boy when he died," said Molly, as if the fact infinitely aggravated the sorrow in his case.

Their whispering did not interrupt their grandmother this time. She had already paused.

"I think, dears," she said, "I had better read the rest to-morrow evening. There is a good deal more of it, and my voice gets tired after a while."

"Couldn't I read it for you, mother dear?" said aunty.

Grandmother smiled a little roguishly. "No, my dear, thank you," she said. "I think I like best to read myself what I have written myself. And you, according to that, will have your turn soon, Laura."

"*Mother!* how did you find out what I was doing?" exclaimed aunty.

"A little bird told me, of course," said grandmother, smiling. "You know how clever my little birds are."

During this mysterious conversation the children had sat with wide open eyes and puzzled faces. Suddenly a light broke upon Sylvia.

"I know, I know," she cried. "*Aunty's* writing a story for us too. Oh, you delightful aunty!"

"Oh you beautiful aunty! oh you delicious aunty!" echoed Molly. "Why don't you say something too, Ralph?" she exclaimed, turning reproachfully to her brother. "You like stories just as much as we do—you know you do."

"But you and Sylvia have used up all the adjectives," said Ralph. "What *can* I call aunty, unless I say she's a very jolly fellow?"

"Reserve your raptures, my dears," said aunty, "'The proof of the pudding's in the eating,' remember. Perhaps you may not care for my story when you hear it. I am quite willing to wait for your thanks till you have heard it."

"But any way, aunty dear, we'll thank you for having *tried*," said Molly encouragingly. "I daresay it won't be *quite* as nice as grandmother's. You see you're so much younger, and then I don't

think anybody *could* tell stories like her, could they? But, grandmother dear," she went on, "would you mind telling me one thing? When people write stories how do they know all the things they tell? How do you know what poor Mr. Sawyer said to himself when he was alone in his room that day? Did he ever tell anybody? I know the story's true, because uncle Jack told it you himself, only I can't make out how you got to know all those bits of it, like."

"What a goose you are, Molly!" exclaimed both Ralph and Sylvia. "How could any stories ever be written if people went on about them like that?"

But Molly's honest puzzled face made grandmother smile.

"I know how you mean, dear," she said, "I used to think like that myself. No, I don't know *exactly* the very words Mr. Sawyer said to himself, but, judging from my knowledge of the whole story, I put myself, as it were, in his place, and picture to myself what I would have said. I told you I had altered it a little. When your uncle wrote it out it was all in the first person, but not having been an eye-witness, as he was, it seemed to me I could better give the *spirit* of the story by putting it into this form. Do you understand at all better, dear? When you have heard the whole to the end you will do so, I think. All the part about Carlo I had from his own lips."

"Thank you, grandmother dear. I think I understand," said Molly, and she was philosophical enough to take no notice of the repeated whisper which reached her ears alone. "Oh, you *are* a goose!"

It was not till the next evening that grandmother went on with the second part of her story.

"What do all those stars mean?" asked Molly, peeping over her grandmother's shoulder before she began to read. "Look Sylvia, how funny!" and she pointed to a long row of * * * * at the end of the first part of the manuscript.

"They mean that some length of time had elapsed between the two parts of the story," said grandmother.

"Oh, I see. And each star counts for a year. I suppose. Let me see; one, two, three——"

"Molly, *do* be quiet, and let grandmother go on," said Ralph and Sylvia, their patience exhausted.

"No, they are not counted like that," said grandmother. "Listen, Molly, and you will hear for yourself."

"The first part of my little story finished in the snow—on a cold December morning in England. The second part begins in a very different scene and many, many miles away from Ryeburn. Three or four years have passed. Some of those we left boys are now men—many changes have taken place. Instead of December, it is August. Instead of England we have a far away country, which till that time, when the interest of the whole world was suddenly concentrated on it, had been but little known and still less thought of by the dwellers in more civilised lands. It is the Crimea, children, and the Crimea on a broiling, stifling August day. At the present time when we speak and think of that dreadful war and the sufferings it entailed, it is above all the *winters* there that we recall with the greatest horror—those terrible 'Crimean winters.' But those who went through it all have often assured me that the miseries of the summers—of some part of them at least—were in their way quite as great, or worse. What could be much worse? The suffocating heat; the absence, or almost total absence, of shade; the dust and the dirt, and the poisonous flies; the foul water and half-putrid food? Bad for the sound ones, or those as yet so—and oh, how intolerably dreadful for the sick!

"'What could be much worse?' thought Jack Berkeley to himself, as after a long killing spell in the trenches he at last got back to his tent for a few hours' rest.

"'My own mother wouldn't know me,' he said to himself, as out of a sort of half melancholy mischief he glanced at his face in the little bit of cracked looking-glass which was all he had to adorn himself by. He was feeling utterly worn out and depressed—so many of his friends and companions were dead or dying—knocked down at that time quite as much by disease as by Russian bullets—in many cases the more terrible death of the two. And things in general were looking black. It was an anxious and weariful time.

"Jack threw himself on the bed. He was too tired to undress. All he longed for was coolness and sleep—the first the less attainable of the two, for the thin sides of his tent were as powerless to keep out the scorching heat as the biting cold, and it was not till many more months of both heat and cold had passed that any better shelter was provided for him or his fellows.

"But heat and flies notwithstanding Jack fell asleep, and had slept soundly for an hour or two when he was suddenly awakened by a voice calling him by name.

"'Berkeley,' it said, 'you are Berkeley of the 300th, aren't you? I am sorry to awaken you if you're not, but I couldn't see your servant about anywhere to ask. There's a poor fellow dying, down at Kadikoi, asking for Berkeley—Jack Berkeley of the 300th.'

"'Yes, that's me,' said Jack, rubbing his eyes with his smoke-begrimed hands, which he had neither had energy nor water to wash before he fell asleep. 'That's me, sure enough. Who is it? What does he want?'

"'I don't know who he is,' replied the other. 'I didn't hear his name. He's not one of us. He's a

poor devil who's out here as a correspondent to some paper—I forget which—he's only been out a short time. He's dying of dysentery—quite alone, near our quarters. I'm Montagu of the 25th Hussars—Captain Montagu, and our doctor, who's looking after him, sent in for me, knowing I'd been at Ryeburn, as the poor fellow said something about it. But it must have been after my time. I left in '48.'

"'I don't think I remember you,' said Jack meditatively. 'But you may have been among the upper boys when I was one of the small ones.'

"'Sure to have been,' said Captain Montagu. 'But about this poor fellow. He was so disappointed when he found I was a stranger to him that I said I'd try to find some other Ryeburn boy who might remember him. And some one or other mentioned you, so I came over to look you up.'

"'Very good of you,' said Jack, who was still, however, feeling so sleepy that he could almost have wished Captain Montagu had *not* been so good. 'Shall I go back with you to Kadikoi? Very likely it's some one I did not know either, still one can but try.'

"'You're very tired,' said Montagu, sympathisingly. 'I am sorry to give you such a long walk. But the doctor said he couldn't last long, and the poor fellow seemed so eager when he heard your name.'

"'Oh, he *does* know me then?' said Jack, his interest reviving. 'I didn't understand.'

"'Oh yes. I mentioned your name when I heard it, and he said at once if it was *Jack* Berkeley he would extremely like to see him. It was stupid of me not to ask his name.'

"'I'll be ready to go with you in a moment,' said Jack, after frantic efforts discovering in a bucket a very small reserve of water with which he managed to wash his face clear of some part of its grimy covering. 'My servant's gone to Balaclava to see what he could get in the way of food for a change from these dreadful salt rations. He brought me a bottle of porter the other day; it cost three shillings, but I never enjoyed anything so much in my life.'

"'I can quite believe it,' said Captain Montagu feelingly. 'Your servant must be worth his weight in gold.'

"In another minute they were on their way. The sun was beginning to sink, fortunately; it was not *quite* so hot as a few hours previously. But it was quite as dusty, and the walking along a recently and roughly made track, not worthy the name of road, was very tiring. It was fully five miles to Kadikoi—five miles across a bare, dried-up country, from which all traces of the scanty cultivation it had ever received were fast disappearing under the present state of things. There was not a tree, hardly a stunted shrub, to be seen, and the ground—at best but a few inches of poor soil above the sterile rock, felt hard and unyielding as well as rough. It was a relief of its kind at last to quit the level ground for the slope leading down to Balaclava, where, though they were too small to afford anything in the shape of shade, the sight of some few, starved-looking bushes and some remains of what might once have been grass, refreshed the eye, at once wearied and dazzled by the glare and monotony of the sun-dried plain.

