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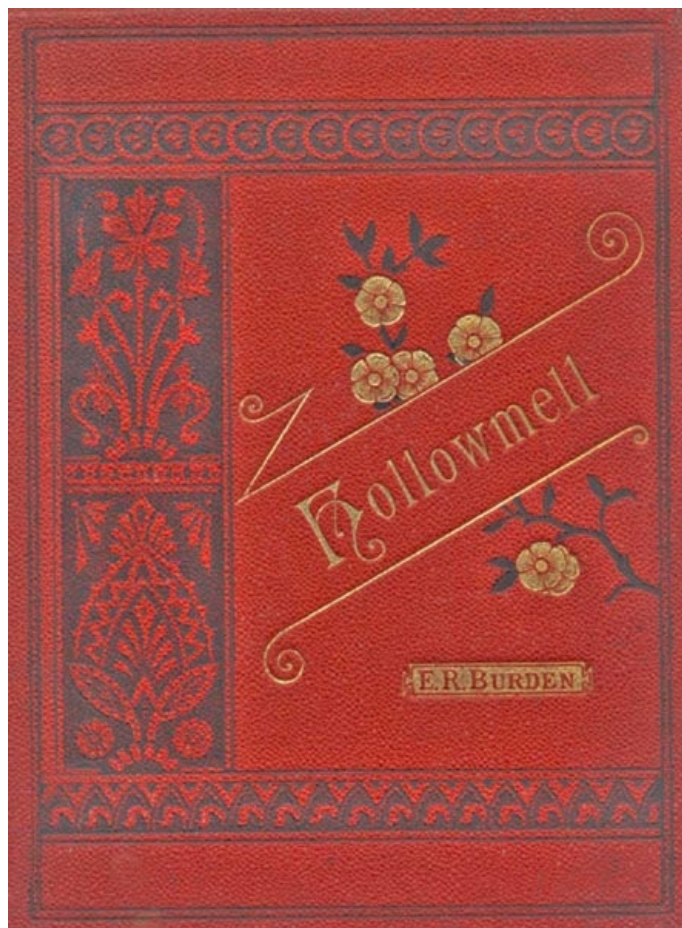
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HOLLOWMELL ***



HOLLOWMELL:

OR,

A SCHOOLGIRL'S MISSION.

BY

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HOLLOWMELL: OR, A SCHOOLGIRL'S MISSION.



CHAPTER I.

MINNIE'S PLAN.

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"Why, wherever *can* my books be?" exclaimed Minnie Kimberley in a vexed tone, as she hunted up and down the schoolroom, opening now one cupboard, then another, now a desk, and again diving down to peer under some out-of-the-way table or form; for places which one would think the most unlikely, were certain to be the places where Minnie's books would at length be discovered.

"I can't make it out," she continued, her bright face clouded over with vexation, "somehow or other my books always *do* manage to get lost."

"Perhaps if you could manage to put them back in your desk when you had done with them, instead of leaving them lying just wherever you happen to be, they might manage to stay there," suggested Mona Cameron, a tall young lady, who sat near the window sewing, and who had more than once been disturbed by Minnie's voyage of discovery.

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"Oh, I've found two of them!" cried Minnie, emerging from beneath a distant table, her hands black with dust, and herself nothing abashed by Mona's rather sarcastic speech. "I wonder, now, whether I shall be able to hunt up the others before Mab finishes her music!"

"O, Mabel Chartres is away," volunteered one of the other girls, "I heard her come down fully ten minutes ago."

"That can't be," replied Minnie, "she must have come in here for her things before she went away."

"Not at all, seeing she carried them up to the music-room with her that she might save time; I heard her say she wanted away soon."

Minnie flew to the corner where Mabel's hat and jacket usually hung, and sure enough both were gone. She sat down for a minute ready to cry with disappointment, but recovering herself immediately, she choked back the tears, and proceeded with the search for her books, though in a rather more subdued manner, and with a great deal less bustle and talkativeness. At length they were all collected from their various hiding-places, and Minnie was ready to depart, but she seemed in no hurry to go. She stood leaning against the desk, with a rather irresolute look on her face, as if trying to make up her mind to something. More than once she moved as if to go, but something seemed to arrest her step.

At last she turned to where Mona Cameron still sat at work, and said in a clear voice which could be distinctly heard by all the girls in the room, "I *will* try, Mona, to take your advice about putting my books back in my desk; I know I'm horribly careless, and I thank you for reminding me how I can mend it if I try."

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All the girls looked up amazed—Mona herself as amazed as any and also a little confused—but Minnie did not wait to see what effect her words would produce, she walked straight out after she had spoken, and was not a little astonished, and perhaps a little perturbed, to find Miss Elgin, the English governess, in the dressing-room where she could not choose but hear what had passed. Her face flushed, and she tried to hurry out without attracting her notice, but Miss Elgin stopped her as she passed the desk at which she sat, and drawing the bright face down to the level of her own, kissed her on the forehead with a whispered "That was bravely spoken, Minnie," and let her go.

Minnie rushed out into the cool air with a flushed and happy face, and her heart beating high with the joy of victory, and the gratification of knowing that her effort was appreciated. She ran home without once thinking of her disappointment in missing Mabel, but she did not forget to seek her own room the first thing when she got in, and pour out her thanksgiving for her recent triumph—even although she did find herself stopping more than once in the midst of it to go over again in her own mind the scene in the dressing-room afterward. After dinner she was occupied with her lessons, and she found it just a little difficult to settle down to them after the excitement of the afternoon.

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She was a girl of a very warm and impulsive temperament, and little things were apt to upset her in a way that many people would characterize as absurd, but which was, so far from being absurd, simply natural and unavoidable in an emotional nature such as hers. It was not, therefore, through one cause and another, till she was in bed that she recollected how she had wished to speak to Mabel so particularly, and what it was she had to speak about. She felt just a little ashamed of herself for allowing what had, only that morning, seemed to her a thing of the first importance, to be crushed out, and for the moment annihilated, by the occurrence of the afternoon. However, she decided to make up for it on the morrow, and satisfied with this resolve,

she fell fast asleep.

Next morning, true to her resolution, she was early at the school so as to be able to see Mabel Chartres, her most particular friend and constant companion, before the day's work began. Mabel was a little late, so Minnie could only whisper to her to wait when school was over, and then they were called to their different places, for Minnie, though younger by almost a year than Mabel, occupied an advanced position in the first class, while Mabel was only in the second, and even there was not of much account. Minnie, indeed in most things divided the laurels of the school with Mona Cameron who was the oldest pupil, and the emulation of the two kept the school in a perpetual state of effervescence; Mona being sharp, and at times rather acrid, and Minnie bright and sparkling and excitable, the contact of the two natures was more than calculated to produce such a result. But on this particular day it seemed as if some of the ingredients were wanting, for the morning and afternoon passed, to the astonishment of all, without a single "phiz" as the girls were wont somewhat felicitously to call the frequent passages of arms in which the two girls considered it their peculiar privilege to indulge.

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Mona had slightly sneered at what she termed Minnie's latest "crank," on the preceding evening, but she had been a good deal impressed by the courage and simplicity of Minnie's conduct, and in reality admired it, while she felt she could never emulate it. She was honest with herself whatever she might be with others, and felt in a vague sort of way that she might be doing a thing almost as admirable, if not as likely to excite admiration, if she could even only for one day keep her sharp tongue under control, and refrain from such exercises of the vein of sarcasm which was her peculiar characteristic, as at other times she held it almost necessary to perform. Thus it was that the school was particularly quiet that day, for Minnie was also in a subdued mood, and so when school was over and she was at liberty to walk off with Mabel, she felt just in the frame of mind for the discussion to which she had been looking forward all day.

She felt, however, that she could not proceed with it at present, on the way home where they would be liable to interruption at almost every turn, so she persuaded Mabel to come home with her. This was no very difficult matter, any more than it was an infrequent occurrence, for Minnie and Mabel were never very long separate, and having had to leave without her friend on the previous evening, had been as much a disappointment to Mabel as it had been to Minnie.

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It was a remarkable feature in the friendship which existed between them, that it was, and always had been free from that species of quarrel called "huffs." In the case of nine girls' friendships out of ten, the fact of one going off in the way Mabel had done, without an explanation afterwards or an intimation before hand, would have formed a very strong foundation whereon to raise a structure of evidence to prove that something was amiss, which few girls could have resisted. But no such idea entered Minnie's head. She simply concluded that something very pressing had compelled Mabel to leave earlier than usual, and trusted her too completely to connect it in any way with herself.

After dinner they proceeded with their lessons, which seemed to be got over in a much shorter time when the two worked together, than when they each worked separately, so that they were soon free to settle down before the fire in Minnie's room, and begin the subject which had been on Minnie's mind for almost four days now.

"Well, Minnie, what is it?" asked Mabel at last, for Minnie seemed to be at a loss how to begin, now that the time had come. She walked over and sat down on the rug, leaning her head on Mabel's knee, and began, "you know, Mab, dear, that it isn't very long since I found out that there was anything better in life than laughing and dancing and enjoying one's self in the way the world calls enjoyment. I told you all about it before, how Mr. Laurence told me about the happiness of being a Christian, and living for something beside my own pleasure, and how since that I have felt that great happiness myself. I can't talk very much about it, because it is so new—and so—I can't find a word for it, but I think you'll know what I mean—that I don't quite understand it myself, but I feel it all the same, and it has made me another creature. I don't think anybody would believe that who only sees the outside of me, but it is quite true; I have different thoughts and feelings and wishes about everything, and feel altogether as if I had newly awakened and could never go to sleep again."

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Minnie had rattled on in her usual impulsive fashion, and now pulled up suddenly, for Mabel's arm tightened round her arm with a convulsive clasp, and her head dropped on her shoulder in a perfect agony of weeping.

Minnie felt a good deal of surprise as well as alarm at this sudden outburst, for she had never seen Mabel so much overcome before, and just now it seemed so altogether unaccountable; she concluded, however, that it would be useless to attempt any solution of the mystery until the storm had somewhat spent itself; she did not, therefore, trouble her with any questions or attempts at consolation, but allowed her to cry on unrestrainedly, only changing her position, that she might the better render her all the support in her power, and convey to her by every means but that of speech her sympathy and concern. At length her sobs began to be less convulsive, and her tears to come less freely, and soon she was able to speak and assure her friend that she need not be under any apprehension concerning her, and that she would soon be able to tell her the cause of her grief.

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Minnie waited with great patience for some minutes before she would allow Mabel to speak again, and then, Mabel protesting that it was all over, and that she was quite calm again, began with brimming eyes, notwithstanding her protest. "It must have been the narration of your

happiness that caused me to lose control of myself, I felt the contrast between it and my own state of mind so keenly, that I was quite overcome—Oh, Minnie, I would give every drop of mere earthly happiness to feel for one hour, what you have described!"

Minnie looked at her in astonishment. "Why, Mabel, of course you never needed to feel such a thing—you have known about these things all your life!"

"Ah, yes!" replied Mabel, "I have known *about* them, as you say, but I have never *known* them. You know one may know all about a thing or person, and yet never know it or him by direct experience."

"That is true," said Minnie, reflectively. "But why did you always try to interest me in them, when you really felt no good effect from them yourself?"

"Please don't ask me that!" entreated Mabel, "It would be worse than useless for me to try to explain it, but it is a fact that I have never known such a change as you talk about—as what we call conversion must surely imply—so I have never been converted, and that is the reason, I suppose, why all my efforts to interest you were always vain. How could I hope to lead you to a Saviour I could not see myself?"

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Minnie was silent. She could not understand Mabel's difficulty, and therefore did not feel able to discuss it. She could not say anything to comfort or console her either, from her own short experience, because she felt, notwithstanding all that she had just heard, that Mabel was years and years before her on the road—further by a long way than all the years of her life. She felt this but could not say it; it seemed to hover through her mind like a shadow, and she could not grasp it in order to put it into words.

Mabel saw how puzzled she was, and realized how dangerous it might be to her peace to communicate difficulties of such a nature in her present impressionable state; she therefore endeavoured to divert her mind into a safer channel by getting her to talk about herself.

"It is very silly of me," she said, "to speak thus to you who have so newly begun the race. What should you know of such things? Come, we won't talk about them, and I daresay I shall grow out of such morbid notions in time; tell me about yourself, I am sure it will do me good; you were telling me about how different you felt. Please do go on."

"But are you sure it won't affect you as it did before? I would like to tell you about it because of what it has led me to do, and because I would like you to feel as I do, if, as you say, you have never felt it." And Minnie looked at her with great tears in her eyes, and with a great pity in her warm generous heart, wishing she could give half her happiness to her friend.

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"Go on, dear," said Mabel, "you don't know how much good it will do me."

"Well, but I must tell you, Mabel, that although I am very happy, it sometimes troubles me to think how little I am changed outwardly, and how nobody but yourself would believe anything of all I have told you. I am sure Mona Cameron wouldn't"—she stopped suddenly, half inclined to interrupt herself in order to retail to Mabel the incident of the previous day, but thinking better of it, she resumed—"It does trouble me more than a little, sometimes, but I'm not going to let it. I know about the difference, and you know about it, and better than all, God who wrought it knows about it, so what can it matter whether the world knows about it or not?"

"But, Minnie," interrupted Mabel, "I don't see that you are quite right there; it must be of consequence that we show to the world what side we are on."—"O, yes, of course," replied Minnie hastily, "I was just coming to that—I meant the school-girls particularly when I said the world just now, because I know it will take a long time to convince them of the reality of this—indeed I am inclined to think they won't be convinced, it won't suit their ideas—but there, I am again! judging them just in the very way I am condemning them for judging me. Oh, dear, what a long time it will take before I get out of my old way of speaking without thought, for which my new way of thinking rebukes me a thousand times a day!"

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"Patience, dear," recommended Mabel, knowing well what a hard recommendation it was to follow, but feeling she must say something.

"Yes, Mabel," returned Minnie, "I *am* learning patience—even I, who never knew what restraint meant all my life, am learning what true freedom is for the first time."

Mabel looked down at her wistfully, as if half inclined to say something, but remembering her danger she remained silent.

"And that just reminds me," continued Minnie, after a moment's pause, "that I have not yet told you the new idea I have been so longing to have your opinion upon, since ever it came into my head."

"Well, you must make haste," Mabel answered, "you see it's quite late already."

"O, it won't take long! I'll just tell you about it, and we can go into it some other time, it's only a project, you know, and of course I wanted to have your opinion and advice first, and your help afterwards."

"All of which you may count on," said Mabel smiling.

"Well, then, I must ask you in the first place, if you know the row of houses down beside the pit

which papa built for the miners?"

"Yes, I pass it every day coming to school."

"Then you will probably have noticed how ill-kept and dirty the houses are, and how untidy the women and children are, who continually lounge and romp about the doors."

"Indeed I have," returned Mabel, "and I have often thought what a pity it was that those houses which might be made so beautiful, should be kept in such a state." [Pg 16]

"That is just what papa was saying the other morning at breakfast. He said that he had had the houses built on the most approved principles, with every sort of convenience and facility for the promotion of health and order, and yet when he took a party of gentleman down to the pit last week, he was utterly ashamed to observe the squalor and misery of the place. He said that some of the worst slums of London could hardly be worse, except in the matter of light and air, and even these the people seemed to be doing their best to exclude, judging from the dust covered and tightly closed windows. It just occurred to me while he was speaking that perhaps I might be able to do something to remedy this terrible state of affairs. I am sure papa would be glad to do anything to help us. I have not said anything to him about it till I should hear your verdict, and because I haven't the least shadow of an idea what plan would be best to go upon. What do you think of it?"

"I think it will be a very difficult matter, and will require a great deal of consideration," replied Mabel thoughtfully.

"But you don't think it impossible or impracticable?" inquired Minnie, anxiously.

"Impossible?—no," replied she, "But do you think our hands will be strong enough, and our hearts stout enough for such an undertaking. It is not a thing we may take up to amuse ourselves with for a moment, and throw down when we are tired of it." [Pg 17]

"O, there's no fear of *you* doing that with anything, and as for me, I must strike while the iron is hot. You know how new impressions wear off with me, and if I don't get into some work of this kind at once, I am afraid I'll get cool. I don't mean that I fear going back to where I was, but I am not like you, I haven't lived in it all my life, and I need something to keep up my interest. It's so with me in everything else, and I am sure it won't be different in this case, because of course my nature won't change, although my heart has. But that is not all; during these few weeks I have been living just in a sort of trance—that is, every moment I've been alone, content to dream all the time of how good God had been to me, but just the night before papa spoke about those people, it suddenly occurred to me that I must do something to help others, to find out how good He would be to them if they would only let Him. It seemed dreadfully selfish to sit still and drink in that wonderful happiness, without offering some of it to others when there are thousands dying for a drop of it. So when papa spoke about the miners down at Hollowmell, it struck me that here was work just ready for me."

She stopped, a little out of breath, and waited to hear what Mabel would say.

"Well, it does seem," said Mabel, beginning at the same time to put on her jacket and hat, "It does seem as if it was intended you should take this in hand; but don't let us do anything rashly. Let us think it over carefully for a week, and if we come to the conclusion that it would not be too much for us, let us begin operations then." [Pg 18]

"O, Mab!" cried Minnie in dismay, "How calmly you talk of putting it off. Why, my hands are just aching to get to work, and then, what's the use of considering whether or not it will be too much for us; no amount of consideration will convince us as one attempt will, and of what use is our faith if we cannot make a practical use of it?"