"The tent to which Captain Montagu led the way stood by itself on some rising ground, a little behind the row of nondescript hovels or mud huts representing what had been the little hamlet of Kadikoi. It looked wretched enough as the two young men made their way in, but everywhere looked wretched, only the bareness and comfortlessness impressed one doubly when viewed in connection with physical suffering that would have been hard to endure even with all the alleviations and tenderness of friends and home about one.

"The doctor was just leaving the tent—his time was all too precious to give much of it where it was evident that his skill could be of no avail—but before going he had done what he could for the sick man's comfort, and he lay now, pale, worn, and wan, but no longer in pain, and by the bedside—a low narrow camp stretcher—sat a young soldier, holding from time to time a cup of water to the dry lips of the dying man. Clumsy he might be, but there was no lack of tenderness in his manner or expression.

"That's one of our men that the doctor sent in,' whispered Montagu; 'the poor fellow there had been lying alone for two or three days, and no one knew. His Greek servant—scoundrels those fellows are—had deserted him.'

"Jack cautiously approached the bed.

"'This is Mr. Berkeley—Jack Berkeley of the 300th, whom you said you would like to see,' said Captain Montagu gently, stepping in front of Jack.

"The sick man's eyes lightened up, and a faint flush rose in his cheeks. He was very fair, and lying there looked very young, younger somehow than Jack had expected. *Had* he ever seen him before? There was nothing remarkable about the face except its peculiarly gentle and placid expression—yet it was a face of considerable resolution as well, and there were lines about the mouth which told of endurance and fortitude, almost contradicting the wistfulness of the boyish-looking blue eyes. Jack grew more and more puzzled. *Something* seemed familiar to him, yet——

"'How good, how very good of you to come. Do you remember me, Berkeley?' said the invalid, feebly stretching out a thin hand, which Jack instinctively took and held gently in his own strong grasp.

"Jack hesitated. A look of disappointment overspread the pale face.

"'I am afraid you don't know me. Perhaps you would not have come if you had understood who it was.'

"'I did not hear your name,' said Jack, very gently, 'but, of course, hearing you wished to see me ——' he hesitated. 'Were we at Ryeburn together?'

"'Yes,' said the dying man. 'My—my name is Sawyer—Philip Sawyer—but you only knew my surname, of course.'

"Jack understood it all. Even before the name was mentioned, the slight nervous stammer, the faint peculiarity of accent, had recalled to his memory the poor young junior master, whose short, apparently unsuccessful, Ryeburn career had left its mark on the lives of others besides his own.

"*Jack* understood—not so the sick man. He was surprised and almost bewildered by the eagerness with which his visitor received his announcement.

"'Sawyer, Mr. Sawyer!' he exclaimed. 'You cannot imagine how glad I am to see you again. I don't mean—I am terribly sorry to see you like this—but I have so often wished to find you, and I could never succeed in doing so.'

"He turned as he spoke to Captain Montagu.

"'I'll stay with him for an hour or two—as long as I can,' he said. 'I think,——' he added, glancing at the extempore sick-nurse, and hesitating a little. Captain Montagu understood the glance.

"'Come, Watson,' he said to the young soldier, 'Mr. Berkeley will sit with—with Mr.——'

"'Sawyer,' said Jack.

—"'With Mr. Sawyer for a while. Shall he return in an hour, Berkeley?'

"'Thank you, yes,' said Jack, and then he found himself alone with his old master.

"'You said you tried to trace me after I left Ryeburn,' said Sawyer. 'Will you tell me why? There was no special reason for it, was there? I know I was disliked, but the sort of enmity I incurred must soon have died out. I was too insignificant for it to last. And the one great endeavour I made was to injure no one. That was why I left hurriedly—before I should be forced to make any complaints.'

"He stopped—exhausted already by what he had said. 'And I have so much to say to him,' he whispered regretfully to himself.

"'I know,' said Jack sadly. 'I understood it all before you had left many months.'

"Mr. Sawyer looked pleased but surprised.

"'It is very kind of you to speak so,' he said. 'I remember that dear little brother of yours when he came to see me off that last morning—I remember his saying, 'I'm sure Jack would have come if he had thought of it.' You don't know what a comfort the remembrance of that boy has been to me sometimes. You must tell him so. Dear me—he must be nearly grown up. Is he too in the army?'

"'No, oh no,' said Jack. 'He—he died the year after you knew him.'

"Sawyer's eyes looked up wistfully in Jack's face. 'Dead?' he said. 'That dear boy?'

"'Yes,' Jack went on. 'It was of scarlet fever. It was very bad at Ryeburn that half. We both had it, but I was soon well again. It was not till Carlo was ill that he told me of having run over to wish you good-bye that morning—he had been afraid I would laugh at him for being soft-hearted—what a young brute I was—forgive my speaking so, Sawyer, but I can't look back to that time without shame. What a life we led you, and how you bore it! You were too good for us.'

"Sawyer smiled. 'No,' he said. 'I cannot see it that way. I had not the knack of it—I was not fit for the position. The boys were very good boys, as boys go. It would have been inexcusable of me to have made them suffer for what, after all, was an unfortunate circumstance only. I had attempted what I could not manage. And Carlo—he is dead—somehow, perhaps because I am so near death myself, it does not shock or startle me. Dear little fellow that he was!'

"'And while he was ill he was constantly talking about you. It seemed the only thing on his conscience, poor little chap, that he had joined at all in our treatment of you. And he begged me —I would have promised him anything, but by that time I saw it plainly enough for myself—to try to find you and ask you to forgive us both. But I little thought it would have been like this—I had fancied sometimes——' Jack hesitated, and the colour deepened in his sunburnt cheeks.

"'What?' said Mr. Sawyer. 'Do not be afraid of my misunderstanding anything you say.'

"'I had hoped perhaps that if I found you again I might be able to be of some use to you. And now it is too late. For you see we owe you some reparation for indirectly forcing you to leave Ryeburn —you might have risen there—who knows? I can see now what a capital teacher you were.'

"Mr. Sawyer shook his head.

"'I know I could teach,' he said, 'but that was all. I did not understand boys' ways. I never was a boy myself. But put all this out of your mind, Berkeley, for ever. In spite of all the disappointment, I was very happy at Ryeburn. The living among so many healthy-minded happy human beings was a new and pleasant experience to me. Short as it was, no part of my life has left a pleasanter remembrance. You say you would like to do something for me. Will you write to my mother after I am gone, and tell her? Tell her how little I suffered, and how good every one was to me, a perfect stranger. Will you do this?'

"Jack bent his head. 'Willingly,' he said.

"'You will find her address in this book,' he went on, handing a thick leather pocket-book to Jack. 'Also a sort of will—roughly drawn up, but correctly—leaving her all I have, and the amount of that, and the Bank it is in—all is noted. I have knocked about so—since I was at Ryeburn I have tried so many things and been in so many places, I have learnt to face all eventualities. I was so pleased to get the chance of coming out here——'

"He stopped again.

"'You must not tire yourself so,' said Jack.

"'What does it matter? I can die so much more easily if I leave things clear—for, trifling as they are, my poor mother's comfort depends on them. And I am so glad too for you to understand about me, Berkeley. That day—it went to my heart to have to refuse you about the subscription for the fireworks.'

"'Don't speak of it. I know you had some good motive,' said Jack.

"'Necessity—sheer, hard necessity,' said poor Sawyer. 'The money I had got that morning was only just in time to save my younger brother from life-long disgrace, perhaps imprisonment.'

"Then painfully—in short and broken sentences—he related to Jack the history of his hard, sad, but heroic life. *He* did not think it heroic—it seemed to him, in his single-minded conscientiousness, that he had done no more than his duty, and that but imperfectly. He had given his life for others, and, hardest of all, for others who had little appreciated his devotion.