"Perhaps I am over cautious," Mabel admitted, "but let us take at least till Saturday to make up our minds as to the best way of going to work, as you have already confessed you have not yet thought of a plan."

"Very well," agreed Minnie, kissing Mabel warmly as she bade her good-night, "Not a word more till Saturday, when we shall have time enough to give the subject the attention it requires. Good-night."

"Good-night," returned Mabel, as she ran lightly down the steps, and was soon lost in the gathering darkness. [Pg 19]



CHAPTER II.

ITS DEVELOPMENT.

Next day there was much open wonder expressed concerning the absence of any of the little bursts of excitement with which Mona Cameron and Minnie Kimberley were wont to refresh the pupils of Miss Marsden's Seminary for young Ladies. Some were even heard expressing disappointment with the novel arrangement, and Mona, who seemed as utterly at a loss to account for it as the rest, became rather piqued at Minnie's serene imperturbability under her most potent thrusts, and was fain to exercise her wit on some more vulnerable object. Minnie kept closely to her work during lesson time, and even during the pauses between classes was observed to sit quite still, attentively contemplating the toe of her boot, and never once running over to whisper to Mabel as she invariably did when she had something on her mind.

Then, when lessons were over, and needlework began, she sat in her usual place beside Mabel, but both appeared to be deeply interested in their work, and did not exchange a word, although talking was quite allowable during that time, and the privilege was usually taken advantage of fully by Minnie.

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This circumstance was construed by some to indicate that a quarrel had taken place between the two friends, and was preying upon Minnie's mind, which hypothesis, however, was quickly annihilated when the two walked off together as usual, apparently on their usual terms, and in their usual spirits.

Next day things stood in exactly the same position, and the girls were beginning to get impatient for a solution of the mystery, but no solution was forthcoming. Then came Saturday, on which day school was not held, and the two friends were at liberty to discuss their project in full.

They had arranged that the discussion was to take place at Mabel's home, as Minnie's brothers were all at home on Saturday, and would be likely to interfere with their intention of keeping the matter private.

Mabel was an only child, her father being a business man with whom the world had not dealt too kindly. Her mother was dead, which circumstance had first drawn Minnie towards her, for she also was motherless.

A sister of Mr. Chartres kept house for him, so that Mabel was at liberty to spend as much time with her friend as she thought proper. She would often have felt more comfortable if her aunt would have allowed her to remain at home and render her some assistance with her household duties, but her aunt was immovable in her determination to allow no interference with what she considered her special department, declaring indeed that she could not perform her duties to her own satisfaction, or her brother's comfort, if her mind was disturbed by having anyone to direct or issue orders to. Thus it was that when Minnie appeared, directly after breakfast, Mabel was at liberty to devote herself entirely to her. They chatted on various topics of general interest until Miss Chartres disappeared into the "lower regions" (as Minnie was wont to designate the kitchen floor) on housekeeping duties intent, and then they were free to bring forth the matter which was uppermost in each of their thoughts.

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"Well?" Interrogated Minnie, after a short silence.

"Well?" Repeated Mabel in the same tone.

Minnie laughed.

"Now, don't tease, Mabel!" she exclaimed, "you know I am in earnest, so I won't have teasing—and please *don't* be so awfully cautious: one would think you delighted to make a wet blanket of yourself for my especial discomfort and confusion."

"Not this 'one,' though," asserted Mabel, slipping her arm round Minnie, who tried to get up a terrible frown but failed ignominiously.

"Well, then, tell me the result of your cogitations—you are to be Prime Minister, you know."

"Then you must be Queen!" laughed Mabel.

"O, no, I am going to be Chancellor of the Exchequer, thank you, quite a high enough post for me."

"My Right Honourable Friend is easily satisfied, truly, but I don't think if I had the power of appointment I should entrust such an office to you," Mabel remarked.

"You are pleased to be complimentary," returned Minnie, with a ludicrous attempt at genteel sarcasm—and then, suddenly dropping her assumed stiffness, she continued. "But you don't know what a genius I am going to turn out in the region of finances, and I can assure you, you will be astonished when I bring forward my first Budget."

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"I am certain I shall, one way or other; you are continually astonishing me with your ingenuity in various ways."

"Well, to my usual task then—for I have framed several astonishing resolutions, which only await your sanction to become law—you see this is quite a different form of government from any presently existing, so you must not be astonished at the manner of its conduct."

"So I perceive," observed Mabel demurely.

"In the first place, then, you must tell me whether your further consideration has confirmed your decision of Wednesday night?"

"Well, I must confess, that the more I thought of the thing, the more difficult it seemed, and yet I am convinced more than ever of the necessity of our taking it in hand as nobody else seems inclined to do so. But how are we to begin?"

"That is just what we intend to consider."

"Of course, education does not seem to have wrought any great result yet, for the children are compelled to go to school, yet they don't seem to be influenced in any great degree morally by it. I suppose the reason of that is that they don't know how to take advantage of it."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Minnie energetically, "Education is just what they require, and the sort they get just now would probably influence them in time. But we can't wait for that, and so we must do our best to help it on, and try to get them to see the good of it, and take advantage of it while they may; and the first step towards all this is to win their hearts—we must begin with the children, and through them we may reach the parents. It won't do to try any of the old methods of reform, they're hardened in them all. Mrs. Merton and the missionary, not to speak of the Episcopal Church curate, have all assailed them in turn, with tracts, hymn books and Sunday-schools—not that I would for a moment seem to despise these methods—only I think that in cases like this they should be introduced judiciously, and when the people are in a fit temper to receive them, and treat them with the respect they deserve; instead of being, as it were, thrown at them just at a time, when they will most probably not feel inclined to do anything but throw them back, and if they can't exactly do that they do the thing next best calculated to relieve their feelings—throw them in the fire. Now, I don't see that this does any good, and I should not like our efforts to be useless as theirs have been. We will take lessons from them and try to avoid what seems to have been their great mistake—injudiciousness; and perhaps showing a little too plainly that they considered them heathen, and were determined to convert them at any cost."

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Mabel laughed at Minnie's queer statement of the case, but was constrained to admit that it was at least fair in the main, if a little severe on the well-meant efforts of the persons referred to.

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"Well, its quite clear we must take an entirely different course if we wish to succeed," concluded Minnie, "and I hereby beg to propose as our first course, a course of Popular Entertainments."

Mabel stared at her in amazement.

"Why, Minnie, are you crazy!" she exclaimed when she recovered her breath.

"Well, no, not quite yet I hope," replied Minnie, enjoying the sensation she had created, "But I suppose that was rather a big way to put it, I don't wonder it took away your breath. The style of entertainment I have in my head is a very small, innocent kind of affair, as you will perceive when I tell you that they are to be carried out by ourselves, and, moreover, that they are not to consist of anything more formidable (for the present at anyrate) than the preparation of tea or coffee, and the adjuncts pertaining thereunto."

"But how is it to be done?" asked Mabel, scarcely less mystified than before, "It can't be done without money, and a good deal of money too."

"That's just what bothered me at first," Minnie replied, "Of course, I knew I could get the money from papa if I asked him for it, and could assure him it was for a good purpose, but I wasn't going to do that, because, in the first place, I wished to keep the thing a secret between ourselves till we see how it will work, and in the next place I didn't want to take the money from papa at all; so I thought out a plan, but to carry it out we *must* take papa into our secret."

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"Perhaps it would be as well to do that in any case," remarked Mabel, "seeing it happens to be his work-people with whom we have to do, and I daresay it is only fair and just that he should know about it. However, let me hear the plan."

"You remember I told you I was laying past money for a sealskin jacket. Papa thought I was too young to have one last year, but he promised me that if I had a certain sum by my next birthday he would give me the rest. I have saved a good deal, for I have done without some things—a good many things—and given the money they would have cost to papa to keep for me because I was always afraid I might use it for something else. I should have, I think, about seven or eight pounds by this time, which will, I am sure, with part of our pocket-money, and clever management go a good way to start us fairly on our expedition, don't you think so?"

"Why, yes, that is quite a fortune; but are you sure you won't be sorry for it when your birthday comes and you can't have the jacket you've wished for so long?"

"O, I suppose I *shall* be sorry that I can't have the jacket, but that won't matter much, I shall be so much more happy that it has been spent in doing good that it will be recompense for any amount of jackets."

"But we must have some more definite plan than this to work upon, and there will be no end of arrangements to be made. How about a place where the entertainments may be held?"

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"I've thought of that too," said Minnie, her eyes sparkling with delight. "Such a glorious idea

occurred to me yesterday, as I was coming home; after I left you I went round by the Hollow—I was sorry I did not think of it sooner, I might have gone along with you as far as that—well, I noticed that one of the houses in the corner is not occupied, and it struck me we might have that, as long as it is empty at anyrate, to hold our meetings in. I am sure papa will consent."

"The very thing!" exclaimed Mabel, clapping her hands. "I noticed that house also, and it did occur to me that it would be a promising spot, but the idea of asking it, or even hinting at such a thing never entered my mind."

"I am so glad that you like it. Now, confess that the exact direction in which my genius lies has at last been revealed. I was sure you would discover it some day."

"Pray, be more explicit, my talented friend," requested Mabel. "I am doubtless very dull, but I should like to be quite certain about the direction to which you alluded just now."

"Well I'm afraid I can't enlighten you very much," said Minnie, with a look of comical dismay, "I am about as uncertain as yourself. I was just trusting to your general stupidity not to go any deeper into the subject, but simply to take my word for it."

"I think I won't cause you any further confusion by discussing the matter more fully, but proceed to business. What do you think of taking a walk down there this afternoon, and viewing the battlefield?"

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"I am quite agreeable," responded Minnie, "and I shall speak to papa to-night about our other arrangements. I must be off now, and dispose of some of my lessons so that I may have time—I shall expect you about four."

"Very well," agreed Mabel. "But I shall only have an hour to spare, remember, I must be back by five."

"All right, we won't put off any time, you may count on my being ready." And off she went with a light heart.

Mabel turned back and went in with a sigh.

"How bright and gay she is," said she to herself. "To look at her now, one would think that a serious thought never entered her head, and yet how full of good and unselfish thoughts that little head is, for all its giddiness.

"She spoke just now of giving some of the blessings she had received to others, to those who were thirsting for one drop, and did not guess that I who stood so near her was even one of those. It would only trouble and distress her to know how dark my mind is about these things which she thinks I have known all about for years—aye, truly I *have* known about them since I knew anything, yet of what use has the knowledge been to me. It's like the 'learned lumber' Pope speaks about—it's like rummaging in a library without a light. O, will light such as Minnie speaks about ever dawn in my heart? Will such a change as has beautified and softened her life with such a sweet and gracious influence, ever come near to touch mine? Minnie, my friend, you seek my aid to walk in the path you think I know so well, but it is I who should lean on you. I hold the scroll in my hand, but you have the guide in your heart." So thinking she turned wearily from the window and began her studies.

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CHAPTER III.

PREPARATIONS.

Sharply at four, Mabel appeared at the door of Minnie's home, and she, being quite ready, they proceeded without delay to carry out their purpose of "viewing the battlefield" as Mabel remarked.

Hollowmell was a lovely glade which lay at the foot of a gentle eminence, immediately behind which lay the pit whose ugly shaft was almost hid by it. No one would have imagined that such a thing lay in the immediate neighbourhood who saw the glade before the row of miner's cottages had been erected on one side of it by Mr. Kimberley for the convenience of his work-people, and even yet the beauty of the scene would not have been marred by the pretty picturesque-looking little red brick houses with their white-coppiced windows and green-painted sashes, if the carelessness and disorder which reigned within had not been reflected without in the neglected

plots of ground attached to each cottage, in the dirty window-panes, and in the untidy women and children, and occasionally begrimed men who seemed to have no other object in life than to hang about and complete the disgrace they had wrought on the fair face of nature.

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Mabel and Minnie walked along the entire row, as the empty cottage stood at the further end, looking with a new interest at the faces with which they were both well acquainted by sight, and being rewarded by stares of stony indifference. They went into the empty cottage, and Mabel cried out with pleasure, as she looked round the bright, cheerful apartments, wondering how anyone could feel anything but pride and interest in keeping such a house in order.

"Why," she said, "I would not wish any pleasanter place to live in myself, nor any lovelier view to feast my eyes on."

Minnie laughed and said that her papa always said these houses should belong to her some day, and when that time came she would make this one a present to Mabel, unless indeed, she would allow her to share it. After that, they took their leave, convinced that it would answer their purpose exactly.

Minnie made a message into one of the cottages on their way back to make inquiries concerning one of the children whom she knew to be ill.

This house was about the most respectable in the entire row, and yet it might have borne a great deal in the way of improvement. The child's mother was quite a young woman, probably not over twenty-two, yet there were two other children playing on the floor, while she herself sat sewing the braid of her skirt with white thread in great uneven stitches, the dishes and remains of dinner still upon the table.

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She jumped up as they tapped at the open door, and having hastily bade them enter, she dived into an adjoining room from whence she produced two chairs, talking in a pleasant, though rather loud voice all the time. They thanked her, but would not sit down, as they had only a few minutes to spare, and having ascertained that the little girl was progressing favourably, they departed.

"I think I'd better go home this way," said Mabel, when they got to the end of the glade. "It is my soonest way home, and I have got a great deal to do. I suppose I shall see you at church to-morrow?"

"O, yes," returned Minnie. "And I shall speak to papa to-night. I'll just whisper to you whether it's all right or not, when I see you to-morrow."

"And I suppose that after that it will be a free subject, and liable to be discussed at any time?" queried Mabel, smiling.

"Certainly," assented Minnie, a little puzzled.

"O, Minnie, you can't think how amused I was at your efforts to keep from speaking about it yesterday and the day before! You would open your lips to say something every five minutes, and then suddenly recollecting yourself, you would close them again with a determined snap, but it was hard work to keep them closed, I could see that plainly enough."

Minnie laughed.

"I know it was," she confessed, "but I must say I did not dream that my efforts would be appreciated as thoroughly as they seem to have been."

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"Well, be thankful it *is* so," advised Mabel. "And now I'm off. Good-bye."

That evening Minnie, seizing a favourable moment when the boys were all out, and she and her father alone, unfolded to him her scheme for the reformation of Hollowmell. He was, of course, greatly surprised, and at first very reluctant to allow his daughter to go among these people, even for the purpose she had at heart.

"You don't know what sort of people these miners are, my dear," he said when Minnie had made known to him in as few words as possible what she wished to do. "And as for reforming them, I don't think that possible, I don't indeed. You had better leave that to the missionary, I think, or to some one who knows the sort of folks they are, and how to deal with them."

"But they have proved that they don't know how to deal with them, they have all failed, so I mean to try a different plan from any of the common methods, besides I shall only have to do with the children at first; I want to try to influence the older people through them. Come, papa, *do* let me have the cottage and make a trial, and I promise if the result does not please you to give it up at the end of a month."

Mr. Kimberly shook his head a good deal, and grumbled a little that she might find something better to occupy her time than amusing a lot of dirty ragamuffins who would never thank her for her trouble, but finally gave in, to the unbounded delight of Minnie, who, it may be remarked, had never entertained a doubt as to the final issue of the debate, knowing well that her father would refuse her nothing on which she had so strenuously set her heart.

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"And how about the jacket?" he inquired, when she laid before him her financial scheme, in a business-like manner which greatly amused and delighted him.

"O, you know, I can do without that quite well. You don't imagine, surely, that it is because a sealskin is warmer or for any reason of that description that I want it. It is only because it looks finer, and it is so great a satisfaction to have such a thing that I wanted it—in fact, only to gratify my vanity, which is gratified too much already by a certain old gentleman who evidently thinks there never *was* such another girl as his daughter."

"Come, now, young lady, don't abuse your old father in that insinuating manner, for he won't stand it, and as for your vanity, you don't overstate it a bit; but we'll see whether the inhabitants of Hollowmell won't contrive to rid you of some of that."

"Just one thing, papa," said Minnie, as she kissed and thanked him again, before retiring for the night. "Please keep it a secret from the boys. You know how they would tease me about it if they knew."

"Very well, it is not likely it would have occurred to me to mention it to them, but it is just as well to be on guard. When do you begin operations?"

"As soon as we can have everything in working order."

"Well, here's some money to start with, and see you make a good use of it. We'll arrange about your own money when I have more time." [Pg 34]

Minnie ran off with her prize—a bright, golden sovereign—and found herself scarcely able to sleep that night for dreaming of the wonders which were to be affected through her agency in Hollowmell.

Next day she only saw Mabel for a few minutes as they came out of church, but even that short time was sufficient for the communication of a whispered account of her success, the narration of which afforded Mabel quite as much delight as its accomplishment had afforded Minnie. It is just possible, indeed, that the consideration of their project occupied rather more of their attention on that day, at least, than the sermon did. Mabel had to take herself to task severely several times during the afternoon service, and Minnie, without thinking very much about it, found herself mixing up the Epistle to the Galatians with a homily to be delivered to the inhabitants of Hollowmell upon some important occasion, the exact nature of which she had not yet clearly settled in her mind.

Next day there was more than one "phiz" between Minnie and Mona, owing to the fact that Minnie's mind was so entirely occupied by her new undertaking, that she could not manage to give more than a small part of her attention to her lessons. This was a matter of no small gratification to Mona, who was rather more profuse, in consequence, with her sharp remarks, which Minnie was in no mood to brook patiently. [Pg 35]

Some of Minnie's books were lost as usual, when at last she was free to go, for although she had tried, and been pretty successful too, in keeping her books together since her promise to do so, they sometimes reverted to their old habit of getting lost again, and to-day she had almost fallen back to her former careless state.