"'My father died when I was only about twelve,' he said. 'He had been a clergyman, but his health failed, and he had to leave England and take a small charge in Switzerland. There he met my mother—a Swiss, and there I was partly brought up. When he died he told me I must take his place as head of the family. I was not so attractive as my brother and sister; I was shy and reserved. Naturally my mother cared most for them. I fear she was too indulgent. My sister married badly, and I had to try to help her. My poor brother, he was always in trouble and yet he meant well——'

"And so he told Jack the whole melancholy history, entering into details which I have forgotten, and which, even if I remembered them, it would be only painful to relate. His brother was now in America—doing well he hoped, thanks of course to him; his sister's circumstances too had improved. For the first time in his life Sawyer had begun to feel his burdens lessening, when he was brought face to face with the knowledge that all in this world was over for him. Uncomplainingly he had, through all these long years, borne the heat and burden of the day; rest for him was to be elsewhere, not here. But as he had met life, so he now met death—calmly and unrepiningly, certain that hard as it had been hard as it seemed now, it must yet be for the best—the solving of the riddle he left to God.

"And his last thought was for others—for the mother who had so little appreciated him, who required to lose him, perhaps, to bring home to her his whole value.

"'I have always foreseen the possibility of this,' he said, 'and prepared for it as best I could. Besides the money I have confided to you, I insured my life, most fortunately, last year. She will have enough to get on pretty comfortably—and tell her,' he hesitated, 'I don't think she will miss me very much. I have never had the knack of drawing much affection to myself. But tell her I was quite satisfied that it is all for the best, and Louis may yet return to cheer her old age.'

"Jack stayed till he could stay no longer. Then, with a grasp of the hand which meant more than many words, he left his new, yet old friend, promising to be down again at Kadikoi first thing in the morning. 'But take the papers with you, Berkeley, the papers and the pocket-book, in case, you know——' were Sawyer's last words to him.

"Jack was even earlier the next day than he had expected. But when he got to the tent the canvas door was drawn to.

"'Asleep?' he said to the doctor of the 25th Hussars, who came up at that moment, recognizing him.

"'Yes,' said the doctor, bending his head reverently, as he said the word.

"He unfastened the door, and signed to Jack to follow him. Jack understood—yes, asleep indeed. There he lay—all the pain and anxiety over, and as the two men gazed at the peaceful face, there came into Jack's mind the same words which his mother had whispered over the dead face of his little brother,

> "'Of such is the kingdom of Heaven'."

CHAPTER XII.

A CHRISTMAS ADVENTURE.

"With bolted doors and windows wedged,
The care was all in vain;
For there were noises in the night
Which nothing could explain."

GRANDMAMMA AND THE FAIRIES

The children had gone quietly to bed the evening before when grandmother had finished the reading of her story. They just kissed her and said, "Thank you, *dear* grandmother," and that was all. But it was all she wanted.

"I felt, you know," said Molly to Sylvia when they were dressing the next morning, "I felt a sort of feeling as if I'd been in church when the music was *awfully* lovely. A beautiful feeling, but strange too, you know, Sylvia? *Particularly* as Uncle Jack died too. When did he die? Do you know, Sylvia? Was it at that place?"

"What place?" said Sylvia curtly. When her feelings were touched she had a way of growing curt and terse, sometimes even snappish.

"That hot place—without trees, and all so dusty and dirty—Kadi—Kadi—I forget."

"Oh! you stupid girl Kadikoi was only one little wee village. You mean the Crimea—the Crimea is the name of all the country about there—where the war was."

"Yes, of course. I *am* stupid," said Molly, but not at all as if she had any reason to be ashamed of the fact. "Did he never come home from the Crimea?"

"No," said Sylvia, curtly again, "he never came home."

For an instant Molly was silent. Then she began again.

"Well, I wonder how the old lady, that poor nice man's mother, I mean—I wonder how she got the money and all that, that Uncle Jack was to settle for her. Shall we ask grandmother, Sylvia?"

"No, of course not. What does it matter to us? Of course it was all properly done. If it hadn't been, how would grandmother have known about it?"

"I never thought of that. Still I would like to know. I think," said Molly meditatively, "I think I could get grandmother to tell without exactly asking—for fear, you know, of seeming to remind her about poor Uncle Jack."

"You'd much better not," said Sylvia, as she left the room.

But once let Molly get a thing well into her head, "trust her," as Ralph said, "not to let it out again till it suited her."

That very evening when they were all sitting together again, working and talking, all except aunty, busily writing at her little table in the corner, Molly began.

"Grandmother dear," she said gently, "wasn't the old lady *dreadfully* sorry when she heard he was dead?"

For a moment grandmother stared at her in bewilderment—her thoughts had been far away. "What are you saying, my dear?" she asked.

Sylvia frowned at Molly across the table. Too well did she know the peculiarly meek and submissive tone of voice assumed by Molly when bent on—had the subject been any less serious than it was, Sylvia would have called it "mischief."

"Molly," she said reprovingly, finding her frowns calmly ignored.

"What is it?" said Molly sweetly. "I mean, grandmother dear," she proceeded, "I mean the mother of the poor nice man that uncle was so good to. Wasn't she *dreadfully* sorry when she heard he was dead?"

"I think she was, dear," said grandmother unsuspiciously. "Poor woman, whatever her mistakes with her children had been, I felt dreadfully sorry for her. I saw her a good many times, for your uncle sent me home all the papers and directions—'in case,' as poor Sawyer had said of himself—so my Jack said it."

Grandmother sighed; Sylvia looked still more reproachfully at Molly; Molly pretended to be threading her needle.

"And I got it all settled as her son had wished. He had arranged it so that she could not give away the money during her life. Not long after, she went to America to her other son, and I believe she is still living. He got on very well, and is now a rich man. I had letters from them a few years ago

—nice letters. I think it brought out the best of them—Philip Sawyer's death I mean. Still—oh no—they did not care for him, alive or dead, as such a man deserved."

"What a shame it seems!" said Molly. "When *I* have children," she went on serenely, "I shall love them all alike—whether they're ugly or pretty, if *anything* perhaps the ugliest most, to make up to them, you see."

"I thought you were never going to marry," said Ralph. "For you're never going to England, and you'll never marry a Frenchman."

"Englishmen might come here," replied Molly. "And when you and Sylvia go to England, you might take some of my photographs to show."

This was too much. Ralph laughed so that he rolled on the rug, and Sylvia nearly fell off her chair. Even grandmother joined in the merriment, and aunty came over from her corner to ask what it was all about.

"I have finished my story," she said. "I am so glad."

"And when, oh, when will you read it?" cried the children.

"On the evening of the twenty-second of December. I fixed that while I was writing it, for that was the day it happened on," said aunty. "That will be next Monday, and this is Friday. Not so very long to wait. And after all it's a very short story—not nearly so long as grandmother's."

"Never mind, we'll make it longer by talking about it," said Molly. "That's how I did at home when I had a very small piece of cake for tea. I took one bite of cake to three or four of bread and butter. It made it seem much more."

"I can perfectly believe that *you* will be ready to provide the necessary amount of 'bread and butter' to eke out my story," said aunty gravely.

And Molly stared at her in such comical bewilderment as to what she meant, that she set them all off laughing again.

Monday evening came. Aunty took her place at the table in front of the lamp, and having satisfied herself that Molly's wants in the shape of needles and thread, thimble, etc., were supplied for the next half-hour at least, she began as follows:—

"A Christmas Adventure.

"On the twenty-second of December, in the year eighteen hundred and fifty——" "No," said aunty, stopping short, "I can't tell you the year. Molly would make all sorts of dreadful calculations on the spot, as to my exact age, and the date at which the first grey hairs might be looked for—I will only say eighteen hundred and *something*."

"*Fifty* something," said Molly promptly. "You did say that, aunty."

"Terrible child!" said aunty. "Well, never mind, I'll begin again. On the twenty-second of December, in a certain year, I, Laura Berkeley, set out with my elder sister Mary, on a long journey. We were then living on the western coast of England, or Wales rather; we had to cross the whole country, for our destination was the neighbourhood, a few miles inland, of a small town on the *eastern* coast. Our journey was not one of pleasure—we were not going to spend 'a merry Christmas' with near and dear friends and relations. We were going on business, and our one idea was to get it accomplished as quickly as possible, and hurry home to our parents again, for otherwise their Christmas would be quite a solitary one. And as former Christmases—before we children had been scattered, before there were vacant chairs round the fireside—had been among the happiest times of the year in our family, as in many others, we felt doubly reluctant to risk spending it apart from each other, we four—all that were left now!

"'It is dreadfully cold, Mary,' I said, when we were fairly off, dear mother gazing wistfully after us, as the train moved out of the station and her figure on the platform grew smaller and smaller, till at last we lost sight of it altogether. 'It is dreadfully cold, isn't it?'

"We were tremendously well wrapped up—there were hot-water tins in the carriage, and every comfort possible for winter travellers. Yet it was true. It was, as I said, bitterly cold.

"'Don't say that already, Laura,' said Mary anxiously, 'or I shall begin to wish I had stood out against your coming with me.'

"'Oh, dear Mary, you couldn't have come alone,' I said.

"I was only fifteen. My accompanying Mary was purely for the sake of being a companion to her, though in my own mind I thought it very possible that, considering the nature of the 'business' we were bent upon, I might prove to be of practical use too. I must tell you what this same 'business' was. It was to choose a house. Owing to my father's already failing health, we had left our own old home more than a year before, and till now we had been living in a temporary house in South Wales. But my father did not like the neighbourhood, and fancied the climate did not suit him, and besides this we could not have had the house after the following April, had we wished it. So there had been great discussions about what we should do, where we should go rather, and much consultation of advertisement sheets and agents' lists. Already Mary had set off on several fruitless expeditions in quest of delightful 'residences' which turned out very much the reverse.

But she had never before had to go such a long way as to East Hornham, which was the name of the post-town near which were two houses to let, each seemingly so desirable that we really doubted whether it would not be difficult to resist taking *both*. My father had known East Hornham as a boy, and though its neighbourhood was not strikingly picturesque, it was considered to be eminently healthy, and he was full of eagerness about it, and wishing he himself could have gone to see the houses. But that was impossible—impossible too for my mother to leave him even for three days; there was nothing for it but for Mary to go, and at once. Our decision in the case of one of the houses must not be delayed a day, for a gentleman had seen it and wanted to take it, only as the agent in charge of it considered that we had 'the first refusal,' he had written to beg my father to send some one to see it at once.

"And thus it came about that Mary and I set off by ourselves in this dreary fashion only two days before Christmas! Mother had proposed our taking a servant, but as we knew that the only one who would have been any use to us was the one of *most* use to mother, we declared we should much prefer the 'independence' of going by ourselves.

"By dint of much examination of Bradshaw we had discovered that it was possible, just possible, to get to East Hornham the same night about nine o'clock.

"'That will enable us to get to bed early, after we have had some supper, and the next day we can devote to seeing the two houses, one or other of which *must* suit us,' said Mary, cheerfully. 'And starting early again the next day we may hope to be back with you on Christmas eve, mother dear.'

"The plan seemed possible enough,—one day would suffice for the houses, as there was no need as yet to go into all the details of the apportionment of rooms, and so on. That would be time enough in the spring, when we proposed to stay at East Hornham for a week or two at the hotel there, and arrange our new quarters at leisure. It was running it rather close, however; the least hitch, such as failing to catch one train out of the many which Mary had cleverly managed to fit in to each other, would throw our scheme out of gear; so mother promised not to be anxious if we failed to appear, and we, on our part, promised to telegraph if we met with any detention.

"For the first half—three-quarters, I might say—of our journey we got on swimmingly. We caught all the trains; the porters and guards were civility itself; and as our only luggage was a small hand-bag that we carried ourselves, we had no trouble of any kind. When we got to Fexel Junction, the last important station we were to pass, our misfortunes began. Here, by rights, we should have had a full quarter of an hour to wait for the express which should drop us at East Hornham on its way north; but when the guard heard our destination he shook his head.

"'The train's gone,' he said. 'We are more than half an hour late.'

"And so it proved. A whole hour and a half had we to sit shivering, in spite of the big fire, in the Fexel waiting-room, and it was eleven at night before, in the slowest of slow trains, we at last found ourselves within a few miles of East Hornham.

"Our spirits had gone down considerably since the morning. We were very tired, and that has *very* much more to do with people's spirits than almost any one realises.

"'It wouldn't matter if we were going to friends,' said Mary. 'But it does seem very strange and desolate—we two poor things, two days before Christmas, arriving at midnight in a perfectly strange place, and nowhere to go to but an inn.'

"'But think how nice it will be, getting home to mother again—particularly if we've settled it all nicely about the house,' I said.

"And Mary told me I was a good little thing, and she was very glad to have me with her. It was not usual for me to be the braver of the two, but you see I felt my responsibilities on this occasion to be great, and was determined to show myself worthy of them.

"And when we did get to the inn, the welcome we received was worthy of Dr. Johnson's praise of inns in general. The fire was so bright, the little table so temptingly spread that the spirits—seldom long depressed—of one-and-twenty and fifteen rose at the sight. For we were hungry as well as tired, and the cutlets and broiled ham which the good people had managed to keep beautifully hot and fresh for us—possibly they were so accustomed to the railway eccentricities that they had only cooked them in time for our arrival by the later train, for we were told afterwards that no one ever *did* catch the express at Fexel Junction,—the cutlets and ham, as I was saying, and the buttered toast, and all the other good things, were *so* good that we made an excellent supper, and slept the sleep of two tired but perfectly healthy young people till seven o'clock the next morning.

"We awoke refreshed and hopeful. But alas! when Mary pulled up the blind what a sight met her eyes! snow—snow everywhere.

"'What *shall* we do?' she said. 'We can never judge of the houses in this weather. And how are we to get to them? Dear me! how unlucky!'

"'But it has left off, and it can't be very thick in these few hours,' I said, 'If only it keeps off now, we could manage.'

"We dressed quickly, and had eaten our breakfast by half-past eight; for at nine, by arrangement,

the agent was to call for us to escort us on our voyage of discovery. The weather gave promise of improving, a faint wintry sunshine came timidly out, and there seemed no question of more snow. When Mr. Turner, the agent, a respectable fatherly sort of man, made his appearance, he altogether pooh-poohed the idea of the roads being impassable; but he went on to say that, to his great regret, it was perfectly impossible for him to accompany us. Mr. H——, Mr. Walter H——, that is to say, the younger son of the owner of the Grange, the larger of the two houses we were to see, had arrived unexpectedly, and Mr. Turner was obliged to meet him about business.

"'I have managed the business about here for them since they left the Grange, and Mr. Walter is only here for a day,' said the communicative Mr. Turner. 'It is most unfortunate. But I have engaged a comfortable carriage for you, Miss Berkeley, and a driver who knows the country thoroughly, and is a very steady man. And, if you will allow me, I will call in this evening to hear what you think of the houses—which you prefer.' He seemed to be quite sure we should fix for one or other.

"'Thank you, that will do very well,' said Mary,—not in her heart, to tell the truth, sorry that we were to do our house-hunting by ourselves. 'We shall get on quite comfortably, I am sure, Mr. Turner. Which house shall we go to see first?'

"'The farthest off, I would advise,' said Mr. Turner. 'That is Hunter's Hall. It is eight miles at least from this, and the days are so short.'

"'Is that the old house with the terraced garden?' I asked.

"Mr. Turner glanced at me benevolently.

"'Oh no, Miss,' he said. 'The terraced garden is at the Grange. Hunter's Hall is a nice little place, but much smaller than the Grange. The gardens at the Grange are really quite a show in summer.'

"'Perhaps they will be too much for us,' said Mary. 'My father does not want a very large place, you understand, Mr. Turner—not being in good health he does not wish to have the trouble of looking after much.'

"'I don't think you would find it too much,' said Mr. Turner. 'The head gardener is to be left at Mr. H——'s expense, and he is very trustworthy. But I can explain all these details this evening if you will allow me, after you have seen the house,' and, so saying, the obliging agent bade us good morning.

"'I am sure we shall like the Grange the best,' I said to Mary, when, about ten o'clock, we found ourselves in the carriage Mr. Turner had provided for us, slowly, notwithstanding the efforts of the two fat horses that were drawing us, making our way along the snow-covered roads.

"'I don't know,' said Mary. 'I am afraid of its being too large. But certainly Hunter's Hall is a long way from the town, and that is a disadvantage.'

"A *very* long way it seemed before we got there.

"'I could fancy we had been driving nearly twenty miles instead of eight,' said Mary, when at last the carriage stopped before a sort of little lodge, and the driver informed us we must get out there, there being no carriage drive up to the house.

"'Objection number one,' said Mary, as we picked our steps along the garden path which led to the front door. 'Father would not like to have to walk along here every time he went out a drive. Dear me!' she added, 'how dreadfully difficult it is to judge of any place in snow! The house looks so dirty, and yet very likely in summer it is a pretty bright white house.'