Mona looked on from time to time when she could spare a minute from her work, and at last observed in her most sarcastic manner that "fair words were easily spoken and light vows swiftly broken."

Minnie flared up in a moment.

"Fair words are easily spoken, as you say, Mona," she retorted, "you speak of what you know nothing. It may be so. Sharp things cost more, I dare say, and that is doubtless why they are generally more successful in their aim."

Mona laughed disagreeably, and enquired with mock politeness, "at what object Minnie might at present be aiming."

She was about to retort with a bitterness scarcely less penetrating than Mona's own sharp thrusts, when she suddenly checked herself, and putting her books which she had now collected under her arm, she walked out without even waiting for Mabel, lest she should find the temptation to speak too strong for her. Her heart was very heavy as she walked homewards, and her eyes *would* keep filling with tears.

Only last night she had been so happy in her efforts to do good, and here she was, actually as bad as any of the people she had been flattering herself she could reform. What *was* she to do? she asked herself a hundred times, and then it occurred to her that she must tell God about it. [Pg 36]

She hastened home, and shutting herself into her room poured out all her sorrow and contrition into the ear of Him who is ever ready to hear and comfort. When she rose she felt both refreshed and strengthened, and after a little while something came into her mind which she had, only by chance, heard the minister say yesterday. She could not tell the exact words, for she had only a vague remembrance of it, but it was something about the mistake of allowing anything, however good and right it might be in itself, to come between us and our present duty.

"That is just the mistake I have fallen into," thought Minnie, "I ought to have been attending to my lessons, which were clearly of the first importance at the time, and having gone wrong at the beginning, I naturally fell into a great many other scrapes. I must remember that about present duty. I am rather afraid I allowed the same thing to occur yesterday in church, or I should have

been better able to recollect the words I wanted just now."

On the afternoon of the following day, which happily contained no cause of regret to Minnie, she and Mabel went down to the vacant cottage, and occupied themselves for about two hours busily and happily in rendering it fit for their purpose. They were determined to do all the scrubbing and cleaning themselves, so on that and the two following afternoons all the time they could spare was devoted to the work.

Having got it thoroughly bright and clean, they proceeded to arrange a variety of odd pieces of furniture, dragged by Minnie from their place of concealment in a large attic, where such things were allowed to accumulate, and supplemented by various old benches, which the gardener had been only too glad to get rid of. [Pg 37]

These had been transported to their place of consignment by him during the early hours of the morning, when the lazy inhabitants were still wrapped in slumber, the hour being discriminately chosen to avoid the notice of such miners as might be going or returning from the pit.

These arrangements being successfully carried out by Thursday evening, Minnie paid a visit to all the houses which contained children, and asked leave that they might attend a small treat which they intended to provide for their enjoyment on the following Saturday.

Various were the forms of reception which she received. Some regarded the proposal with contempt, enquiring with ironical interest what manner of "treat" they were going to stand, and whether they would not include parents also in their invitations, Others affected anger, and wondered what the "likes of them" had to do coming among poor folk's bairns, and stuffing their heads with their "high and mighty nonsense," whatever style of absurdity such a term might be held to describe.

However, she won over most of them with her bright winning manner, and sweet, unaffected graciousness, and seemed when she left their dirty and untidy dwellings to leave something behind in them that had never been there before. [Pg 38]

On Friday evening she and Mabel had a wonderful shopping expedition, to provide the necessary utensils for the preparation of their entertainment. These absorbed the greater part of their treasure, but happily Mabel had some of her pocket-money left which was a great help.

Then they made everything ready for the morrow, the whole forenoon of which was to be devoted to cooking, for they had mutually agreed that all the eatables were to be of their own manufacture—unless, indeed, they were found to be unpalatable to their guests, in which case they should resort to other methods.

Minnie could make oat-cake of a specially delicious kind, so it was to be introduced, Mabel had learnt to make gingerbread of quite an uncommon quality, which was also to make its appearance; and various other delicacies, easily made and of general popularity, were placed upon their bill of fare.

There was much fun and merriment over their cooking operations next day, and when all were completed, both girls came to the conclusion that working for the good and happiness of others, was in itself an excellent cure for irritability, and all forms of bad temper.

"Do you remember the time," enquired Minnie, "when I invited all the girls in the singing-class to tea? How I did fret about the cake-basket being old-fashioned, and moaned about the pattern of the tea cups." And she laughed again at the recollection.

"And how perfectly tragic you became on the subject of the drawing-room curtains," reminded Mabel laughing also. [Pg 39]

"I don't think," continued Minnie, "that we were ever so near quarrelling as we were that day about those very curtains. Well, that was all because I wished to make a show before the girls, not to have them enjoy themselves. Now it is quite different. We don't mind at all what like the things about us are, as long as the things we make are good, and the children enjoy themselves."

"That reminds me," said Mabel, "that we have forgotten to provide ourselves with confections—they will doubtless be in great request."

"Of course, what could we be thinking about! We must see after them immediately—or stay! Perhaps you could get them when you are coming back—don't you think that would do?"

"I am sure it would, and would save time which is precious," agreed Mabel, and so it was settled.

Their preparations being completed about two o'clock, they repaired to their respective homes, locking the door upon their possessions with a delightful sense of proprietorship and satisfaction, after a solemn mutual reminder concerning the necessity of being back sharp at four, as the festivity was arranged to take place at five prompt.

Minnie found her father and four brothers in the parlour when she came in, flushed and breathless with her run home.

"Hallo, Min!" Exclaimed Charlie, the eldest of her brothers, a young man of about twenty-two. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, rushing off directly breakfast's over and leaving your poor unhappy encumbrances of brothers to amuse themselves as best they can during the long hours of a Saturday morning. Here are Ned and I, who only get a peep of home once a week, and even [Pg 40]

on that occasion we seldom get half a peep of you. Confess now, isn't it too bad?"

"Bad!" put in Ned, before she could speak, "It's villainous. Here am I, shut up in a dingy office all week and every day of the week, with nothing more amusing than that highly respectable old humbug, Blackstone, to lighten the weary moments, and when I come home it isn't a bit better."

"Oh, you two poor, neglected beings!" Cried Minnie, laughing heartlessly at their rueful faces, "What would you like me to do for your amusement? Read goody stories to you, or play at wild beasts?—Which?"

"Why, you're just as heartless as any other girl could possibly be," asserted Ned.

"And haven't I quite as good a right?" enquired Minnie saucily. "Pray, tell me why shouldn't I be?"

"Oh, as to that, you may be just as heartless as you please to other fellows—the more so the better, *I* should say—but you might have a little consideration for the feeling of your brothers," replied Ned, calling up a look of tragic gloom, delightful to behold.

"I say," interrupted Archie at this juncture, "I'm ferociously hungry. Do let's see about having something to eat. In my opinion, the best way to amuse one's self under the present circumstances, and to lay the foundation of an imperturbable temper, is to satisfy the cravings of the inner man."

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"Well spoken!" approved Charlie, patting him on the head, "you're a sound philosopher, my boy, and deserve every honour."

"'Tis not for praise, my voice I raise," sang Charlie, "I speak only in the interests of common sense, and common necessity," he continued in a sepulchral voice, "and I rather think Pope had the same interests at heart when he represented justice weighing solid pudding against empty praise."

They all laughed at the extreme literalness of Archie's interpretation, which Charlie declared would probably have afforded the great poet himself unbounded satisfaction. By this time they had made the transition from the parlour to the dining-room, where, on the table just by Minnie's plate lay a letter, directed in a peculiar yet beautiful form of writing. Ned, in passing, was arrested by it, and lifted it the better to observe its beauty.

"Look here!" he exclaimed, "what peculiar writing—I never saw anything like this before. Did you, Charlie?"

Charlie, thus appealed to, came round to see, and started slightly when his eyes fell upon it, but quickly recovering himself, he glanced at it indifferently, and remarked that it was very pretty in a careless tone, which yet had in it an uneasy ring.

"Whose writing is it?" asked Ned, bluntly, as Minnie at last obtained possession of it after it had been criticized and admired by all in turn, with the exception of Charlie, who stood somewhat aloof, humming a tune with a strained assumption of carelessness, which was only noticed by Seymour, the only member of the family who had been silent during the conversation.

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"O, it's a girl in our school—Mona Cameron—a deadly enemy of mine," said Minnie with a laugh as she made the last assertion, "Some of the girls call her 'Soda' and me 'Magnesia,' because we always create a 'phiz' when we come into contact."

She opened the letter carelessly and found it to contain, as she had expected it would, some information relative to an examination for which they were both working. She put the note in her pocket when she had read it, but left the envelope on the table.

Nothing more was said on the subject, but when Minnie came into the dining-room about half-an-hour afterward for something she had left there, she found Charlie standing by the window with the envelope in his hand, gazing at it with a look that was more than merely critical. He put it down hastily as she entered, and remembering his former indifference, she enquired laughingly if he was trying to discover the writer's character from her caligraphy. He laughed too, but it was not a mirthful laugh, and soon after, went out; Minnie observed, however, that the envelope no longer lay where he had laid it, and turned back to look for it, thinking it must have fallen, but it was not to be found.

"Charlie must have taken it with him," she thought. "Is it possible that he has fallen in love with Mona's writing without knowing Mona herself. Well, when one thinks of it, Mona's writing is almost Mona's self, and any one who would be likely to fall in love with it would be almost likely to fall in love with her. She is just as beautiful and delicate and sharp," she continued to herself, taking out Mona's note and looking at it attentively, "and just the same something about both that repels one and produces an uncomfortable sensation without any visible cause."

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She put back the note in a hurry, remembering how much she had to do, and soon forgot the circumstance among the multitude of other matters which immediately claimed her attention.

She found her time fully occupied till shortly before four o'clock, and had a pretty exciting scramble to be at Hollowmell at the time appointed.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST ESSAY.

Mabel was already there when she arrived, and the two set to work in earnest, buttering great piles of tea-cakes and toasted muffins, which were all set forth in tempting array when the children began to appear at the door, looking in with some bashfulness at first, but plucking up courage after sundry peeps at the good things, they came trooping in, in goodly numbers—a motly throng, ranging in point of age, from about seven to fourteen, and in point of condition, from ragged and torn urchins, with dirty faces and uncombed hair, to mill-girls of various ages with shining faces, and ribbons of different degrees of dirtiness in their crimped and frizzled tresses.

They were led by Mabel into another apartment, where accommodation was provided for those who desired to improve their toilet with such additions as soap and water and a certain amount of vigorous brushing could afford. These arrangements completed, they were marshalled into the largest room the house contained, where it was found that, although an apartment of no mean dimensions, it was still hardly large enough to accommodate the throng comfortably. However, by dint of squeezing and crushing, and amid not a little noise and merriment, they were at last all wedged in, "like figs in a box," as Minnie humourously remarked thinking she was saying quite a smart thing, out of which delusion she was at once awakened by one of the smallest and most ragged of the urchins present, who promptly suggested "herring" as a more appropriate simile. This view of the case being evidently a popular one, and, moreover, being more favourably received by the assemblage, Minnie felt it to be her duty to admit the correction, and next fell to wondering how they would manage to get out again. The difficulty did not seem to strike the children as being an insuperable one, they even proposed to tackle and overcome it on the spot—merely as an experiment, in order to show that it could be done—which obliging proposal, however, was not accepted. One row of small boys, nevertheless, fired with a desire to distinguish themselves in some way or other, tilted back the bench on which they sat so far that they completely lost their equilibrium, and indubitably proved the possibility of *their* getting out, at least, by finding themselves on the floor in various ungraceful positions, and with several pretty hard knocks.

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These had of course to be re-packed, which ceremony being accomplished, the business of eating and drinking commenced in earnest.

This occupied a considerable part of the time which was thereafter filled up with games and songs supplied by the young folks themselves, Minnie and Mabel merely superintending.

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They departed about nine o'clock, all highly pleased with themselves, each other, and most of all with the young ladies who had provided for them this means of enjoyment. Each of them carried away some remnant of the feast, and better than that, all carried to their homes and scattered there all unconsciously, the seeds of kindness which had that night been scattered so freely in their own hearts; for Minnie could not let them go away, even on that first night of her experiment, without saying to them a word about the kind "Master" who had put it into her head to give them this pleasure, and offering up a short and simple petition that her efforts might be attended with the result she aimed at, namely, the winning of these young souls for the Master's service.

There were no murmurings as they ran home about their fun being turned into a prayer-meeting, as would doubtless have been the case had the Missionary or the Curate tried such a plan, but none of those who were likely to give the matter a second thought suspected a girl not much older than themselves of such a thing, and the younger ones did not trouble themselves with motives, but thought it nice to have the young lady speaking so sweetly and gently to them, with tears in her eyes too, and determined firmly, though they were scarcely conscious of the determination, to please her by every means in their power, and from that moment were her devoted champions.

Mabel and Minnie had had a slight difference of opinion on the subject of allowing the children to provide the games and songs entirely themselves. Mabel thought it likely they would introduce rather rough games, and possibly rude songs, and that it might be better if they themselves suggested the games, and allowed only such songs to be sung as should be approved by them.

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"Because," she remarked, "We mean to educate them to something better than what forms their enjoyment at present, and this ought to be a beginning."

The latter part of Mabel's suggestion was received by Minnie with some favour, and at length, indeed, admitted as a rule of the house, but the first clause she resolutely objected to as too decided an invasion, and Mabel was obliged to yield.

"It is quite true that we mean to educate them to something better, but we must not frighten them away at the beginning with stringent regulations. If we do, we shall have no opportunity of educating them at all."

And so it was settled, and as it happened, they had no cause to regret their decision, for many of their little friends confessed long afterwards, that it was the complete freedom from restraint and from any attempt to introduce other than their customary forms of enjoyment, that induced them to return again and again when the plan was almost wholly changed.

Next morning Minnie rose with a light heart, feeling that she was better as well as happier for her last night's exertions, and during the whole of that week things went smoothly with her, for the spell of a sacred charge was upon her, and its influence mellowed and subdued her native sweetness, till it seemed to those about her something unearthly, and the girls regarded her with something like awe, all but Mona Cameron, who, if she noticed any difference, would not acknowledge it, and laughed at the others for their absurdity.

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"I'll show you," she said, as they were talking about it one afternoon after Minnie had gone home, "How far her saintliness will carry her. You all say that she never gets provoked except with me. Well, I promise you, I'll provoke her; I know her, and exactly how long any impression lasts with her. I suppose she's been attending some revival meeting and got this wonderful sweetness there, but I'll scatter it, I promise you."

"Well, I don't think that fair any way you look at it," remarked another girl, who was standing by. "It can't be right to try and make anybody sour just for spite, and as for Minnie, you can't make her sour whatever you do, so it is only lost time. She's just sweetness itself always, though she *has* a quick temper, and lets it get roused very easily now and then. But it can't be right to make any one worse, we are all bad enough for that matter, and should have enough to do to look after ourselves."

"I'm glad you have the candour to confess it, Agnes, but speak for yourself another time, please, it's quite enough responsibility for a young lady of your age," replied Mona with asperity, "Your notions of what is right or wrong are of no consequence to me whatever."

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After that none dared to add a word, for they were, one and all, afraid of Mona's sharp tongue; nevertheless, they felt the injustice of her attack, and resented it in their hearts, for Minnie was their favourite, and they all knew that Mona was jealous of Minnie's position as such, no less than of her rivalry in other matters. However, though she did her best by long-successful methods, to upset Minnie's tranquillity next day she found it of no use. Minnie was living in another world just then, and the sound of strife could not come near her.

Mabel noticed these efforts on the part of Mona with growing indignation, but seeing they fell harmless, judged it best to be silent on the subject. There was also another eye which saw and noted these things—that of Miss Elgin, the English governess, who was more among the girls than any of the other teachers, and she kept a vigilant watch, determined to check Mona's tactics whenever they should go too far.

But Minnie was all unconscious of these things, and in this way Saturday arrived, and the two girls again held their simple entertainment.

At the close of the evening, before the children left it was announced from the chair, which was occupied by Mabel, that a prize would be given at the end of a stated time to whichever of the young people then present could show the best kept garden.

This was the first step towards the improving of the place outwardly, which they both considered their plain duty to begin at the very outset, seeing it was with this view they had obtained the use of the house.

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Minnie arranged with the gardener to procure the necessary implements for those who had not already got them. These were partially supplied by him out of a hoard of old ones which he was very glad to be rid of, and partially through the co-operation of a friend of his who also obtained permission so to dispose of his superfluous stock, leaving only a few to be provided out of the "Exchequer," as Minnie stated at next meeting with due gravity and importance.

It was necessary to exercise a little diplomacy in the distribution of these, as they were a little afraid there might be some dissatisfaction felt about some getting new spades and rakes, and others not. This difficulty they soon disposed of, however, by the new ones being bought of a smaller size than usual, and only the youngest being supplied with these.

Thus the minds of the two girls were occupied during their leisure time in devising new schemes for the furtherance of the good work they had originated, and were so kept free from the morbid and unhealthy train of thought into which girls of their age with nothing better to interest them are so apt to fall. And thus their work went on, and the month of probation for which Minnie had asked was nearly at an end.