"It was not a bad little house: there were two or three good rooms downstairs and several fairly good upstairs, besides a number of small inconvenient rooms that might have been utilised by a very large family, but would be no good at all to us. Then the kitchens were poor, low-roofed, and straggling.

"'It might do,' said Mary doubtfully. 'It is more the look of it than anything else that I dislike. It does not look as if gentle-people had lived in it—it seems like a better-class farm-house.'

"And so it proved to be, for on inquiry we learnt from the woman who showed us through, that it never had been anything but a farm-house till the present owner had bought it, improved it a little, and furnished it in a rough-and-ready fashion for a summer residence for his large family of children.

"'We should need a great deal of additional furniture,' said Mary. 'Much of it is very poor and shabby. The rent, however, is certainly very low—to some extent that would make up.'

"Then we thanked the woman in charge, and turned to go. 'Dear me!' said Mary, glancing at her watch, 'it is already half-past twelve. I hope the driver knows the way to the Grange, or it will be dark before we get there. How far is it from here to East Hornham?' she added, turning again to our guide.

"'Ten miles good,' said the woman.

"'I thought so,' said Mary. 'I shall have a crow to pluck with that Mr. Turner for saying it was only eight. And how far to the Grange?'

"'Which Grange, Miss? There are two or three hereabouts.'

"Mary named the family it belonged to.

"'Oh it is quite seven miles from here, though not above two from East Hornham.'

"'Seven and two make nine,' said Mary. 'Why didn't you bring us here past the Grange? It is a shorter way,' she added to the driver, as we got into the carriage again.

"The man touched his hat respectfully, and replied that he had brought us round the other way that we might see more of the country.

"We laughed to ourselves at the idea of seeing the country, shut up in a close carriage and hardly daring to let the tips of our noses peep out to meet the bitter, biting cold. Besides, what was there to see? It was a flat, bare country, telling plainly of the near neighbourhood of the sea, and with its present mantle of snow, features of no kind were to be discerned. Roads, fields, and all were undistinguishable.

"'I wonder he knows his way,' we said to each other more than once, and as we drove on farther we could not resist a slight feeling of alarm as to the weather. The sky grew unnaturally dark and gloomy, with the blue-grey darkness that so often precedes a heavy fall of snow, and we felt immensely relieved when at last the carriage slackened before a pair of heavy old-fashioned gates, which were almost immediately opened by a young woman who ran out from one of the two lodges guarding each a side of the avenue.

"The drive up to the house looked very pretty even then—or rather as if it would be exquisitely so in spring and summer time.

"'I'm sure there must be lots and lots of primroses and violets and periwinkles down there in those woody places,' I cried. 'Oh Mary, Mary, *do* take this house.'

"Mary smiled, but I could see that she too was pleased. And when we saw the house itself the pleasant impression was not decreased. It was built of nice old red stone, or brick, with grey mullions and gables to the roof. The hall was oak wainscotted all round, and the rooms that opened out of it were home-like and comfortable, as well as spacious. Certainly it was too large, a great deal too large, but then we could lock off some of the rooms.

"'People often do so,' I said. 'I think it is a delicious house, don't you, Mary?'

"One part was much older than the other, and it was curiously planned, the garden, the terraced garden behind which I had heard of, rising so, that after going upstairs in the house you yet found yourself on a level with one part of this garden, and could walk out on to it through a little covered passage. The rooms into which this passage opened were the oldest of all—one in particular, tapestried all round, struck me greatly.

"'I hope it isn't haunted,' I said suddenly. Mary smiled, but the young woman looked grave.

"'You don't mean to say it *is*?' I exclaimed.

"'Well, Miss, I was housemaid here several years, and I certainly never saw nor heard nothing. But the young gentlemen did used to say things like that for to frighten us, and for me I'm one as never likes to say as to those things that isn't for us to understand.'

"'I do believe it *is* haunted,' I cried, more and more excited, and though Mary checked me I would not leave off talking about it.

"We were turning to go out into the gardens when an exclamation from Mary caught my attention.

"'It is snowing again and *so* fast,' she said, 'and just see how dark it is.'

"'Twill lighten up again when the snow leaves off, Miss,' said the woman. 'It is not three o'clock yet. I'll make you a bit of fire in a minute if you like, in one of the rooms. In here——' she added, opening the door of a small bedroom next to the tapestry room, 'it'll light in a minute, the chimney can't be cold, for there was one yesterday. I put fires in each in turns.'

"We felt sorry to trouble her, but it seemed really necessary, for just then our driver came to the door to tell us he had had to take out the horses and put them into the stable.

"'They seemed dead beat,' he said, 'with the heavy roads. And besides it would be impossible to drive in the midst of such very thick falling snow. 'Twould be better to wait an hour or two, till it went off. There was a bag in the carriage—should he bring it in?'

"We had forgotten that we had brought with us some sandwiches and buns. In our excitement we had never thought how late it was, and that we must be hungry. Now, with the prospect of an hour or two's enforced waiting with nothing to do, we were only too thankful to be reminded of our provisions. The fire was already burning brightly in the little room—'Mr. Walter's room' the young woman called it—'That must be the gentleman that was to be with Mr. Turner to-day,' I whispered to Mary—and she very good-naturedly ran back to her own little house to fetch the necessary materials for a cup of tea for us.

"'It is a fearful storm,' she informed us when she ran back again, white from head to foot, even with the short exposure, and indeed from the windows we could see it for ourselves. 'The snow is

coming that thick and fast, I could hardly find my own door,' she went on, while she busied herself with preparations for our tea. 'It is all very well in summer here, but it is lonesome-like in winter since the family went away. And my husband's been ill for some weeks too—I have to sit up with him most nights. Last night, just before the snow began, I did get such a fright—all of a sudden something seemed to come banging at our door, and then I heard a queer breathing like. I opened the door, but there was nothing to be seen, but perhaps it was that that made me look strange when Miss here,' pointing to me, 'asked me if the house was haunted. Whatever it was that came to our door certainly rushed off this way.'

"'A dog, or even a cat, perhaps,' said Mary.

"The woman shook her head.

"'A cat couldn't have made such a noise, and there's not a dog about the place,' she said.

"I listened with great interest—but Mary's thoughts were otherwise engaged. There was not a doubt that the snow-storm, instead of going off, was increasing in severity. We drank our tea and ate our sandwiches, and put off our time as well as we could till five o'clock. It was now of course perfectly dark but for the light of the fire. We were glad when our friend from the lodge returned with a couple of tallow candles, blaming herself for having forgotten them.

"'I really don't know what we should do,' said Mary to her. 'The storm seems getting worse and worse. I wonder what the driver thinks about it. Is he in the house, do you know?'

"'He's sitting in our kitchen, Miss,' replied the young woman. 'He seems very much put about. Shall I tell him to come up to speak to you?'

"'Thank you, I wish you would,' said Mary. 'But I am really sorry to bring you out so much in this dreadful weather.'

"The young woman laughed cheerfully.

"'I don't mind it a bit, Miss,' she said; 'if you only knew how glad I shall be if you come to live here. Nothing'd be a trouble if so be as we could get a kind family here again. 'Twould be like old times.'

"She hastened away, and in a few minutes returned to say that the driver was downstairs waiting to speak to us——"

"Laura, my dear," said grandmother, "do you know it is a quarter to ten. How much more is there?"

Aunty glanced through the pages—

"About as much again," she said. "No, scarcely so much."

"Well then, dears, it must wait till to-morrow," said grandmother.

"*Oh*, grandmother!" remonstrated the children.

"Aunty said it was a shorter story than yours, grandmother," said Molly in a half reproachful voice.

"And are you disappointed that it isn't?" said aunty, laughing. "I really didn't think it was so long as it is."

"Oh! aunty, I only wish it was *twenty* times as long," said Molly. "I shouldn't mind hearing it all over again this minute, only you see I do dreadfully want to hear the end. I am sure they had to stay there all night, and that something frightens them. Oh it's 'squisitely delicious," she added, "jigging" up and down on her chair.

"You're a 'squisitely delicious little humbug," said aunty, laughing. "Now good-night all three of you, and get to bed as fast as you can, as I don't want 'grandmother dear' to scold me for your all being tired and sleepy to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIII.

A CHRISTMAS ADVENTURE.—PART II.

> "And as for poor old Rover,
> I'm sure he meant no harm."
>
> OLD DOGGIE.

"Molly is too sharp by half," said aunty, the following evening, when she was preparing to go on with her story. "We *had* to stay there all night—that was the result of Mary's conversation with the driver, the details of which I may spare you. Let me see, where was I? 'The driver scratched his head,'—no,—ah, here it is! 'He was waiting downstairs to speak to us; 'and the result of the speaking I have told you, so I'll go on from here——

"It was so cold downstairs in the fireless, deserted house, that Mary and I were glad to come upstairs again to the little room where we had been sitting, which already seemed to have a sort of home-like feeling about it. But once arrived there we looked at each other in dismay.

"'Isn't it dreadful, Mary?' I said.

"'And we shall miss the morning train from East Hornham—the only one by which we can get through the same day—that is the worst of all,' she said.

"'Can't we be in time? It is only two or three miles from here to East Hornham,' I said.

"'Yes, but you forget I *must* see Mr. Turner again. If I fix to take this house, and it seems very likely, I must not go away without all the particulars for father. There are ever so many things to ask. I have a list of father's, as long as my arm, of questions and inquiries.'

"'Ah, yes,' I agreed; 'and then we have to get our bag at the hotel, and to pay our bill there.'

"'And to choose rooms there to come to at first,' said Mary. 'Oh yes, our getting away by that train is impossible. And then the Christmas trains are like Sunday. Even by travelling all night we cannot get home, I fear. I must telegraph to mother as soon as we get back to East Hornham.'

"The young woman had not returned. We were wondering what had become of her when she made her appearance laden with everything she could think of for our comfort. The bed, she assured us, could not be damp, as it had been 'to the fire' all the previous day, and she insisted on putting on a pair of her own sheets, coarse but beautifully white, and fetching from another room additional blankets, which in their turn had to be subjected to 'airing,' or 'firing' rather. To the best of her ability she provided us with toilet requisites, apologising, poor thing, for the absence of what we 'of course, must be used to,'—as she expressed it, in the shape of fine towels, perfumed soap, and so on. And she ended by cooking us a rasher of bacon and poached eggs for supper, all the materials for which refection she had brought from her own cottage. She was so kind that I shrank from suggesting to Mary the objection to the proposed arrangement, which was all this time looming darkly before me. But when our friend was about to take her leave for the night I could keep it back no longer.

"'Mary,' I whispered, surprised and somewhat annoyed at my sister's calmness, 'are you going to let her go away? You and I *can't* stay here all night alone.'

"'Do you mean that you are frightened, Laura dear?' she said kindly, in the same tone. 'I don't see that there is anything to be frightened of; and if there were, what good would another girl—for this young woman is very little older than I—do us?'

"'She knows the house, any way, and it wouldn't seem so bad,' I replied, adding aloud, 'Oh, Mrs. Atkins'—for I had heard the driver mention her name—'can't you stay in the house with us? We shall feel so dreadfully strange.'

"'I would have done so most gladly, Miss,' the young woman began, but Mary interrupted her.

"'I know you can't,' she said; 'your husband is ill. Laura, it would be very wrong of us to propose such a thing.'

"'That's just how it is,' said Mrs. Atkins. 'My husband has such bad nights he can't be left, and there's no one I could get to sit with him. Besides, it's such a dreadful night to seek for any one.'

"'Then the driver,' I said; 'couldn't he stay somewhere downstairs? He might have a fire in one of the rooms.'

"Mrs. Atkins wished it had been thought of before. 'Giles,'—which it appeared was the man's name—would have done it in a minute, she was sure, but it was too late. He had already set off to seek a night's lodging and some supper, no doubt, at a little inn half a mile down the road.

"'An inn?' I cried. 'I wish we had gone there too. It would have been far better than staying here.'

"'Oh, it's a very poor place—'The Drover's Rest,' they call it. It would never do for you, Miss,' said Mrs. Atkins, looking distressed that all her efforts for our comfort appeared to have been in vain. 'Giles might ha' thought of it himself,' she added, 'but then you see it would never strike him but what here—in the Grange—you'd be as safe as safe. It's not a place for burglaries and such like, hereabouts.'

"'And of course we shall be quite safe,' said Mary. 'Laura dear, what has made you so nervous all of a sudden?'

"I did not answer, for I was ashamed to speak of Mrs. Atkins' story of the strange noises she had heard the previous night, which evidently Mary had forgotten, but I followed the young woman with great eagerness, to see that we were at least thoroughly well defended by locks and bolts in our solitude. The tapestry room and that in which we were to sleep could be locked off from the rest of the empty house, as a door stood at the head of the little stair leading up to them—so far, so well. But Mrs. Atkins proceeded to explain that the door at the *outside* end of the other passage, leading into the garden, could not be locked except from the outside.

"'I can lock you in, if you like, Miss,' she said, 'and come round first thing in the morning;' but this suggestion did not please us at all.

"'No, thank you,' said Mary, 'for if it is fine in the morning I mean to get up very early and walk round the gardens.'

"'No, thank you,' said I, adding mentally, 'Supposing we *were* frightened it would be too dreadful not to be able to get out.'—'But we can lock the door from the tapestry room into the passage, from our side, can't we?' I said, and Mrs. Atkins replied 'Oh yes, of course you can, Miss,' turning the key in the lock of the door as she spoke. 'Master never let the young gentlemen lock the doors when they were boys,' she added, 'for they were always breaking the locks. So you see, Miss, there's a hook and staple to this door, as well as the lock.'

"'Thank you, Mrs. Atkins,' said Mary, 'that will do nicely, I am sure. And now we must really not keep you any longer from your husband. Good-night, and thank you very much.'

"'Good-night,' I repeated, and we both stood at the door of the passage as she made her way out into the darkness. The snow was still falling very heavily, and the blast of cold wind that made its way in was piercing.

"'Oh, Mary, come back to the fire,' I cried. 'Isn't it *awfully* cold? Oh, Mary dear,' I added, when we had both crouched down beside the welcome warmth for a moment, 'won't it be *delicious* to be back with mother again? We never thought we'd have such adventures, did we? Can you fancy this house ever feeling *home-y*, Mary? It seems so dreary now.'

"'Yes, but you've no idea how different it will seem even to-morrow morning, if it's a bright day,' said Mary. 'Let's plan the rooms, Laura. Don't you think the one to the south with the crimson curtains will be best for father?'

"So she talked cheerfully, more, I am sure—though I did not see it at the time—to encourage me than to amuse herself. And after awhile, when she saw that I was getting sleepy, she took a candle into the outer room, saying she would lock the door and make all snug for the night. I heard her, as I thought, lock the door, then she came back into our room and also locked the door leading from it into the tapestry room.

"'You needn't lock that too,' I said sleepily; 'if the tapestry door is locked, we're all right!'

"'I think it's better,' said Mary quietly, and then we undressed, so far as we could manage to do so in the extremely limited state of our toilet arrangements, and went to bed.

"I fell asleep at once. Mary, she afterwards told me, lay awake for an hour or two, so that when she did fall asleep her slumber was unusually profound. I think it must have been about midnight when I woke suddenly, with the feeling—the indescribable feeling—that something had awakened me. I listened, first of all with *only* the ear that happened to be uppermost—then, as my courage gradually returned again, I ventured to move slightly, so that both ears were uncovered. No, nothing was to be heard. I was trying to compose myself to sleep again, persuading myself that I had been dreaming, when again—yes most distinctly—there *was* a sound. A sort of shuffling, scraping noise, which seemed to come from the direction of the passage leading from the tapestry room to the garden. Fear made me selfish. I pushed Mary, then shook her gently, then more vigorously.

"'Mary,' I whispered. 'Oh, Mary, *do* wake up. I hear such a queer noise.'

"Mary, poor Mary awoke, but she had been very tired. It was a moment or two before she collected her faculties.

"'Where are we? What is it?' she said. Then she remembered. 'Oh yes—what is the matter, Laura?'

"'Listen,' I said, and Mary, calmly self-controlled as usual, sat up in bed and listened. The sound was quite distinct, even louder than I had heard it.

"'Oh, Mary!' I cried. 'Somebody's trying to get in. Oh, Mary, what *shall* we do? Oh, I am so frightened. I shall die with fright. Oh, I wish I had never come!'

"I was on the verge of hysterics, or something of the kind.

"Mary, herself a little frightened, as she afterwards confessed—in the circumstances what young girl could have helped being so?—turned to me quietly. Something in the very tone of her voice seemed to soothe me.

"'Laura dear,' she said gravely, 'did you say your prayers last night?'

"'Oh yes, oh yes, indeed I did. But I'll say them again now if you like,' I exclaimed.