Some fruits of their labours were already beginning to make themselves visible. The children always made it a point to appear on Saturdays, at least, with clean faces and neatly-combed hair,

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and altogether as tidy generally as circumstances would permit; and were to be found, on other afternoons, instead of lying about the little gardens, enhancing their disorder, hard at work with their spades and other implements, engaged in weeding them and setting them in order; so that the outward aspect of Hollowmell was being improved at any rate, upon which indication of success the two friends congratulated themselves much, and felt more than repaid for their efforts and sacrifices both of time and money.

Mr. Kimberly had not given much thought to Minnie's freak, as he called it, after consenting to it, and had in fact dismissed it from his mind and forgotten all about it, when Minnie informed him one evening that it was now a month since they commenced their work, and as they had obtained his permission to use the house for only that length of time, she begged him to continue it if the house were still unlet.

"O, yes, I remember now," he said. "The house at the end of the hollow. No, it is not let to anybody but you. I had almost forgotten that it was you who occupied it till this moment. I was just remarking to Menzies, the manager down at the pit, the other day that it was by far the most respectable house in the place."

"I suppose that is because we keep the windows clean," laughed Minnie.

"Well, as you seem to be such good tenants—you and your friend—I don't think I can do better than give you another lease of it," remarked Mr. Kimberly, smiling at her delighted face. "By the way, I suppose that is some of your work—the general improvement in the grass plots?"

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"O, no, papa, that is what the children do themselves. And what do you think, papa, one of the little fellows actually comes regularly and weeds our beds, because we haven't time to attend to them ourselves. He did it at first without any prompting but that of gratitude, and now some of the others help him, and so they keep our garden tidy as well as their own."

"Yes, yes, Slyboots, but who put the idea of keeping their own tidy, into their heads? It didn't grow there, I am sure of that."

"Well, *I'm* not quite so sure of that," replied Minnie, shaking her head wisely. "Perhaps it has been there a long while, and only required some one to tap it out."

"Well, well," returned Mr. Kimberly with an amused expression, "as you have been so clever as to tap this one out, who knows how many more you may tap out before long, so go on and prosper, and remember if you run short of funds you may draw on me, because I should like to see my work-people in a better condition, though I haven't time to attend to it myself, and *they* wont. They don't seem to see the good of spending money on anything but drink, and that is how it is, though they have good houses and fair pay, they are always dirty and miserable and discontented." And a weary look took the place of his former amused one, as he turned again to the heap of papers on his desk.

Minnie saw that he was busy, and though she would have liked to stay and cheer him up, she thought it better to retire, her request being granted.

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"He sees I am in earnest, anyhow," she observed to herself as she closed the door softly behind her, "and he sees too that we *are* doing something. Oh, I *will* be so glad if I can do anything to make it easier for him. These people try him so—I suppose they have been threatening another strike." And she went to bed, her head full of plans for getting further into the hearts of these rough miners, and drawing them to better things.

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CHAPTER V.

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

Meanwhile, Mona Cameron, who had no such philanthropic schemes to occupy her energies, was no less busy with schemes of an altogether different character. She was thoroughly roused by this time, by Minnie's utter impregnability to all established methods of provocation, so that she found herself obliged to invent new ones, which up to this time had been attended with no better success.

She was not naturally malicious, nor did it afford her any sort of pleasure to rouse and anger Minnie as she so often did, neither did she dislike the girl herself; but circumstances had been too much for her in the beginning, and her nature was such that now it seemed to her almost impossible to change her policy and adopt any other line of conduct. She sometimes rebelled against the rivalry which, she considered, stood between them and any possibility of friendship,

but was still firm in her belief, that it was a difficulty which could not be bridged, and the subject had not hitherto been considered by Minnie at all; she simply accepted it, as she did most other things, as it stood, and it had not yet occurred to her that it could or should be changed.

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One afternoon, Minnie stood at the outer door of the schoolroom waiting on Mabel coming down stairs from the music-room. There were perhaps a dozen girls inside, but she stood just where they could not observe her—at least, with the exception of Mona Cameron—who seemed much too intent upon her work to notice anything. At last, however, she appeared to have got over the part which demanded such urgent attention, and began to talk.

"I say, girls!" She said in an animated tone, which instantly secured the attention of every one present, at the same time moving nearer the window for the purpose, as it seemed, of obtaining better light. "Have you heard the news?"

"What news?" eagerly exclaimed a dozen voices.

"Why, that Minnie Kimberly has turned Methodist."

Minnie started, scarce knowing whether to leave immediately or return and proclaim her presence.

"What?" cried the girls, not quite understanding what Mona meant to convey by that appellation.

"Methodist," repeated Mona, quite enjoying their mystification. "One of those people who profess to go about continually doing good with tracts in their pocket—though it's my private opinion they usually contrive to do the very opposite. That's the sort of thing Minnie's going in for just now, though I really think she is a little ashamed of it, she keeps it so well hidden. You see my penetration was not at fault—I said it was revival meetings or something of that sort."

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Minnie turned, and with a firm step and fast beating heart walked back into the schoolroom.

Mona did not seem to notice her but went on.

"Yes, isn't it fun! Quite a romance I'm sure! A sort of juvenile Mrs. Fry or some person of that stamp, converting the heathen down in Hollowmell."

"O, hush!" whispered some one, as Minnie walked straight into their midst, her eyes flashing, but her cheeks pale as marble.

"I do not know what you may mean to insinuate by calling me Methodist as you did just now. It may either be that you intend it as a term of reproach to me, or as a mark of disrespect to the worthy body of people who bear that name—"

"You hear her!" Interrupted Mona with a laugh, "you hear her defending them. Didn't I tell you so?"

"I mean to say," continued Minnie, ignoring the interruption, "that if you mean by calling me Methodist that I profess to go about continually doing good, you are mistaken. Until now, I have not as you hinted, made any profession at all, but I am not ashamed to own that I consider it the noblest thing in life, to be good and to do good, and if by taking the name of Methodist I might the better attain that object I should be happy to do so."

"Ah!" replied Mona with a sneer, as no one else spoke, "it is quite affecting I'm sure, to hear you say so. I should not be at all surprised if that good-looking Methodist Minister from Canningate, had something to do with these novel notions. I heard he had evinced great interest in the heathen of Hollowmell."

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Minnie's pale cheeks flushed with indignation, and for a moment she forgot everything but Mona's cruel insinuation.

"It is certainly flattering to know you take such an interest in my proceedings," she began, angrily, then checking herself hastily, she continued in a softer tone: "I don't know why you should say such a thing of me, Mona. What I have done (and the motive I had for keeping it secret, was because it was so little), I have done from a simple wish to make my life of some use, and benefit my father's tenants."

Mona smiled derisively but did not speak.

"I do not fear to say I am a Christian," continued Minnie, turning to the other girls after a short pause. "Even in spite of Mona's sarcasm, and though I do often come short of what one bearing that name should be, I am not the less determined to persevere in my endeavours to make these failures as few and far between as possible; and that any one here will intentionally attempt to frustrate these efforts I cannot believe."

"That is a challenge directed to me, I suppose," observed Mona laughing disagreeably.

"For shame, Mona!" cried one of the girls with warmth. "Your sharpness is no match for Minnie's earnestness, I am sure all here think so!" and she turned to the rest for confirmation.

"Yes, yes!" cried several voices enthusiastically.

"And I, for one," continued the young lady who had spoken, "though I cannot give as good an account of myself, either in words or actions as Minnie can, would have no objection to doing

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some good too, and if she will accept my help, I shall be glad to render it such as it is."

Minnie thanked her with tears in her eyes, and accepted her offer with simple gratitude, whereupon several of the others also volunteered their aid, and some who lived too far away to render actual assistance begged to know if there was no way in which they could help.

Minnie had by this time explained the plan of working adopted by Mabel and herself, which was received with expressions of unmixed approval by all, with the exception of Mona, who sat silently during their conversation with her head bent over her work.

Mabel appeared in the midst of their discussion, and was greatly surprised to learn the subject of it. She, however, entered heartily into the debate, and a plan was quickly sketched out whereby the eager desire displayed by all present to join in the work was to be satisfied.

Mabel was all this while wondering how their doings at Hollowmell had come to be known among the girls, but no one explained, and even after Minnie and she were on their way home, Minnie spoke no word in explanation of this strange circumstance.

On the following day, of course, she received a full account from one of those who had been present, and her love and respect for her friend increased tenfold on becoming acquainted with the part she had played on the occasion.

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"She is a true heroine," thought Mabel when left to herself again, "I don't understand how she can do things like that. I am sure if they were required of me I could not do them. Why is there such a difference between us? She seems to do everything so well, though she is just newly conscious that there are things like this to do, and I have been acquainted with the fact all my life. I am distracted by doubts and fears—I, who have known the reality of God's love and goodness so long, and she, who only a few weeks ago wakened up to that reality, is able to rest in it without question or misgiving. Ah! that is the difference, I only know of its existence, while she feels it—breathes it—lives in it."

Just then her meditations were broken in upon by Minnie herself who ran in, exclaiming breathlessly, "O, I am so glad you're here early, I did so want to have a chat with you before the school commenced!"

"All right," replied Mabel, who had been occupied during her reflections in slowly unlacing her boot. She now set about the task with right good will, and was soon ready; but Minnie was quicker, and was already in the inner room, depositing the books of both in their respective desks when Mabel came in. Minnie turned to address some remark to her on the subject of her dilatoriness, and then for the first time her eye was caught by a paper fastened upon the opposite wall with a pin. It was a large paper, and had notice printed in large capitals on the top.

Beneath was written in Mona Cameron's beautiful writing the following advertisement:—

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"MISSION TO THE HEATHEN OF HOLLOWMELL.

"A meeting of Christian friends favourable to the above scheme will be held in Hollowmell Hall, on the evening of Wednesday, the 22nd inst.

"All Christians—(especially Methodists)—are invited to attend."

Minnie's exclamation brought all the girls then in the room to the spot, and great was the indignation of those who had been witnesses of the scene on the preceding evening, but some who as yet knew nothing about it laughed and thought it rather clever.

Minnie's first impulse was to tear down the obnoxious notice and burn it before them all, but fortunately her better sense prevailed, and after a momentary struggle with her angry feelings, and also with her keen personal distress, she looked up and read it aloud, omitting the objectionable parenthesis, and said with a smile to those who were in the secret:

"It is a very good joke, I daresay, so we'll make it a true one," and then, with their permission, she told all about their proposed plan, and how Mona had laughed at it, and ended by inviting them all to attend the meeting advertised from so unexpected a quarter, in the Hollowmell Hall. "Only," she added, "we will hold it on Friday evening instead of Wednesday as Mona suggests—not considering, I apprehend, our onerous duties in the matter of lessons on that evening."

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The teachers entered the room at this juncture, and consequently the curiosity of many who had come in during Minnie's speech was left unsatisfied except for various disconnected whispers which were exchanged during the morning with such as were better acquainted with the matter, and these, it may be supposed, were not of the most satisfactory character.

There was quite a sensation created in Minnie's favour when the girls were free again at the mid-day recess, and the whole story came out; Mona had to endure, as best she could, the spectacle of Minnie elevated to the pedestal of heroism, and finding herself all but sent to Coventry. As may be imagined, this state of affairs did not tend to soothe her already ruffled feelings, but rather the opposite, so that, by the time school was dismissed she was in no enviable frame of mind.

She did not sit at her work chatting and laughing with the others who remained behind, long after school hours, but immediately left the schoolroom, and proceeded to don her hat and ulster in haste, lest any one should come out before she could leave. Just as she lifted her glove she

noticed something white on a table in one corner, and notwithstanding her haste she was moved by a strong desire to go over and look at it. It turned out to be a heap of manuscript.

"Why, it's Minnie Kimberly's," she said to herself. "Her Latin translation for the examination! just like her to leave it about in this manner!" she ran her eye over several lines.

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"How beautiful!" she exclaimed, under her breath, "I could do nothing like it if I tried a hundred years. I am not afraid of her in anything else, but if she sends this, I may give up hope."

Then a strong temptation seized her to hide the manuscript, and so not only be revenged on Minnie for her humiliation, but also secure the certainty of her success in the examination.

"Why should she have everything?" she asked petulantly, "Is it not enough for her that she has sweet temper, and popularity, and—Christianity," and her lip did not curl at the word now that she was alone as it certainly would have done had there been others by. An expression of deep pain came into her beautiful face, and putting down the manuscript where she had found it, she laid her head on the dusty table and something like a sigh escaped her.

"No!" she said, in her excitement speaking aloud. "Minnie *shall* have the prize. She deserves it as she does all the gifts my selfish heart so wickedly envies her; we may not be friends, but at least we can be fair rivals."

A step was heard in the room, and without looking round to ascertain whose it might be, Mona snatched up her gloves and disappeared.

Minnie, for it was she, stood staring in a dazed sort of way at the place where Mona had been, not a moment before, in such an attitude of dejection as no one had ever believed her capable of yielding to, and thoroughly mystified by her last words which had reached her ears. All at once she noticed the paper on the table, and recognised it at once as her Latin translation.

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"So that was it," she soliloquised. "Poor girl, she isn't happy, I am afraid. I wish we could be friends. Mab and I would soon manage to get her into a more cheerful frame of mind. If she would only join the Mission, she was the unintentional means of forming, she would find a great deal more satisfaction in her life. However, she need not be afraid of this," and she touched the pages of her work lovingly. "I don't think I will send it after all."

The meeting, so strangely convened, was held as agreed, and was numerously attended by those young ladies who lived within a convenient distance. Many who did not, sent letters expressing regret for the same, and sympathy for their object, some also sending subscriptions, and offering any other kind of aid it might be in their power to bestow.

This was all very encouraging, and the girls in a flutter of delighted excitement formed themselves into a society which was to be known to future generations as the "Hollowmell Mission." There was a great deal of laughing, and talking, and fun, many of them looking on it as a new, and accordingly, agreeable source of amusement, but there was also a great deal of simple, unaffected earnestness which kept the work alive when these butterfly supporters, who hailed it as a new excitement, wearied of it and one by one dropped off.

The company was divided into committees who presided over the different branches of the work, and were, moreover, charged with the conduct of the Saturday evening entertainments, over which each committee presided in rotation, thus relieving Mabel and Minnie of a great deal of labour, and leaving them free to apply themselves to the extension of the work.

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Prizes of various descriptions were offered, the competition lists being open to all. At first these were entirely in connection with work which could be shown out-doors, as the girls did not consider themselves warranted to go any further at present. The competition for the best-kept garden has already been mentioned. Another was shortly announced for the best-cleaned and tidiest windows. Many of the gates and little wooden railings which separated the different plots of ground were in very bad repair, the paint being in many cases completely rubbed off, and the wood-work broken. At Minnie's request these places were mended, and Mr. Kimberly himself, who began to be quite interested in the work, supplied a certain quantity of paint to every house, while the young ladies offered a prize for its most successful use.

Although there were children in almost every house in the hollow, there were two or three where there were not any, and some also where the children were too young for work of this kind. These were consequently allotted to any who should volunteer their services for the purpose. Some one proposed that this competition should be open to boys alone, but Minnie stood up bravely for the girls, declaring that they could do this kind of work as well as the boys, and should not be shut out from it, as the boys had not been shut out from the window-cleaning.

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This was considered only fair, and it was also thrown open to all who cared to compete.

But though the young reformers did not think it right to go further than the outsides of the cottages in their endeavours after improvement, their influence began to assert itself within also. They were so young themselves that they considered it would be an arrogant and presumptuous proceeding on their part to attempt anything that would look like dictation, or interference, and might materially injure their work in directions wherein it had been successful heretofore. They contented themselves therefore with working among the young people, relying on the natural development of that work, and were encouraged to find, that such reliance was by no means misplaced, for, besides the improvements effected by the youthful competitors in the outward

appearance of the cottages, a further improvement was observable in the comparative absence of drunken men and untidy women.

The entertainments on Saturday afternoons had also somewhat changed in their nature by this time. The social element was still preserved, but instead of the riotous fun and hilarity of the opening meeting, a quieter mode now prevailed. After tea, there was usually a game, then all sat down, and the girls drew forth their sewing with which they proceeded while the boys sat quietly in their places, all listening eagerly to some entertaining book read by one of the young ladies till about half-an-hour before the usual hour for dispersion which was given up to general conversation, and the singing of a few hymns.

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One night, during this half-hour, one of the young ladies, Agnes Summers by name, the same Agnes who had defended Minnie on a former occasion, began to wonder if there was nothing the boys could do while the reading was going on.

Nobody could suggest anything at first, but at length one boy volunteered the information that he could knit; other two professed the same accomplishment, and, encouraged by this example, several voices expressed their willingness to learn.

"The very thing!" exclaimed Mabel, "we might have thought of that sooner."

"O, but," objected Minnie, "wouldn't it be too ridiculous to see boys sitting knitting."

"Not at all," asserted Mabel. "I once knew a family of Germans, rich people too, who had all their knitting done by the young men, and anyhow it won't matter if it is ridiculous, it's useful, and nobody will laugh when they remember that. I thought at first it would have been rather ridiculous to see the girls painting the gates and palings, but it turned out quite the opposite. It is wonderful how earnestness beautifies the most commonplace things, and reconciles us to the most incongruous."

"Well, I see you are right, and I suppose I must give in," answered Minnie, "We can give it a trial at any rate, though it will justify its existence, in my eyes, I am afraid, only by its success, as papa said our undertaking had in his,—oh, that's a dreadfully narrow way to look at it, no, I'll give the plan my unqualified support."