"Even then, Mary could hardly help smiling.

"'That isn't what I meant,' she said. 'I mean, what is the *good* of saying your prayers if you don't believe what you say?'

"'But I do, I do,' I sobbed.

"'Then why are you so terrified? You asked God to take care of you. When you said it you believed He would. Why not believe it now? *Now*, when you are tried, is the time to show if you do mean what you say. I am sure God *will* take care of us. Now try, dear, to be reasonable, and I will get up and see what it is.'

"'But don't leave me, and I will try to be good,' I exclaimed, jumping out of bed at the same moment that she did, and clinging to her as she moved. 'Oh, Mary, don't you think perhaps we'd better go back to bed and put our fingers in our ears, and by morning it wouldn't seem anything.'

"'And fancy ever after that there had been something mysterious, when perhaps it is something quite simple,' said Mary. 'No, I shouldn't like that at all. Of course I won't do anything rash, but I would like to find out.'

"'The fire, fortunately, was not yet quite out. Mary lighted one of the candles with a bit of paper from a spark which she managed to coax into a flame. The noise had, in the meantime, subsided, but just as we had got the candle lighted, it began again.

"'Now,' said Mary, 'you stay here, Laura, and I'll go into the next room and listen at the passage door.' She spoke so decidedly that I obeyed in trembling. Mary armed herself with the poker, and, unlocking our door, went into the tapestry room, first lighting the second candle, which she left with me. She crossed the room to the door as she had said. *I* thought it was to listen; in reality her object was to endeavour to turn the key in the lock of the tapestry room door, which she had *not* been able to do the night before, for once the door was shut the key would not move, and she had been obliged to content herself with the insecure hold of the hook and staple. Now it had struck her that by inserting the poker in the handle of the key she might succeed in turning it, and thus provide ourselves with a double defence. For if the intruder—dog, cat, whatever it was—burst the outer door and got into the tapestry room, my fears, she told me afterwards, would, she felt sure, have become uncontrollable. It was a brave thing to do—was it not? She deserved to succeed, and she did. With the poker's help she managed to turn the key, and then with a sigh of relief she stood still for a moment listening. The sounds continued—whatever it was it was evidently what Mrs. Atkins had heard the night before—a shuffling, rushing-about sound, then a sort of impatient breathing. Mary came back to me somewhat reassured.

"'Laura,' she said, 'I keep to my first opinion. It is a dog, or a cat, or some animal.'

"'But suppose it is a *mad* dog?' I said, somewhat unwilling to own that my terrors had been exaggerated.

"'It is possible, but not probable,' she replied. 'Any way it can't get in here. Now, Laura, it is two o'clock by my watch. There is candle enough to last an hour or two, and I will make up the fire again. Get into bed and *try* to go to sleep, for honestly I do not think there is any cause for alarm.'

"'But Mary, I *can't* go to sleep unless you come to bed too, and if you don't, I can't believe you think it's nothing,' I said. So, to soothe me, she gave up her intention of remaining on guard by the fire, and came to bed, and, wonderful to relate, we both went to sleep, and slept soundly till—what o'clock do you think?

"It was *nine* o'clock when I awoke; Mary was standing by me fully dressed, a bright frosty sun shining into the room, and a tray with a cup of tea and some toast and bacon keeping hot by the fire.

"'Oh, Mary!' I cried, sitting up and rubbing my eyes.

"'Are you rested?' she said. 'I have been up since daylight—not so very early *that*, at this season—Mrs. Atkins came and brought me some breakfast, but we hadn't the heart to waken you, you poor child.'

"'And oh, Mary, what about the noise? Did she hear it?'

"'She wasn't sure. She half fancied she did, and then she thought she might have been imagining it from the night before. But get up, dear. It is hopeless to try for the early train; we can't leave till to-night, or to-morrow morning; but I am anxious to get back to East Hornham and see Mr. Turner. And before we go I'd like to run round the gardens.'

"'But, Mary,' I said, pausing in my occupation of putting on my stockings, 'are you still thinking of taking this house?'

"'Still!' said Mary. 'Why not?'

"'Because of the noises. If we can't find out what it is, it would be very uncomfortable. And with father being so delicate too, and often awake at night!'

"Mary did not reply, but my words were not without effect. We ran round the gardens as she had proposed—they were lovely even then—took a cordial farewell of Mrs. Atkins, and set off on our return drive to East Hornham. I must not forget to tell you that we well examined that part of the garden into which the tapestry room passage led, but there were no traces of footsteps, the explanation of which we afterwards found to be that the snow had continued to fall till much later in the night than the time of our fright.

"Mr. Turner was waiting for us in considerable anxiety. We had done, he assured us, the most sensible thing possible in the circumstances. He had not known of our non-arrival till late in the evening, and, but for his confidence in Giles, would have set off even then. As it was, he had sent a messenger to Hunter's Hall, and was himself starting for the Grange.

"Mary sent me out of the room while she spoke to him, at which I was not over well pleased. She told him all about the fright we had had, and that, unless its cause were explained, it would

certainly leave an uncomfortable feeling in her mind, and that, considering our father's invalid state, till she had talked it over with our mother she could not come to the decision she had hoped.

"'It may end in our taking Hunter's Hall,' she said, 'though the Grange is far more suitable.'

"Mr. Turner was concerned and perplexed. But Mary talked too sensibly to incline him to make light of it.

"'It is very unfortunate,' he said; 'and I promised an answer to the other party by post this evening. And you say, Miss Berkeley, that Mrs. Atkins heard it too. You are *sure*, Miss, you were not dreaming?'

"'*Quite* sure. It was my sister that heard it, and woke me,' she replied; 'and then we both heard it.'

"Mr. Turner walked off, metaphorically speaking, scratching his head, as honest Giles had done literally in his perplexity the night before. He promised to call back in an hour or two, when he had been to the station and found out about the trains for us.

"We packed our little bag and paid the bill, so that we might be quite ready, in case Mr. Turner found out any earlier train by which we might get on, for we had telegraphed to mother that we should do our best to be back the next day. I was still so sleepy and tired that Mary persuaded me to lie down on the bed, in preparation for the possibility of a night's journey. I was *nearly* asleep when a tap came to the door, and a servant informed Mary that a gentleman was waiting to speak to her.

"'Mr. Turner,' said she carelessly, as she passed into the sitting-room.

"But it was not Mr. Turner. In his place she found herself face to face with a very different person—a young man, of seven or eight and twenty, perhaps, tall and dark—dark-haired and dark-eyed that is to say—grave and quiet in appearance, but with a twinkle in his eyes that told of no lack of humour.

"'I must apologise for calling in this way, Miss Berkeley,' he said at once, 'but I could not help coming myself to tell how *very* sorry I am about the fright my dog gave you last night at the Grange. I have just heard of it from Mr. Turner.'

"'Your dog?' repeated Mary, raising her pretty blue eyes to his face in bewilderment.

"'Yes,' he said, 'he ran off to the Grange—his old home, you know—oh, I beg your pardon! I am forgetting to tell you that I am Walter H——,—in the night, and must have tried to find his way into my room in the way he used to do. I always left the door unlatched for him.'

"Instead of replying, Mary turned round and flew straight off into the room where I was.

"'Oh, Laura,' she exclaimed, 'it *was* a dog; Mr. Walter H—— has just come to tell us. Are you not delighted? Now we can fix for the Grange at once, and it will all be right. Come quick, and hear about it.'

"I jumped up, and, without even waiting to smooth my hair, hurried back into the sitting-room with Mary. Our visitor, very much amused at our excitement, explained the whole, and sent downstairs for 'Captain,' a magnificent retriever, who, on being told to beg our pardon, looked up with his dear pathetic brown eyes in Mary's face in a way that won her heart at once. His master, it appeared, had been staying at East Hornham the last two nights with an old friend, the clergyman there. Both nights, on going to bed late, he had missed 'Captain,' whose usual habit was to sleep on a mat at his door. The first night he was afraid the dog was lost, but to his relief he reappeared again early the next morning; the second night, also, his master happening to be out late at Mr. Turner's, with whom he had a good deal of business to settle, the dog had set off again on his own account to his former quarters, with probably some misty idea in his doggy brain that it was the proper thing to do.

"'But how did you find out where he had been?' said I.