"That's more like you," said Mabel, smiling at her impulsive afterthought, "it isn't your way to be half-hearted in anything. Now, I'll tell you what I propose should be done about this. We must supply ourselves with a quantity of worsted, and a sufficient number of knitting-needles, and set all the boys at once to knit stockings and socks for their own winter wear. I propose that they shall, every pair as it is finished, be put into a box with the maker's name attached to it, and be kept there for distribution in the cold weather."

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This motion meeting with general approval, was forthwith adopted, and the conversation for that evening ended. The boys, as a rule, were greatly delighted with the proposed change, for they did not find it by any means an easy matter to sit quite still, doing nothing, even while listening to the most interesting story, and thus it promised to be a comfortable, as well as a useful arrangement all round.

That night as Mabel was locking the door preparatory to going home, she noticed a little boy who usually attended the Saturday evening meeting, but who had that night been absent, waiting outside the gate. As soon as he saw her come out, he ran up the path, and eagerly caught by her dress, begging her to come to his mother.

She inquired what the matter was, but he could do nothing but sob and cry to her to make haste. She hesitated for a moment. She was already later than usual and the night was rather stormy, but the little creature's distress moved her to go with him.

He led her into one of the cottages where, in the kitchen, lay a woman evidently in the last stage of consumption. The house was in a terrible state of disorder, having, apparently, never been touched since its mistress lay down, which Mabel learned was about three weeks ago.

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Her husband was away at the pit, she said, and the little boy who had brought Mabel was her eldest child. An infant of about four months old slept beside her, and two other children of about two and three years of age respectively sprawled on the floor, screaming with all the strength of their united lungs.

After speaking for a few minutes to the poor woman, Mabel decided that she could do nothing until the noise was stopped, and after many unsuccessful efforts, at last had the satisfaction of seeing the two drop off to sleep, thoroughly exhausted with crying. She then turned her attention to the sick woman, whom she found to be in a very weak state indeed. She told Mabel that the doctor had visited her that morning, and had thought it his duty to tell her that she had only a very few days more to live.

Mabel hardly knew what to do, or what to say, but at last suggested, that perhaps she would like to see Mr. Chadwell or the missionary, as she gathered from her conversation that she was in great spiritual distress.

"Oh, no," sighed the poor creature, "I daren't have any of them here. The missionary was here once, and it was the words he spoke that first set me thinking. He left me a book too, that was full of good things, but my husband burned it when he came home, and the priest said if he ever

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came here again my eyes would never look on the blessed Virgin." She was stopped by a hollow cough that completely racked her wasted frame, and then went on in a faint voice:

"I couldn't rest, though, and the priest did not give me any comfort. Then I heard Willie there tell what the kind young ladies said about going to Heaven directly we die, and never a word of purgatory, and I thought maybe one of you could tell me something to ease my heart."

"What can I do?" Asked Mabel of herself—"What can I say? My heart seems frozen, and my lips powerless to tell her what she is dying to hear. How can I tell her what I have never experienced? How can I comfort her with words that have never comforted me?"

She laid her head down on the torn coverlet, and prayed for strength and wisdom—but no strength—no wisdom seemed to come—the Heavens seemed as brass above her—she felt nothing but a dreary blank.

And yet the woman was dying, she must do something.

For a brief moment—like a flash—she pictured herself in the dying woman's place, and felt the horror of being there without hope. With a convulsive shudder she rose and sitting down by the bedside, she took the woman's thin wasted hand in hers, and asked her if indeed she had no hope.

"Hope!" she repeated. "I read in that book—he called it the word of God—that the wages of sin is death. The priest said it was only purgatory, but I know more than he thinks I do—and I know what death that means—No, I have no hope. I know what a sinner I have been, and I know what the wages of sin are."

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"But," said Mabel, gently, "we are all sinners. We cannot—even the best of us—hope for anything but the wages of sin, except through the death of Christ, who died to save sinners—even the chief."

"O, you know nothing of sin," said the woman in an agonised voice. "Here it has not been so bad, but if you had seen the place we came from you might know something of it." And the remembrance seemed to completely overcome her, for she lay moaning and crying in a perfect agony of despair.

Mabel talked and argued, but felt she was not making any impression. Finally she rose and said, speaking in a hurried whisper, "I spoke to you of hope—of hope that I myself know not. I am in as great darkness as you, and therefore I cannot give you the help you need."

The woman stared at the girl in a strange, uncomprehending sort of way, but she was by this time too weak to make any comment.

"But," continued Mabel, "I know of one who has *felt* the power of salvation, may I bring her to you?"

She nodded assent, and Mabel hastened away.

It was now nearly ten o'clock, but she felt that the patient would not see the light of day, and that every consideration must give way before the desperate nature of this case. She almost felt inclined to fetch Mr. Chadwell, instead of disturbing Minnie at this unseasonable hour, but feared it might have a fatal effect on the dying woman.

She quietly tapped at the back door, fearing to alarm the family by ringing, and asked to speak to Minnie privately. Minnie took her into her own room, where she related the circumstance in a few hurried words.

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As soon as she had taken in the meaning of Mabel's words she ran off without uttering a word, to beg her father's permission to undertake this errand of mercy. He was very reluctant, naturally, but at last yielded, on condition that she could get one of her brothers to accompany her.

They were all in the parlour, from which apartment the sounds of their laughter and merriment proceeded, as Minnie opened the door rather hesitatingly, and asked Charlie to come out and speak to her a moment.

"Why can't you come in here and speak to me?" He asked, "I feel so comfortable, I don't care about moving."

"Oh, do come quickly!" entreated Minnie. "You don't know what may be the consequence of a minute's delay."

Charlie rose, a good deal surprised, and the others enquired rather anxiously if there was anything wrong, she looked so terribly in earnest.

She hastily assured them that it was nothing wrong at home, and drawing Charlie into the hall, told him what she wished to do, and begged him to accompany her, forgetting in her eagerness the dread of his ridicule, which at any other time would have overpowered her.

"Nonsense," he said when he had heard her out, "I really thought you had more common sense, Minnie, than to bother your head with things of that description. Are there not enough fanatics *paid* for doing these things? The girl must be a fool, and has no business to be out at this hour alone. Her people must be crazy too, to allow it."

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"Oh, Charlie!" exclaimed Minnie, wringing her hands in her distress. "Do, please come. You can't think how much it may mean. Think if *you* were dying, and had no one to say a kind word!—Think if it was *me*! And this woman's soul is as immortal and as precious as yours or mine."

He looked at her a moment, as if he had fallen into a dream, and then without a word, took down his coat, and bidding her wrap well up, prepared to accompany her.

She flew upstairs again, and hastily threw a large shawl round her, insisting at the same time on Mabel enveloping herself in another of similar magnitude, and in about three minutes, the two girls were down in the hall, where they found Charlie awaiting them.

They set off at once, walking rapidly, towards Hollowmell, and only stopping for a few minutes, while Charlie left a message at Dr. Merton's directing him to follow them there.

They found the poor woman in a state of utter prostration, but she revived a little upon the administration of some cordial, which Charlie had had the forethought to slip into his pocket before coming out. She seemed to be worn out by mental, rather than by physical suffering, but Charlie would allow no word to be spoken to her, until the arrival of Dr. Merton, which took place in a very short time after they reached the cottage.

He gave it as his opinion, that she could not live many hours at most, and that if anything could be done to ease her suffering, which was altogether the effect of mental distress, most certainly it should be done. [Pg 73]

He could do no good, so he took his departure, having other cases to see to, and Charlie withdrew to the fire at the other end of the apartment, leaving Mabel and Minnie to administer whatever remedy it might be in their power to offer.

Minnie immediately approached the dying woman, and finding her conscious bent over her, whispering softly in her ear. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life."

She started up at the words, but her strength was not sufficient, murmuring to herself, "Not for me, oh, not for me."

"Yes, for you," said Minnie with a quiet confidence in her tone that carried with it a visible influence. "For every one who believes. Jesus came to call, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He is calling you now. Won't you answer?"

"I can't, I can't. How can I who have never spoken his name except to profane it!"

"But God will forgive all that for His Son's sake. Don't you know that Jesus died that God might be able to forgive us all our sins?"

"I know nothing but that I am a sinner, and the wages of sin is death," she moaned in a voice that was momentarily getting weaker.

"But the gift of God is eternal life," added Minnie turning to the place in her Testament which she had brought. "See, those are the words that follow, you can read them for yourself." [Pg 74]

She took the book and spelt out the words by the light of the candle which Minnie held up for her.

"You see," continued she, "the one is what you have earned what you must get if you persist in standing on your own merits—the other is a gift. We get wages as we deserve them, but a gift has nothing to do with deserving. God gives us eternal life, not because we are worthy, but because Christ, our Saviour, has asked it for us—has earned it for us. It is *His* wages—the price of *His* work. All we have got to do is to take it and trust Him for the rest."

There was nothing wonderful in the words Minnie used, they were at times a little disconnected, but they came straight from her heart with such evident conviction of their truth that they struck her hearers with a force that astonished them.

"Trust Him for the rest," repeated the dying woman. "Trust Him for the rest. Yes I will. You trust Him, I see that, and why should not I? I don't understand it quite yet, but He has said it, and I *will* believe it."

After that she lay still for a long time, neither moving nor speaking, and scarcely seeming to breathe.

"Mabel," whispered Minnie, "I think we may leave her now. She seems at peace. I'll run in to Molly Gray's, and ask her to stay here with her during the night. Molly lives all alone since her father died, so it won't disturb any one." [Pg 75]

"No need," said a voice behind her in a gruff whisper that startled her, "I'll stay with her myself."

She turned round and found herself face to face with the woman's husband, who had returned from the pit, and entering without their knowledge, had been a silent spectator of the scene.

"Pat!" cried the dying woman joyfully, as she heard his voice, "Oh, Pat, I am so glad you've come back in time to see me die in peace. You see I *can* die in peace, and you need not mind the money you promised to save for masses. I won't need any, for I am going straight to my Saviour. He's waiting for me in Heaven, and He's here beside me now, and He'll be with me all the way. Oh,

miss, pray for my husband and my children that they may come to know such joy as this!"

Minnie knelt down beside the bed, and involuntarily they all followed her example—the great, strong Irishman kneeling at the head beside his wife, her thin, white hands clasped in his rough brown ones. For some minutes the silence remained unbroken, and then Minnie's clear, sweet voice rose in earnest, supplicating tones for this family so soon to be bereaved.

Her prayer was short and simple, but it went straight to the hearts of her few listeners, touching and softening them with its heart-felt pathos, so that when they rose there were tears on every cheek, and even that of Charlie was not dry.

Directly after the visitors prepared to depart, Minnie promising to come down as early as possible the next morning. As they passed out, after a few more parting words with the newly-born Christian, whom they were not likely to see again alive, Patrick Malone laid his hand on Minnie's arm to stay her, saying, "Won't you leave that with her?" pointing to the Testament.

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"Gladly," replied Minnie, as she put it into his hand, then hurriedly taking it again she found and turned down the page at the fourteenth chapter of St. John, and directed him to read that to her.

"I will," he said, "and I'll give you the book to-morrow when—" but his emotion choked him and he could not proceed.

"Never mind," said Minnie, "Keep it for my sake and hers."

He thanked and blessed her again and again, and declared he would never part with it till the last day of his life, though the priest burned him for it, and then Minnie ran out to find Charlie and Mabel waiting for her in the rain.

They did not speak at all, till they reached the Kimberly's home, when Charlie said he would see Mabel home, and explain the cause of her absence to her friends, and Minnie bade her friend good-night with a very tired but happy face. Charlie came up the steps to open the door to her with his latch-key, and as she went in he stopped suddenly and kissed her on the forehead and then was gone.

Minnie did not sleep till she heard him come in softly and go into his room, and even after that she lay for hours thinking of all she had seen that night and rejoicing with the angels over the sinner who had during its early watches returned to her Saviour's arms.

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Mabel, too, lay long awake that night, but her thoughts were very different from Minnie's. She was pondering over the spectacle of a soul entering into that peace from which she felt herself by some mysterious means shut out.

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CHAPTER VI.

A DISPUTE SETTLED.

Next morning Minnie was down at Hollowmell before any one in that region was stirring. She had carried down with her a basket filled with provisions, feeling sure that under the sorrowful circumstances it would be required. She found, as she had expected, that Mrs. Malone was dead. She died at about four o'clock in the morning, her husband informed Minnie, and her last words had been the words he had been reading to her from the fourteenth chapter of John, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

He was sitting beside the remains of his wife with the book in his hand, as if he had never moved since the moment of her death, when Minnie entered.

He had really loved his wife with all the fervour of his passionate Irish nature, and the remembrance that but for his intemperance, and his cruelty to her, when under the influence of drink, she might have still been alive and happy, had overcome him to such an extent that he had fallen into a half unconscious state, and did not seem to be able to realise anything except that she would speak to him no more. [Pg 79]

Minnie could not wait then, so she ran into another cottage a little way further on, the door of which was already open, and finding the object of her search (Molly Gray) engaged in the preparation of her own breakfast, she told her of the calamity which had befallen the Malones, and begged her to go in and help them.

Molly only waited to refill her kettle that she might find it ready for any emergency, and carrying her own tea with her in a can wherewith to refresh the worn-out watcher, she at once repaired to the bereaved home.

Greatly relieved to be able to leave them under efficient care, Minnie hastened home, having first seen the grief-stricken husband swallow some tea, and a few mouthfuls of bread, but she had no appetite for her own breakfast, though she made a pretence of eating to escape comment, and rose to prepare for church without having tasted a morsel.

None knew of her last night's visit except her father and Charlie, and as her father did not mention it and Charlie had not yet appeared, she was not annoyed with the questions and expressions of wonder which she had hardly hoped to elude. Mabel was not at church, neither was she at school next day, an excuse being sent for her absence, stating that she was confined to the house with a slight attack of influenza. Minnie's excitement of Saturday night, thus augmented by anxiety on her friend's behalf, now began to tell upon her, so much, indeed, that before the work of the school was over, every one observed its effect in her heightened colour, and the unnatural brightness of her eyes round which dark circles had formed. They all attributed it to Mabel's illness and did not think it necessary to enquire into the cause of her apparent feverishness, so that she got away from school also without being embarrassed by troublesome explanations. [Pg 80]

She went straight from school to Mabel's, running all the way in her anxious haste. The fresh wind and the exertion of running had a beneficial effect upon her, both physically and mentally, for by the time she arrived at Mr. Chartres' door, the feverish flush was replaced by a healthy glow, and the strange, indefinable feeling of restlessness which had all day possessed her, seemed to have been swept away by the breath of the wind.

Mabel was still in bed, her aunt informed Minnie, though in her opinion, she was considerably better, and requested her to go up herself to Mabel's bedroom.

Minnie needed no second invitation, but immediately flew upstairs, and opening the door softly, peeped in before she entered. She was lying with her eyes closed, but the opening of the door, quietly though it was done, caused her to unclose them again just as Minnie looked in. She looked very pale and exhausted, but brightened up wonderfully under the influence of Minnie's cheerfulness, and was altogether so much better by the time for her departure, that she felt persuaded she would be able to attend school again on the morrow.

"That notion about influenza, you know," she remarked confidentially to Minnie, "was nothing more than a delusion on aunt's part. I have really no more influenza than she as herself, but she must have some reason for my being ill, and there would be no use contradicting her, unless I could supply a reason myself, which I can't. I thought it just as well to let it be influenza as anything else." [Pg 81]

Minnie agreed that perhaps it was, and conjuring her to "shake herself up" and be out to-morrow, departed.

That night, after tea she was sitting in the parlour with her two brothers, Archie and Seymour, the one of whom, Seymour, was older than she, and the other, Archie, a year younger.

"I say, Min," began Archie, "aren't you going to tell us what the row was on Saturday night? What mysterious traffic is going on between you and Charlie? I was teasing him to tell me yesterday, but he was as silent as the Sphinx."

"And what if I intend to be as silent as that famous monument also?" Asked Minnie.

"O, come now!" Replied he, in a coaxing tone, "you couldn't, you know, you're just dying to tell, as much as I am to hear what before-unheard of circumstance induced him to turn out on a Saturday night, and a wet and stormy one too."

"Am I?" She asked, looking at him with a provokingly doubtful expression, but feeling rather nervous all the time. "Then I must congratulate you on being a great deal better acquainted with my state of mind than I am myself. I don't know how it is, but for my own part, I confess that I cannot find any indication of such a condition as you describe."

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Here Seymour looked up.

"I think," he remarked, quietly. "That I might give you a *little* further information on the subject, since you seem so very much interested in it. Minnie was along with Charlie on Saturday night, on his interesting errand, and also Miss Chartres."

Archie gave a low whistle of surprise, and stared at Seymour, as though expecting him to say more, but if such was his expectation, he was doomed to disappointment, for Seymour having delivered in these few words the full extent of his information on the topic under discussion, closed his lips and turned his attention to his book again.

Minnie looked distressed, but Archie did not notice it in his astonishment and eagerness to know more about this mysterious proceeding.

"Is it true, Minnie?" he demanded. "Seymour, who told you that?—I declare I don't believe a word of it."

"Edward Laurence told me," replied Seymour, without looking up. "His mother was down there at Hollowmell yesterday, and came home full of it. I did not know before to-day that I had a saint for a sister; and as for not believing it, if you don't, just look at her and you soon will."

And sure enough her face was dyed with a hot flush that mounted even as he spoke to the roots of her hair, though he could only have been instinctively aware of her confusion, for his head was still bent over his book.

Archie looked from the one to the other in open-mouthed astonishment for a minute or two, and then it dawned upon him that Minnie looked, to say the least of it, uncomfortable, and stifling his curiosity, which was by this time greater than ever, as best he could, suddenly relapsed into silence.

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Soon afterwards Seymour left the room, and Minnie resolved to seize this opportunity of telling Archie the real facts of the case.

"It was so kind of you," she commenced rather confusedly, "to help me as you did just now. I could not tell you about it while Seymour was here, for you know very well how he laughs at religion, and says it is all done for show, and that there is no heart in it at all. I don't mean that I should have told you if Seymour had not been here, for I wouldn't have mentioned it if he had not —"

"Never mind about that," interrupted Archie, impatiently, "proceed with the story—or," he hastily interrupted himself, "not if it bothers you to talk about it. I don't mind much, you know."

Minnie smiled, knowing well how much he did mind, and assured him that it would not bother her at all to tell him, as she knew he would listen patiently, and not ridicule anything she might say.

She then proceeded to tell him in as few words as possible, what had taken place at Hollowmell on Saturday night, and how it came about that Mabel happened to be there at such a late hour.

"Why," exclaimed Archie, when he had listened with an interest, which surprised himself as entirely as it surprised Minnie; for though of an unusually curious disposition, he invariably found his interest flag after drinking in the first few details of anything. "Why, if you aren't a party of complete 'bricks—' Seymour called you a saint, but I say a 'brick,' and if you aren't content with that, I don't know what *will* content you." And he stared at her with an expression of intense approval that was irresistible.

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"But what I want to know is this," he continued in a tone of confidential deliberation, when her amusement had subsided. "However did you manage to get Charlie into such a pie? He and Seymour go together in these affairs; I should have considered Ned a more suitable subject for a purpose of that kind."

"O, I hadn't time to think, I suppose, I was in too great a hurry to get away—and besides I wasn't sure whether Ned was in or not. I'm glad now it was Charlie, for I don't think he'll look on these things with the same eyes now, as he used to, after what he saw of their value and necessity when nothing else could avail."

"Ah, well, I don't know much about it myself, but I suppose we must attend to them some time, though there's no particular hurry at present for any of *us* that I can see."

"Oh, but there is!" cried Minnie anxiously, "don't you see that the end may come any day, and that though we are young, we haven't any guarantee that we will live even one day more—there

are so many ways we may die, and just consider that one of them might overtake us within an hour."

"O, yes, of course, it *might*," was his light reply, "but that's very unlikely. It's a rather dull sort of subject this—I think I'll run round to Jack Durnard's for a map I lent him yesterday."

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He walked out unconcernedly, and Minnie made no effort to stop him, knowing how useless further remonstrance on this point would be.

Next day Mabel was allowed to come to school, greatly to Minnie's delight, and was not worse on that account contrary to her aunt's confident expectation, indeed the life and activity with which she found herself surrounded there, and into which she was ere long sucked, seemed to raise and disperse the cloud of depression which had enveloped her, so that in a few days she was her old self again.

The examination in which Mona and Minnie were to take part, was now drawing near, and both were very hard at work in consequence. Minnie, who never did anything by halves, wrought with all her energy, and denied herself the pleasure of being at Hollowmell as often as usual, that she might keep herself in right working order.

Not that she hoped to stand first on the list, for that hope she had abandoned when she resolved to keep back her Latin translation, but there were candidates from other schools in the neighbourhood, and the honour of the school was as much a consideration with her as any individual honour could be.

They were both too busy just at that time to indulge in any of their usual skirmishes, even if they had been particularly inclined, which, singularly enough, neither happened to be. Mona, to do her justice, had not, since the day on which she had been so ignominiously defeated about the Hollowmell scheme, troubled Minnie with any of her ordinary most provoking remarks; she held aloof, it is true, in a way which many considered to bode no good to their future peace when she would once more be at liberty to resume her attacks.

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In this, however, they were mistaken, for matters remained "in statu quo" after the examination was over, and the school had fallen into its usual routine again.

There was a good deal of speculation as to which would stand highest, but as it would be some time before the result could be communicated, these speculations were soon allowed to die away, and be replaced by objects of more immediate interest.

About this time the girls were making preparations for a grand floral demonstration which was to take place at the end of June, for their work had been going on now for four months. It was still almost a month till then, but the hearts of these youthful missionaries were already growing troubled as they contemplated the ambitious nature of their undertaking, when an incident occurred which, not in itself having any connection with their project, yet grew into a solution of their difficulty, or rather out of it grew the solution.

They had thought of asking the parents and friends of the boys and girls to be present and share in the festivity, but found that their limited space forbade the carrying into effect of this amiable project. They were very loath to abandon it, however, as at that time there was great discontent among the miners, and indeed a strike was threatened.

They were not vain enough to imagine that the result of this scheme would be to avert the impending catastrophe, but they had such faith in the soothing effect of good-natured social intercourse with them, and a display of real and unaffected interest in them and all concerning them, that they hoped at least to lessen in some degree the spirit of disaffection that pervaded the district.

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Some one suggested that they should hire a hall which stood at that end of the town, erected for temperance purposes but seldom used, and this suggestion, being favourably received, would have been carried out at once, but for the unfortunate reason that the hall was engaged for every Saturday up to that time and several weeks beyond it for meetings of the miners.

There was no other place at all suitable to be had, and so they found their good intentions frustrated at the very outset.

"I am afraid we shall have to give it up," sighed Bessie Raynor, one of the most energetic and indomitable among them in the pursuit of anything on which she had set her heart; and on the carrying out of this scheme she *had* set her heart, as its success involved a private one of her own.

Her father was also a coal-master like Minnie's, but his works were in quite a different part of the country so that they were inaccessible to her at present. They had a house there, though, just outside the little mining village, and there they usually removed during the Summer months. Fired by Minnie's example, Bessie had formed the resolution of initiating something of the same kind among her father's work-people when she should be among them again in a few weeks' time at most; accordingly, she was anxious to acquire as much experience as possible in the different sections of the work set on foot by the "Hollowmell Mission," and their varied results.

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The case was felt to be hopeless indeed when Bessie gave in, and as nothing further could be done, and no fresh idea was promulgated, the meeting separated with the intention of giving the

matter a careful re-consideration in case any solution might present itself hitherto unthought of.

Minnie was in very low spirits indeed, for her father was looking more care-worn and troubled every day, and was even now away attending one of those meetings from which he usually returned only to shut himself up in his study without seeing or speaking to any one.

Mabel was not out that day, she was naturally rather delicate, and had drooped very much of late, indeed, she had not been right since the night of Mrs. Malone's death, and this added a new cause for anxiety to Minnie's already troubled mind.

She walked slowly home trying to think of a way of bringing their plan to a successful issue, and so doing something, at least, towards the diffusion of a better spirit among the people. She could not bear the thought of being idle while there was a vague possibility of the slightest improvement being made in the present aspect of affairs. But her brain seemed willing to turn to anything but that, and she found herself as far off as ever from any settlement by the time she reached home.

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Her father had not yet returned, and the boys were out, so she sat down in the window to await their arrival. She had fallen into a sort of dream, and was performing all sorts of impossible feats before an admiring audience, composed for the most part of miners, but among whom she could distinguish the faces of her father, Mabel, Charlie, and a certain Mr. Laurence, the identical good-looking Methodist minister to whom Mona Cameron had on one occasion alluded.

Strangely enough, or rather, not strangely at all, for what impossible thing is not possible in a dream, Mona was her fellow-actor in this vision, and the two were in the midst of some wonderful acrobatic display, when they happened to touch each other and the result was a sudden "phiz," not a moral "phiz," such as the pupils of Miss Marsden's school were in the habit of witnessing, but a real, or rather what seemed to her a real chemical "phiz" in which both were involved, and without much surprise she beheld herself seethe and bubble "just like lemonade," as she afterwards described it, and finally vanish into viewless vapour.

Just at that moment a sharp report in her ear caused her to start and wake, and there, sure enough, was her father in the act of drawing the cork of a lemonade bottle, while Archie poured out the contents of another, which must by some mysterious means or other have got into her dream.

"Well, sleepyhead!" exclaimed Archie, "did you condescend to wake at last? Do you know how long you have been sleeping?"

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Minnie looked round in half-awakened surprise.

The curtains were drawn, the gas-jets lit, and the supper on the table, nearly finished too.

"Why did you allow me to sleep so long?" asked Minnie in rather an injured tone.

"As to that," replied Archie, "I'd have wakened you fast enough—you know my usual accommodating spirit—but papa would not hear of it."

"And really you did look so uncommonly tired," added Ned, "that we all thought it a charity to let you go on. I hope it was a pleasant dream—you seemed to do a great deal of talking during it."

Minnie laughed, and taking her seat at the table proceeded to entertain them with an account of it, and its absurd termination, which was received with shouts of laughter, and Minnie was glad to observe that her father joined them in their merriment without the appearance of force or strain, which she had noticed on similar occasions during the last few weeks.

"But what put the miners in your head?" He enquired curiously, when they were at last sober again.

"I suppose it must have been with hearing so much about them for some time back, and we were talking about them down in the Hollow this afternoon. I knew you were trying to satisfy them, and I was bothering myself because I could do nothing when things were going wrong."

"Well, if all that was on your mind, I hardly wonder at your dreaming of miners," remarked Mr. Kimberly smiling.

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"And highly complimented the miners may think themselves," put in Archie.

"Well, as it turns out," continued Mr. Kimberly, "you needn't have worried yourself quite so much about your inability, seeing you have already accomplished a very great deal—you and your young friends who help you."

"How?" exclaimed Minnie, eagerly, "we seem to be able to do nothing just now—the only time we could do any real good—"

"Never mind that at the present moment," interrupted Archie, "let us hear papa's story."

"Then you must know in the first place that the discontent among the miners is stirred up by a few men who, not content with bringing poverty and hardship upon themselves, seek to draw others into it also, and seem never to be so happy as when raising strife of one kind or another. I know that the most of my men, are perfectly well aware that they receive good wages for their work, and would be content enough if it were not for these vampires—for they seem liker that

than anything else. Though I have been at many of their meetings I have never had an opportunity of speaking until to-day, and you may be sure I made the most of it, laying before them a plain statement of the case, and asking them if, in their hearts, they did not endorse every word of it.

"I may as well say that I had very little faith in anything resulting from this appeal, and was therefore not surprised when I sat down, to see that the stolid indifference with which they had received me was still unbroken; but I *was* surprised at what followed.

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"A great burly Irishman—one Malone—who has been working in the pit for half-a-year or so, stood up and spoke.

"He did not say much, but every word told. He retailed the story of his wife's death-bed, and how the master's daughter had come, undeterred by wind and rain, and brought with her the comfort and hope which had made his wife's last moments the happiest she had ever known. I cannot bring before you the grandeur of simplicity which carried such weight with it, nor the terrible sincerity of the rugged giant, as he stood with tears in his eyes and his voice husky with emotion, but it is a scene I will never forget as long as I live, and I don't think any one who witnessed it will ever forget it either.

"He reminded them too, how the master's daughter and her friends had wrought and thought for their children's good and theirs, and how there was scarcely one present who had not reaped the benefit of their labours in comfort and cleanliness alone, not to mention other and better things.

"In conclusion, he proposed that they should all go back to their work, after they had given three cheers in honour of the young ladies, for the sake of whose goodness alone, they should be willing to do much more than this.

"He sat down amid a perfect burst of cheering, and when that was subdued, another miner rose and seconded him, and the resolution was carried by acclamation.

"Some one tried to oppose it, but he was effectually shouted down in less time than it takes to tell it; and so the dispute was settled, and my men go back to work on Monday in perfect good humour with themselves and all the world."

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Nobody spoke when he had finished his recital, the minds of all being intensely occupied, each with its individual reflections on the scene just described.

"And that man," continued Mr. Kimberly after a long pause, "was, not two months ago, the most malignant malcontent in Hollowmell."

Still no one else seemed to care about giving expression to any thoughts they might have on the subject, and in silence they separated for the night.

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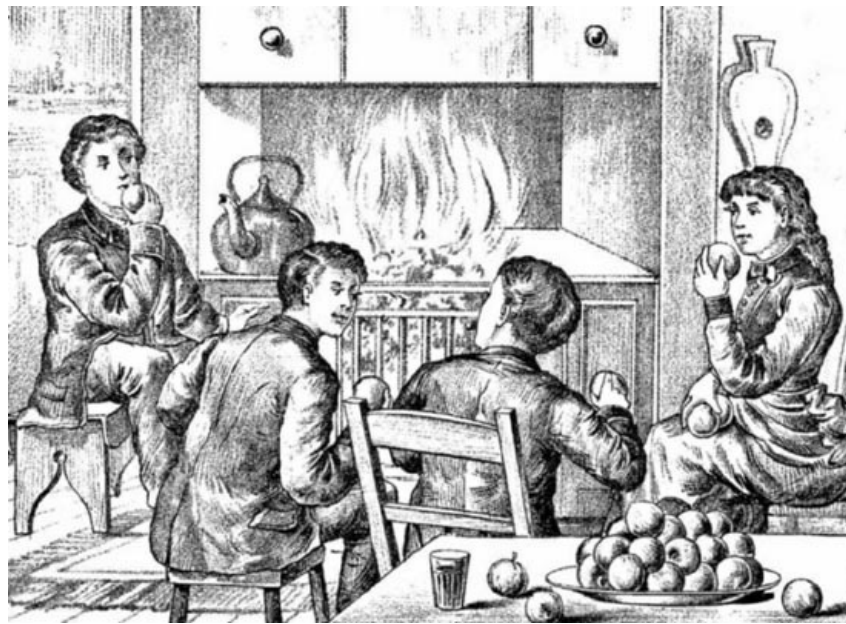


CHAPTER VII.

MONA'S DEFEAT.

Next day was very wet and stormy, therefore Minnie could not go down to see Mabel as she had intended, and the whole family were at home after church.

"I say, Min," said Archie looking in at the parlour door, where Minnie, Seymour, and Ned were each engaged in staring out at the rain as it poured, and whirled, and beat upon the glass, as if in glorious enjoyment of some long-meditated revenge. "I say, they are all out down-stairs, and there's a jolly fire there. Let's go down into the kitchen and eat apples."



"Will any of you come?" asked Minnie, turning to Ned and Seymour, who hailed the prospect of such an advantageous exchange with delight, and thither they repaired forthwith.

It was a great stone kitchen, with an immense fire-place, in which blazed what Archie had with justice described as a jolly fire.

"Why, this is the idea!" exclaimed Ned, as he settled himself comfortably in his chair, and began on the apples which Archie piled upon the table. "I never imagined a kitchen was such a jolly place before—upon my word, I didn't. It fairly beats anything in the way of drawing-rooms, dining-rooms, or parlours that ever occurred in my experience, at least. Why did not we think of this before?" he demanded, as he stretched out his long legs before the fire with an air of intense satisfaction.

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"O, we've often thought of it before, and done it too," answered Minnie laughing. "Only you see it isn't always possible, as we can only do it when the servants are out."

"Ah—um—just so," remarked Ned in a ruminating voice, "that's it, is it? Well, couldn't we have another kitchen for them, and keep this one for ourselves? I don't see any good reason why the best apartment in the house should be expressly constructed and designed for the particular delectation of the servants. I say it's a shame."

"You'd better enjoy it while you may," advised Seymour amid the laughter of the other two. "And not spoil your digestion by grumbling. When *you* have a house I have no doubt you will sit in the kitchen, and allow the servants to occupy the drawing-room."

Ned viewed this new proposition with grave and philosophic aspect, for the space of two minutes, and then gave it as the result of his cogitation that he "didn't know but he should prefer that arrangement after all."

Just then Charlie, guided by their laughter, came blundering down the stairs, and not being familiar with the way, took a wrong turning, and much to his astonishment found himself in an apartment, which was evidently a store-room of some description. Hastily groping his way back, he made an essay in another direction, and dived into a passage which ultimately landed him in a coal-cellar. On returning from this second unsuccessful expedition he discovered a door in the passage which he opened. Merely pausing to assure himself that it wasn't a cupboard, he stepped confidently out, and was precipitated into the kitchen, in a manner more expeditious than dignified, or even comfortable.

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"Good gracious! Whatever *can* that be!" exclaimed Minnie, starting up, and running to the rescue, while the others followed with various appropriate and characteristic remarks of an ejaculatory description.

"O, don't disturb yourselves for the world—it isn't worth your while—*now!*" they were assured in the familiar tones of Charlie. "A nice set of people, you," he continued, when he had seated himself in the chair Ned had vacated in his astonishment. "To sit here comfortably and listen to a fellow searching about for the kitchen till it might as well be in the North West Passage for all the chance he has of finding it."

"We heard you come down stairs," explained Minnie when she could speak again, the rest were too much overcome with amusement to offer any observations whatever. "But we thought you had changed your mind and gone back when you didn't make your appearance." And she went off into another fit of merriment.

"Well, now that I *am* here at last—my dangers and perils at an end—won't any of you show your charity to a poor shipwrecked and tempest-tossed mariner, by pitching over half-a-dozen of those apples? Remarkably snug quarters these, to be sure! Quite worth the trouble I had in finding them."