"'I went out early this morning, feeling rather anxious about 'Captain,'' said our visitor; 'and I met him coming along the road leading from the Grange. Where he had spent the night after failing to get into his old home I cannot tell; he must have sheltered somewhere to get out of the snow and the cold. Later this morning I walked on to the Grange, and, hearing from Ruth Atkins of your fright and her own, I put 'two and two together,' and I think the result quite explains the noises you heard.'

"'Quite,' we both said; 'and we thank you so much for coming to tell us.'

"'It was certainly the very least I could do,' he said; 'and I thank you very much for forgiving poor old Captain.'

"So we left East Hornham with lightened hearts, and, as our new friend was travelling some distance in our direction, he helped us to accomplish our journey much better than we could have managed it alone. And after all we *did* get back to our parents on Christmas day, though not on Christmas eve."

Aunty stopped.

"Then you did take the Grange, aunty?" said the children.

Aunty nodded her head.

"And you never heard any more noises?"

"Never," said aunty. "It was the pleasantest of old houses; and oh, we were sorry to leave it, weren't we, mother?"

"Why did you leave it, grandmother dear?" said Molly.

"When your grandfather's health obliged him to spend the winters abroad; then we came here," said grandmother.

"Oh yes," said Molly, adding after a little pause, "I *would* like to see that house."

Aunty smiled. "Few things are more probable than that you will do so," she said, "provided you can make up your mind to cross the sea again."

"Why? how do you mean, aunty?" said Molly, astonished, and Ralph and Sylvia listened with eagerness to aunty's reply.

"Because," said aunty,—then she looked across to grandmother. "Won't you explain to them, mother?" she said.

"Because, my darlings, that dear old house will be your home—your happy home, I trust, some day," said grandmother.

"Is my father thinking of buying it?" asked Ralph, pricking up his ears.

"No, my boy, but some day it will be his. It is your uncle's now, but he is *much* older than your father, and has no children, so you see it will come to your father some day—sooner than we have thought, perhaps, for your uncle is too delicate to live in England, and talks of giving it up to your father."

"But *still* I don't understand," said Ralph, looking puzzled. "Did my *uncle* buy it?"

"No, no. Did you never hear of old Alderwood Grange?"

"Alderwood," said Ralph. "Of *course*, but we never speak of it as 'The Grange,' you know, and I have never seen it. It has always been let since I can remember. I never even heard it described. Papa does not seem to care to speak of it."

"No, dear," said aunty. "The happiest part of his life began there, and you know how all the light seemed to go out of his life when your mother died. It was there he—Captain's master—got to know her, the 'Mary' of my little adventure. You understand it all now? He was a great deal in the neighbourhood—at the little town I called East Hornham—the summer we first came to Alderwood. And there they were married; and there, in the peaceful old church-yard, your dear mother is buried."

The children listened with sobered little faces. "Poor papa!" they said.

"But some day," said grandmother, "some day I hope, when you three are older, that Alderwood will again be a happy home for your father. It is what your mother would have wished, I know."

"Well then, you and aunty must come to live with us there. You must. Promise now, grandmother dear," said Molly.

Grandmother smiled, but shook her head gently.

"Grandmother will be a *very* old woman by then, my darling," she said, "and perhaps——"

Molly pressed her little fat hand over grandmother's mouth.

"I know what you're going to say, but you're *not* to say it," she said. "And *every* night, grandmother dear, I ask in my prayers for you to live to be a hundred."

Grandmother smiled again.

"Do you, my darling?" she said. "But remember, whatever we *ask*, God knows best what to *answer*."

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW THIS BOOK CAME TO BE WRITTEN.

"Ring out ye merry, merry bells,
Your loudest, sweetest chime;
Tell all the world, both rich and poor,
'Tis happy Christmas time."

"Grandmother," said Ralph, at breakfast on what Molly called "the morning of Christmas Eve," "I was going to ask you, only the story last night put it out of my head, if I might ask Prosper to spend to-morrow with us. His uncle and aunt are going away somewhere, and he will be quite alone. Besides he and I have made a plan about taking the shawl to the old woman quite early in the morning. You don't know *how* pleased he was when I told him you had got it for her, grandmother—just as pleased as if he had bought it for her with his own money."

"Then he is a really unselfish boy," said grandmother. "Certainly you may ask him. I had thought of it too, but somehow it went out of my head. And, as well as the shawl, I shall have something to send to Prosper's old friend. She must have a good dinner for once."

"That'll be awfully jolly," said Ralph. Sylvia and Molly listened with approval, for of course they had heard all about the mystery of Ralph's wood-carrying long ago.

"At Christmas time we're to try to make other people happy," said Molly, meditatively. "*I* thought of something that would make a great lot of people happy, if you and aunty would do it, grandmother dear?"

"I don't think you did *all* the thinking about it, Molly," said Sylvia, with a slight tone of reproach. "I do think I did some."

"Well, I daresay you did. We did it together. It couldn't be for *this* Christmas, but for another."

"But what is it?" asked grandmother.

"It is that you and aunty should make a book out of the stories you've told us, and then you see lots and lots of other children would be pleased as well as us," said Molly. "Of course you'd have to put more to it, to make it enough. I don't *mind* if you put some in about me, grandmother dear, if you would *like* to very much."

"No," said Sylvia, "that would be very stupid. Grandmother couldn't make a book about *us*. We're not uncommon enough. We couldn't be *heroines*, Molly."

"But children don't care about heroines," said Molly. "Children like to hear about other children, just really what they do. Now, don't they, grandmother dear? And *isn't* my plan a good one?"

Will *you* answer little Molly's question, children dear? For dear you all are, whoever and wherever you be. Boys and girls, big and little, dark and fair, brown-eyed and blue-eyed, merry and quiet—all of you, dear unknown friends whose faces I may never see, yet all of whom I love. I shall be so glad—so very glad, if this little simple story-book of mine helps to make this Christmas Day a happy and merry one for you all.

THE END.

Sir Francis Drake.

Creasy, Sir E.
The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World.

Dickens, Charles.
Oliver Twist.
The Old Curiosity Shop.
Christmas Books.
Barnaby Rudge.

Edgeworth, Maria.
Lazy Lawrence and other Stories.

Eliot, George.
Scenes of Clerical Life.

Finny, Violet Geraldine.
Revolt of the Young MacCormacks.

Fowler, W. Warde.
A Year with the Birds.
Tales of the Birds.
More Tales of the Birds.

Fraser, Edward.
Famous Fighters of the Fleet.

Gilmore, Rev. John.
Storm Warriors; or Life-Boat Work on the Goodwin Sands.

Grimm, The Bros.
Household Stories.

Henley, W. E.
Lyra Heroica. A Book of Verse for Boys.

Hooper, G.
Life of Wellington.

Hughes, T.
Tom Brown's School Days.
Alfred the Great.

Keary, A. and E.
Heroes of Asgard.

Kingsley, Charles.
Hereward the Wake.
Westward Ho!
The Heroes.
The Water-Babies.
Madam How and Lady Why.
Glaucus.

Kipling, Rudyard.
Selected Stories.

Laughton, Sir J. K.
Life of Nelson.

Marryat, Captain.
Newton Forster.
The Pirate and the Three Cutters.
Peter Simple.
Japhet in Search of a Father.
Mr. Midshipman Easy.
Masterman Ready.
The Phantom Ship.

Metelerkamp, Sanni.
Outa Karel's Stories.

Mitchell, S. Weir.
The Adventures of François.

Molesworth, Mrs.
Carrots.

Tell Me a Story.
The Tapestry Room.
The Cuckoo Clock.
Grandmother Dear.
Herr Baby.
Us.
The Rectory Children.
Two Little Waifs.
Four Winds Farm.
The Ruby Ring.
Mary.
Nurse Heatherdale's Story.
The Woodpigeons and Mary.
The Story of a Year.
Edmée. A Tale of the French Revolution.

Morier, James.
The Adventures of Hajji Baba.

Norton, H. E.
A Book of Courtesy.

Oman, Sir C. W.
Warwick the Kingmaker.

Perry, W. C.
The Boy's Iliad.
The Boy's Odyssey.

Scott, Sir Walter.
Kenilworth.
Count Robert of Paris.

Sharp, Evelyn.
Micky.
The Children Who Ran Away.
The Other Boy.
The Youngest Girl in the School.

Thackeray, W. M.
Henry Esmond.

Yonge, Charlotte M.
Little Duke.
The Prince and the Page.
Unknown to History.
The Dove in the Eagle's Nest.
The Chaplet of Pearls.

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