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"No doubt," returned Ned, finding himself deprived of his comfortable position, "when you manage to usurp another fellow's place. Remarkably snug, indeed!"

"Glad to find you're of the same opinion, old fellow, I rather imagined you wouldn't be so enthusiastic for a minute or so," and he settled himself down in a still more comfortable position yet, and seemed to enjoy himself greatly.

Ned, seeing that remonstrance was altogether useless, was forced to hold his tongue, and hunt up another chair with the best grace he could assume, after which Charlie gave an interesting account of his adventures.

Then they conversed on different subjects, and soon their conversation turned on the miner's dispute, and the scene their father had described to them on the preceding evening.

"I'm sure *I* said Min was a brick all along. I said they were all bricks, didn't I?" exclaimed Archie, appealing to Minnie.

"To be sure you did," she corroborated. "But I don't know that they would have regarded it as any great compliment, if indeed they would have understood it as such at all, so I didn't apprise them of your delicate attention—the girls, I mean." Archie pondered over this for several minutes, and seemed to come to the conclusion that perhaps it was better as it was, at any rate, he did not pursue the subject further.

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"Well, I must confess," remarked Ned, "that I never half believed there was any practical use in Christianity till now."

"Practical use of Christianity," repeated Seymour, disdainfully, "the commonest charity would have had the same result."

"And what is the commonest charity but the essence of Christianity?" asked Minnie.

"Fiddlestick!" replied Seymour, irreverently. "Religion is based upon the difference, in an ecclesiastical sense, 'twixt tweedledum and tweedledee."

"Not the true religion of Christ," asserted Minnie, "not *my* religion."

"Then what is your definition of religion?" asked Charlie, who had been silent hitherto on the subject. "It deserves a voice, you know, since it has 'justified its existence by its success' in the words of father's favourite maxim."

"The religion of Christ does not justify itself by success," corrected Minnie, "since it is in itself the fountain of justice as well as of mercy, it requires no justification, but its adoption justifies all who receive it."

"Well, but tell us what it *is*, according to your interpretation?"

"According to my interpretation, which is also that of the New Testament," answered Minnie, "Pure religion and undefiled, is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep one's self unspotted from the world."

"Well, that's simple enough at any rate. Is that your whole confession of Faith?"

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"Yes, those are what I consider the duties of religion, but no one who has really felt its power, could ever think of them merely as duties."

"You have shown us beyond dispute that you are capable of acting up to the first proposition. Even I, who know little about it, can see that is the easier of the two, how about the second?"

"There is only one way I know of fulfilling that requisition—I can't help it if it seems absurd to you—to me it is the true and only one, and that is by following closely the footsteps of that One who alone trod the world without being corrupted by its evil."

Charlie considered a minute.

"Well, after all," he said, "there must be something in it. No amount of reasoning, however sound, would have moved the turgid intellects of those miners. I suppose that as long as minds of that calibre exist, there must also exist a means of influencing them for good, which must of necessity be the extreme antipodes of their own inclinations."

"I think I don't understand you very clearly," returned she, "but if you mean, as I think you do, that Christianity is only to be tolerated for what it can do in the way of working on the emotions of those who are altogether governed by them, you are wrong. Its purpose is a far higher one, that of awakening the conscience, and enlightening the darkened understanding of such as these."

"And of what use is it to those who are already freed by other means from that benighted condition?"

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Minnie looked perplexed, and the tears began to gather slowly in her eyes. It pained her to find her knowledge on the subject so limited.

"Charlie," she said tremulously, "I am but newly awakened myself out of what you call 'that benighted condition,' through the influence of the Gospel of Christ, and I don't know anything of

the other means you talk about. You know I am not much given to thinking, and I have never tried to argue out these matters. I only know what it has done for me."

"And what is that?" asked Charlie.

"It has saved me from a frivolous, unprofitable life on earth, and a death beyond the grave," replied Minnie, solemnly, "and what it has done for me, it can do for all who are willing."

She paused a moment, but as nobody spoke, went on: "I don't imagine that it has the same effect on everybody, it can't, of course, as everybody isn't alike, but it must make a change of some kind, even in people who live the best lives outwardly, before they realize the power of religion, live only half-filled lives, however much work they may do—as Mrs. Browning says—'Nor man, nor nature satisfies whom only *God* created.'"

"That's just where Minnie has us, *I* think," put in Seymour at this juncture, "If you all feel as I do, you must acknowledge that there is something within us which isn't of a piece with the corruptible part of our nature—something that craves for an object to worship and pour itself out to, and yet nothing on earth is perfect enough to satisfy."

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"I suppose you mean the soul," observed Ned.

"Nay," replied Seymour, "that is what I would call the spirit, and if so, it cannot be of the earth—it must be supernatural. It cannot be a substance, and therefore it cannot be killed or subjected to any of the forms of corruption or extinction to which mundane objects are liable."

Just at this point they were interrupted by the entrance of two of the servants, and they were obliged to exchange their quarters for the drawing-room, where the conversation was not resumed. On the next afternoon, however, as Minnie was alone in the parlour, Archie came in, and leaning on the back of her chair with one arm round her neck, began in his usual impulsive fashion. "I say Minnie, Ned and I were talking it over—you know, what we were talking about last night—well, we had a long talk after we went to bed and we both came to the conclusion that since we always intended to go in for it some time, and knew that we could not face death without it, it would be a mean and cowardly thing to make a rush for it just at the end, and so we're determined to try for it at once."

Minnie's heart gave a great throb of joy at these words, and a torrent of thanksgiving went out from it for this answer to her unceasing prayers on her brothers' behalf; nevertheless, she was a good deal perplexed about the queer ideas he seemed to entertain on the subject, especially as he did not seem to have the ghost of a notion as to how he was to "make a try for it," as he expressed it.

Just at this point Mabel came in, and Minnie, for the first time in her life, regretted her friend's presence, fully expecting Archie to disappear as he usually did when any of her friends visited her. But this time Archie did not move, and after a minute he said "Does not Miss Chartres go down to Hollowmell with you? I think Seymour said she was with you the night you went with Charlie?"

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"Yes," answered Minnie, wondering what was coming next.

"Then she won't be annoyed if we go on with what we were talking about. You see," he said turning to Mabel, "I can't bear to leave anything half done, and I don't see how I'm to get through this without Minnie's help."

Mabel apologised for interrupting them, and begged that they would not mind her presence at all.

"O, but we shall," said Archie smiling, "for perhaps you may help us—me, at any rate, to understand what Minnie is trying to teach me."

"And what may that be?" enquired Mabel, "I am afraid there is little hope for my success if Minnie fails."

"The way to Heaven," replied Archie without a moment's hesitation. To an ordinary observer her face would not have displayed any emotion, but the boy's keen eyes noticed how the shadows deepened in hers, and that her voice trembled a little as she answered that no one was better able to do that than Minnie.

"Well, I'm not so sure of that," he remarked, "Minnie has not had any difficulties herself, you see, and she can't understand how any one else can have any either. As she says herself she just took the salvation when it was offered her and God did the rest. That's easy enough—or looks so at the first glance, but when you come to try it, why, there's nothing more difficult in the whole world. It's just like Columbus and his friends turned the other way. They said it was impossible at first, and when he showed them they cried 'How easy!' we think, 'How easy!' But when we come to try we find it almost impossible."

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"And soon," interrupted Minnie, "you will be wondering at yourself because you did not see it immediately."

After this the three had a long and earnest conversation, but Archie did not seem to get any nearer a solution of his difficulties, and at last decided to go in search of Edward Laurence, who might help him he thought.

Minnie was a good deal disappointed that she could not make things clear to Archie, but feeling assured by his earnestness that he would not long remain in the dark, she brightened up, and gave Mabel an account of how the strike had been averted.

Mabel's delight at this good news was in no way less than Minnie's had been, and for the first time since its occurrence, Minnie allowed herself to taste the fruit of her labour.

"And O, Mabel!" she exclaimed when they had talked about it till she felt it was too dangerously pleasant. "I didn't think of it before, but now the hall won't be needed for any more miner's meetings, so I suppose *we* may have it now."

"I should think we shall be able to get it easily enough," agreed Mabel, "What a deal of good has grown out of our little venture."

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"Yes, is it not splendid to think of—and oh, don't you think we might go round to Rowson's to-night and secure the hall?"

"I think we might, the sooner it's settled the better."

They were soon ready, and walked slowly along, enjoying the sweetness of the lovely evening. Not far from the door they met Archie coming at a terrible pace, his face as bright and glowing as the sunset sky; without stopping to consider that he was on the public road, or regarding the amused look of passers-by, he caught Minnie round the neck and kissed her, and would in all probability have done the same to Mabel, if Seymour had not come up at that moment, and demanded of him what he meant by "making such an ass of himself."

Unabashed by Seymour's description of his conduct, Archie replied that Minnie understood him, and did not object, which statement she instantly corroborated.

He next enquired where they were going, and on their errand being explained both boys volunteered to accompany them, being of opinion that they were better fitted to carry out arrangements of such a nature than young ladies in general—a view which Mabel and Minnie both warmly protested against.

"But I think you had better go home, Archie," said Minnie with a look which he was not slow to interpret and respond to.

"All right!" he replied cheerfully. Then in an undertone as Seymour and Mabel walked on, "you understand, Min, it *is* all right."

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"Yes dear, I understand, and I *am* so glad," she returned in such an affectionate voice, that Archie was moved to kiss her again, and then she ran off after the other two, feeling that her heart was almost too full of happiness.

When the trio arrived at Mr. Rowson's he was out, but they were desired to wait for his coming as he had left word that if any of the young ladies from the Hollow called, he wished particularly to see them. Accordingly, they sat down as requested, and in the course of ten minutes the gentleman himself appeared.

"I suppose you have come about the hall," he observed, addressing Minnie, after they had exchanged greetings.

"Exactly," she replied, "we guessed it would be vacant now, as the miners' dispute is settled."

"Thanks to you and your kind-hearted friends," put in the little man, smiling at the two girls who blushed violently.

"I am sure," he continued, turning to Seymour, "it would be quite a pleasure to let the hall to these young ladies for any purpose, but most of all for the purpose they have in view, and not to be behind hand in doing a good turn when I can, I must beg of you to accept the use of the hall for that day as a present." And he stopped breathless and perspiring from his unwonted exertion.

At first neither Mabel nor Minnie would hear of Mr. Rowson's proposal, and protested that they would rather pay for the hall, till Seymour, who had until now been a mere spectator of the proceedings, came to Mr. Rowson's aid who was by this time in a state of hopeless perspiration.

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"Come, come, young ladies!" he said. "Do try to reduce yourselves to an ordinary level. Be a little more sensible, and a little less quixotic. Does it not occur to you that it is perhaps a little selfish, trying to secure the monopoly of charity to yourselves, and leaving others who too would like to do something in that way out in the cold?"

"But—" Minnie began, and then she came to a standstill, quite overcome by the last most ingenious argument.

Seymour laughed, so did Mr. Rowson, so did Mabel, and finally so did Minnie herself, and thus the matter was amicably settled.

Seymour and Minnie walked home with Mabel, and when they had left her at her own door, as they strolled slowly home, Seymour remarked, "What a quiet, sensible little woman your friend is—as different as possible from you; how comes it that two such extremes manage to get on so well?"

"Thanks for your good opinion! It's quite flattering to be classed as the extreme opposite of quiet

and sensible," was the only reply vouchsafed by Minnie with a great show of offended dignity.

Seymour laughed, and remarked that often "people with a great deal more sense didn't put it to nearly such a good use."

Whereat Minnie assumed a slightly mollified air, and observed that now he was disparaging himself—a piece of humility which he altogether repudiated.

Next morning there was a great deal of rejoicing among the girls, who were in early enough to hear Minnie's news, and some few, who had hitherto held back fearing public ridicule, were now eager to join them, finding they were regarded, not only with toleration, but even with approbation by the general public. [Pg 107]

Mona Cameron was not among the number, though in her heart she would gladly have been there. She had many times longed to join them, and was even now only kept back by her pride, and the conviction that it would degrade her to place herself in the ranks and acknowledge Minnie Kimberly as her head and leader as the other girls cheerfully did, although Minnie herself had placed Mabel in the position of command, and loyally insisted on her approval being necessary to the most trivial arrangement.

On this morning it happened that Mona was in early, and was obliged to listen to the happy chatter of the girls as they discussed their plans with a zest and good-humour such as seldom prevails when a company of girls have under discussion a subject on which each has her individual and separate ideas, and is anxious to see them carried out.

Mona sat apart, feeling very much annoyed with herself for caring at all about "charity organizations," and yet caring all the more, listening eagerly to every different suggestion—rejecting this one in her own mind, and approving that, or improving it, as the case might be, by tacking on some neat little amendment evolved from her own clever brain.

All of a sudden, these several proceedings were brought to a standstill by the entrance of the Principal and teachers rather sharper to the minute than was the usual custom of the school. [Pg 108]

Immediately after the opening exercises, Miss Marsden produced from an envelope in her hand, a large blue paper, and announced that she had that morning received the result of the examination, and would now read it to the school, as it was probably a matter of interest to all, though only two of their number had taken part in it, and might possibly act as a stimulus to others to follow their example.

She then proceeded to read the list at the head of which stood Mona Cameron, followed by Minnie Kimberly—a circumstance which was simply the fulfilment of the general expectation; but the announcement of Mona's name as the taker of the Latin prize was a matter of astonishment to all, and rather a blow to most of them, as it had been confidently expected that Minnie would take it, and to no one did it afford greater surprise than to Mona herself. The flush of triumph on her face deepened for a moment on hearing this second piece of news, but it faded quickly as she remembered Minnie's translation.

"Prize-taker or no prize-taker," she muttered to herself, "Minnie's translation was worth a dozen of mine." And her sense of justice revolted against the decision, whosoever it might be; moreover, Mona did not care much about the prize she did not care to have the name of being first merely, her ambition was to *be* first, and feel herself first. She knew in her own heart that in this matter she was far behind Minnie, and was therefore far from being satisfied, although any of the girls would have said she certainly ought to be.

She received her music lesson from Miss Marsden herself so when the hour arrived she resolved to speak to her on the subject, and did so. [Pg 109]

"I can't make anything of Minnie," replied Miss Marsden to her query, "she showed me her translation—one which would have been no shame to a graduate in Classics, and forgive me, Miss Cameron, greatly superior to yours.

"She said that she showed me it simply to assure me that it was not through idleness she declined to enter the Latin competition. I was naturally anxious to know what motives influenced her in this course, but she would give me no satisfaction on that point. She merely said she did not intend to send it, that was all.

"I reasoned with her," continued the Principal, "and used every argument I could think of to induce her to change her mind, and finally represented to her that it was her duty to consider the interests of the school as well as her own feelings. She became quite distressed at this, and assured me she had made every effort in her power to make a creditable appearance, but she *could* not alter her determination in this case.

"I saw that further remonstrance would only pain her and could not effect my purpose, so I said no more, but allowed her to have her way."

Mona looked almost incredulous for a moment, and then without a word went on with her music. She thought she had discovered Minnie's motive.

When she entered the schoolroom again, she secured a seat beside Mabel, and launched at once into the subject uppermost in her mind. [Pg 110]

"Well, Mabel," she began, "what do you think of the result of the examination?"

"I don't know that I have thought much about it at all but I do not see how the result could have been different."

"Ah, then, I was right in supposing you to be aware of Minnie's intention not to send that Latin translation?"

"Yes, I did know of it," replied Mabel.

"And why then, in the name of justice, did you not prevent her carrying out that intention?" demanded Mona, impatiently, almost forgetting her object. "Surely you might have used your well-known influence better!"

"Nothing would have induced her to give up her determination," replied Mabel, quietly, "and I would have been the last to advise her to do so, seeing she made it a matter between herself and her conscience."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mona, recollecting herself, "That is just what I want to know about. What was her real reason? you know she did not give any to Miss Marsden. Don't be afraid to tell me, I have no sinister motive in asking it, I merely wish to do Minnie justice."

Mabel glanced at her in some astonishment before she replied. "I am not sure that the reason she gave to me was her real one," she said, "at least, I think it was only a part of it. However, I will tell you what she gave to me as such. She said that she had studied Latin so long with her brothers, that she would be able to place any one at a disadvantage who was obliged to study it alone. She considered that she occupied a rather unfair position with regard to you particularly, and probably also to many of the others who would take part in the examination.

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"I think she was pretty sorry about it, for I can assure you, she spared no pains on that translation, and was very proud of it. I remember how regretfully she looked at it, when she told me she was not going to send it after all, and then laughed and said she should be satisfied with the power to do it, even if no one knew about it but herself."

"I am sure I would if I had been Minnie," remarked Mona. "No, I wouldn't either—I would have liked it to be known and appreciated—but I wouldn't have cared for the prize in comparison with the translation itself. But have you no idea about the rest of her reason? That isn't the whole of it, as you say."

"Well, I have my own ideas," admitted Mabel, "but I don't consider myself at liberty to give expression to them, even as conjectures."

"Then I *am* right!" exclaimed Mona, triumphantly, "I have got on to the right track at last, and you will see what I shall make of it. Mabel," she continued earnestly, "you can't think how miserable I have been all this while about my conduct to Minnie. Often I have been on the point of giving in and acknowledging how wrong it was, but my pride has always stood in the way and dared me to do it. I don't think I am a coward in most things, but I am a perfect dastard before that, my worst enemy. I think he is down now, though, and if I can help it, he'll never recover from the defeat Minnie has administered to him this morning."

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Mabel did not know very well what to say in reply to this confession. She felt very much inclined to get up and embrace Mona on the spot, a most uncommon circumstance with our calm, quiet, undemonstrative Mabel, but it being within school hours, and consequently such an exhibition being altogether out of the question, she merely slipped her hand into Mona's and gave it a hearty squeeze which was cordially returned by Mona, at the same time furtively wiping some imperceptible spots of dust off her cheek, while she narrowly examined the points of her compasses which she still held in her hand.

"Don't say anything," whispered Mona, after a long pause, "I'll manage it myself."

"Very well," agreed Mabel, as she rolled up her work and went out.

Mona was determined to do what she had made up her mind to do, thoroughly, and to do it at once, before her purpose began to cool, and perhaps die out all together. Accordingly, she watched diligently for an opportunity to speak to Minnie, which seemed to be a particularly difficult matter to obtain that afternoon; but at last her perseverance was rewarded by the sight of Minnie alone in the dressing-room.

She was rummaging about in her jacket-pocket for something, and started slightly when she became aware of Mona's presence. She did not speak, but continued her search, and Mona looked at her wistfully for a moment, not knowing how to begin—her carefully prepared appeal having vanished as if by magic.

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"Minnie," was all she could falter out, "I—have been so—so—unjust to you—always. Can you forgive me?"

For the space of a minute Minnie stood gazing at her in sheer amazement, and then with impulsive swiftness flung her arms round her neck, whispering, "Oh, Mona, I am so glad we may be friends at last."

Mona forgot all about the Latin translation, and Minnie's motive in connection with it—forgot everything in her new friendship, and not till many days after did she recur to the subject.

The girls were all dying of curiosity to know the history of the wonderful alliance between the quondam enemies and rivals, but neither Mona, nor Minnie, nor Mabel, who alone knew any of the circumstances connected with it, uttered a word of explanation, so they were fain to accept it as it stood.

Mona entered heart and soul into the arrangements for the floral entertainment, and won the admiration as well as the gratitude of all, by the remarkable genius she displayed in the creation of novel devices, and before unheard-of improvements in their plans.

She had evidently made good use of her time during her self-imposed banishment from their councils; she had listened to all their plans and revised and improved them in her own mind, using up every little atom of good suggestion till she had perfected and rounded them to her own satisfaction, which was a much harder matter to gain than the satisfaction of the young ladies to whom she had now the opportunity of propounding them, indeed, it was a matter of such universal congratulation when Mona Cameron joined them that, had Minnie been just a little less anxious for the good of others, and a little more desirous of her own glorification, she would certainly have become jealous of Mona's new-found popularity. But Mona was at this time a good deal softened by the ordeal of humiliation through which she had passed, albeit, the ceremony was performed before only one witness, and did not feel any great inclination for the applause with which her efforts were invariably greeted.

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CHAPTER VIII.

A SUCCESS.

On Friday all was bustle and preparation for the entertainment which was to take place on the next day. Minnie was everywhere at once, and yet was in constant request.

The girls had begged and been granted a holiday that their preparations might be as complete as possible, and their unfailing allies—the children of Hollowmell—were at hand to render them every possible sort of help.

Next morning Minnie was flying round, "more like a bird than a human being," as her father observed. She had to see that the prizes—of which there were a considerable number to be distributed—were carried down to the hall, and innumerable other things about which she was in a fever of excitement.

The dinner was ordered for half-past two precisely, and by that hour everybody had arrived.

It was a goodly sight in Minnie's eyes to see them come in—the miners and their wives and children—all looking clean and respectable, and many of them even looking very well-dressed, as indeed they could all well afford to be, if they had not been in the habit of taking their earnings to the public-house in preference to any other place.

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Pat Malone was there and all his children, accompanied by Molly Gray, who had been promoted to the dignity of his housekeeper since the death of his wife.

In the morning Minnie had informed her father of the expected presence of some of the young ladies' parents and friends, and Mr. Kimberly suggested the propriety of inviting these to dinner in his own house, at a later hour. This proposal, however, was met by Minnie with decided disapproval, who requested instead that they should be invited to sit down with the company.

"I don't wish the people to think they are a show," she declared, "and that all this is merely for the amusement of us and our friends—they must either dine with my people or stay out of the hall till dinner is over."

Every one accepted the invitation—in fact, Mrs. Cameron declared that for her part, she had come for that purpose and no other, and moreover, she believed they had all come with a similar intention.

"Now, my good friends," said Mrs. Cameron, as they prepared to enter the banqueting-hall, "don't sit all together at one end of the table, and look exclusive. Mix yourselves up among the company and make yourselves sociable, and don't, whatever you do, seem to be trying to set them a good example, in the way of eating, or you'll spoil their pleasure and their appetites too." After which advice, delivered with much energy, she accepted Mr. Kimberly's arm and proceeded into the hall, followed by the other guests.

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It was a day, never to be forgotten in the annals of Hollowmell, and for years its inhabitants

talked about it, and dated events from it.

The dinner was a great success, and although there was no liquor of an intoxicating kind in the bill of fare, there were many healths proposed, and toasts drunk in the harmless beverages which were upon the table in abundance.

Minnie's and Mabel's healths were drunk with much enthusiasm, as the original inaugurators of the good work, and then the health of all the young ladies together, which was responded to on their behalf by Mr. Kimberly who expressed the great delight he experienced in reviewing the fruit of such a successful venture, and congratulated his workmen on having for their champions such a bevy of fair reformers, which remark was wildly applauded by the whole assemblage.

Mr. Kimberly and Mrs. Cameron having likewise received a similar tribute, the company rose, and proceeded to entertain themselves with general conversation while the remains of the feast were cleared away, and the hall reduced to an orderly condition.

Then came the distribution of prizes which occupied a considerable time, Mr. Kimberly saying a few words to each youthful prize-taker, as the various articles were handed to him or her by Mrs. Cameron.

After that there were games for the children, into which many of the older people entered with great spirit and enjoyment, and as an appropriate climax the service of strawberries and cream. [Pg 118]

When it had been disposed of the company relapsed into silence and a sort of expectant hush fell upon it which it was difficult to account for, until one of the miners rose to make a speech.

He floundered about a good deal, and didn't exactly know what to say, and at length, in a sort of desperation, determined to forego the pleasure of indulging in a harangue, and went straight to the root of the business by producing from his pocket two small boxes, and presented them in the name of the Hollowmell miners to Miss Mabel Chartres and Miss Minnie Kimberly, as a mark of their respect and gratitude.

These, when opened, were found to contain each an exquisite coral and gold necklet, which had been bought by the miners themselves, who, of their own accord, had subscribed the money for their purchase.

The two girls were completely overcome, to such an extent, indeed, that they could scarcely collect their ideas sufficiently to beg Mr. Kimberly to thank the donors for them, which duty he performed, however, very happily—promising for them, at the instigation of Charlie, that they would wear the gifts, so gracefully and unexpectedly bestowed upon them, incessantly, and would ever have the pleasantest associations connected with them.

Soon after their guests departed, and the Kimberlys went home.

Archie, Ned, and Minnie were in the parlour discussing the events of the day, and regaling each other with their respective experiences as they were in the habit of doing. [Pg 119]

"I am sure there is something serious the matter with Mabel," said Archie, suddenly, "did you not notice something strange about her to-day?"

"She was very tired, you know how little is sufficient to tire her, and the excitement was too much for her," said Minnie.

"I don't think that was all," returned Archie, then suddenly abandoning the subject he inquired where Charlie might be.

"He's with papa in the study," replied Minnie. "I saw him go in a few minutes ago."

"Then I think I'll go and find Seymour. I want somebody to talk to, and Ned looks too lazy even to wink."

"Seymour isn't back yet," drawled Ned, speaking solely for the purpose of disproving Archie's accusation, "he went off with Miss Mabel, and a precious while he has been doing that quarter of a mile."

"Oh, there he is!" exclaimed Minnie, as he passed the window, and a moment later he entered the room looking very grave indeed.

"What's the matter?" inquired all three almost in a breath.

"It's Mabel," he replied slowly. "She is in great danger, the doctor thinks she has burst a blood-vessel, but cannot be quite sure yet."

"But how did it happen?" cried Minnie, "she was all right when she left here. She did not feel ill at all—only tired." [Pg 120]

"The doctor says it must have been the excitement, but I am certain he is wrong there. I know more than he does." The last words were spoken in a voice too low to reach any one but Minnie.

"I know," she said, "she told me about it to-day."

"But you don't know half though—you don't know the terrible state of mind she's been in for months—it may have been years for aught I know, the wearing strain of incessant strife between

feeling and reason going on beneath every other interest and occupation. It was little wonder, I think, that it should tell on her thus at last."

Minnie listened in silence while Seymour spoke, and then she said in a low, almost inaudible voice:

"Why did Mabel keep this from me?" And without waiting for a reply went out and sought her own room.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE END.

Next day Mabel was no better. Minnie called two or three times during the day, but she was unconscious each time, and remained so all that night, and most of the next day. But towards evening she revived slightly and her consciousness returned.

Minnie was not with her at the time, but as soon as she became acquainted with the fact she hastened to her friend's side. She was allowed to see her only for a few moments, and during that time they were not permitted to exchange more than half-a-dozen words.

On the same evening, immediately after her short interview with her friend, Mr. Kimberly called Minnie into his study, saying he wished to have a little conversation with her.

Having first inquired for her friend, and expressed his pleasure on hearing of her improvement, opened the subject on his mind by inquiring how long she had known Miss Cameron.

Minnie was somewhat astonished by the question, and especially by the abruptness of her father's manner of putting it, but she gave a clear and concise account of her friendship with Mona, and of her previous acquaintance with her in Miss Marsden's school.

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"Then you have only been friends for a very short time," was his comment when she had finished.

"Only for a few weeks, papa," she replied.

"And has she never mentioned to you since the date of your friendship her former acquaintance with your brother Charlie?"

"No, she has not, but I am aware of it notwithstanding," confessed she, wondering more than ever.

"Well, it seems they became acquainted in London at the house of my friend Mrs. Cameron—Mr. Cameron's sister it turns out, although I was not aware of the circumstance until to-day."

Here Mr. Kimberly paused, looked at Minnie with an amused expression for a minute or two, and then went on—

"You look rather bewildered, and now I come to think of it, I dare say it is rather a bewildering thing to be treated like an old woman of fifty. I need scarcely have told you of this so soon—especially as you will hear of it soon enough from lips fitter to speak of it than mine, but one always feels the need of a confidante, however old he may be and young she may be."

"And I shall be prouder of nothing than of being yours," she returned, stroking his grey hair lovingly.

"Not even of the Presidentship of the Hollowmell Mission?" enquired he incredulously.

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"O, Mabel is that," she replied, her face clouding again as the thought flashed across her mind that perhaps Mabel would be that no more.

"Well, the position of arbitrator between discontented miners and their employers," he suggested, anxious to divert her thoughts from the gloomy subject he had unwittingly touched on.

"Not even of that," she declared, brightening a little. "Besides, all the girls have a share in that—but to our confidences again. What of Charlie and Mona?"

"I suppose you couldn't guess?"

"I am sure I couldn't," she asserted. Then added laughingly, "unless they've fallen in love with each other—by-the-way," she continued, growing suddenly serious again; "that isn't as altogether

an improbable think as it looks—I remember coming to the conclusion that Charlie had fallen in love with her writing, and thinking that it was almost equivalent to falling in love with herself."

"Well, that is just what has happened to them—though I rather think it happened before the creation of your ingenious theory. It appears they had some misunderstanding, or quarrel or something of that nature, before Miss Cameron left London, and they had never met again till he saw her along with you decorating the hall down there."

"And they've made it up!" exclaimed Minnie, clapping her hands in her delight.

"Yes, it is settled—the girl's only nineteen, and in my opinion too young. But her father doesn't seem to think so."

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"O, that's what he was here for then," remarked Minnie, "I met him as I was going up to Mabel's."

"Yes," replied her father, smiling. "He seems to have fully made up his mind on one point."

"What point?"

"That there is nothing and nobody worth considering in comparison with his daughter, and in that conviction his wife and he seem to be completely at one."

Minnie laughed.

"I know somebody who is pretty nearly as decided in his opinions on a similar subject," she hinted.

"Come, now, not quite," protested he.

"Well, he's a great deal older than Mr. Cameron, and consequently ought to have a great deal more sense."

"And his daughter snubs him too much—I wonder if Miss Mona has as sharp a tongue?"

"I would advise you not to rouse it," was Minnie's reply, as she flitted away.

Next day the mid-summer holidays commenced, much to Minnie's joy, for now she could sit by her friend many hours during the day, cheering her in her intervals of consciousness, and watching and soothing her at other times—thereby not only greatly aiding her slow recovery, but also rendering her aunt inestimable service in her present harassing position.

Mabel's great danger did not lie so much in the ruptured blood-vessel, as in a sharp attack of brain fever, which had followed upon her late excitement, and the slackening of the strain she had borne so long.

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She was yet very far from being out of danger, but there was scarcely so much need for apprehension, and even such a slight crumb of comfort was eagerly caught at.

Minnie was sitting beside Mabel's bed on the third day of the holidays, when she heard a step outside the door. The handle was turned noiselessly, and Mona came in on tip-toes, fearful of creating the least sound.

"Miss Chartres didn't tell me you were here," she said, her voice trembling. "How is she?"

"I think the fever isn't quite so bad—she hasn't been wandering so much this afternoon."

Mabel had lain almost motionless all this time, but now her pale lips began to move, although for some moments no sound issued from them. Then she began to speak in a voice so thin and weak that Mona could hardly recognize it.

For some time they could make nothing of her words, and only tried to soothe her, but after a while it became clear to them that she was repeating something which sounded like poetry. Still they could make nothing out of it, for sometimes several words would be lost from a line, and occasionally a whole line would be repeated by those pale lips without a sound.

At length Minnie caught a whole line. What the words were which went before she could not tell, but the words she caught came clear and distinct:

"It went up Single, Echoless,—'My God I am deserted.'"

The words "Single, Echoless" were uttered with a strange sort of triumphant emphasis which struck both the girls, and then the feeble voice went on more brokenly even than before with a few lines more, and then suddenly ceased.

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Minnie repeated the line over.

"I wonder what it is from," she said. "I am sure I have read it often, but I cannot remember where."

"I can't tell just at this minute either," remarked Mona, "I know it perfectly well though. If we could only get hold of it, reading it to her might do her any amount of good."

"That is just what I was thinking about," returned Minnie, "I wish we could find it."

"I've got it!" exclaimed Mona, at last, with a suppressed shriek of triumph. "It's in Mrs.

He looked very grave indeed on this occasion which was his third visit that day. A crisis, he said, would probably take place that night; he promised to come again before the time he expected it would occur; but held but very little hope as to its ultimate issue.

When he arrived, Mabel was in a state of high delirium, and raved in a way which made Minnie pale with terror. After about half-an-hour of wild, disconnected raving, she became a little quieter, and at last settled down to the old habit of repeating verses—verses which Minnie now recognised as belonging to Mrs. Browning's poem on Cowper's Grave.

She drew the doctor out into an adjoining room and explained to him the idea which had occurred to her in connection with Mabel's constant repetition of this poem, asking if he did not think it might have some good effect.

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"Well," he said, "I must tell you plainly that I am afraid it cannot have any good effect, but at any rate it cannot have any bad effect, and she is only wearing herself out more quickly as it is."—"Yes," he continued more kindly, noticing for the first time how young she was, and how terribly in earnest, "read it to her by all means. It will do *you* good, and it cannot do her harm."

She thanked him with tears in her eyes, and they both went back into the sick-chamber together.

She had brought the book with her, so, turning at once to the place, she began to read in a low, soft tone, with slow and measured accents, well-suited to the subject and the measure as well as the purpose she had in view.

At first it produced no visible effect, but she gradually became quieter as Minnie proceeded and the hopes of the watchers rose. She did not attempt to follow it at all till the line Minnie had caught so distinctly was reached, and then she repeated it after her in the same tone as before, and with the same triumphant emphasis on the words, "Single, Echoless."

Then she went on with the lines following along with Minnie, her voice growing gradually weaker and weaker as she proceeded:—

"It went up from the holy lips amid His lost creation
That of the lost no one should use those words of desolation—
That earth worst frenzies, marring hope, might mar not hope's fruition."

Here her voice died away, and she lay back with a long sigh of content.

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"She's conscious!" exclaimed Minnie in a whisper as she closed the book, "and the fever's gone. You said she would be safe—" and she stood with bated breath while the doctor bent over her.

"Yes, the fever is gone," replied the doctor, "and she is safe—for ever."

For some time Minnie could not bear to go near Hollowmell, so strongly did its associations with her lost friend move her. Her father took her away altogether for a while, and when she returned, though her grief was in no way lessened, it was so much softened that she could resume her work with a holier and tenderer interest in it, since it had been shared by one who was now an angel of light.

There was also much sorrow felt among the inhabitants of Hollowmell, for Mabel had made for herself many friends there, and her quiet goodness made more impression than much of the activity which characterised the greater number of the young ladies.

No one had thought very much about what Mabel was doing; the girls had shown deference to her mainly because Minnie did so; and so none knew how much good she had accomplished until it was too late to give her credit for it. Many of them, too, were astonished to find what a hold she had upon their hearts until death loosened it, and left in its stead a cord of love wherewith to draw them nearer Heaven.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HOLLOWMELL ***

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