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Title: Poppy's Presents

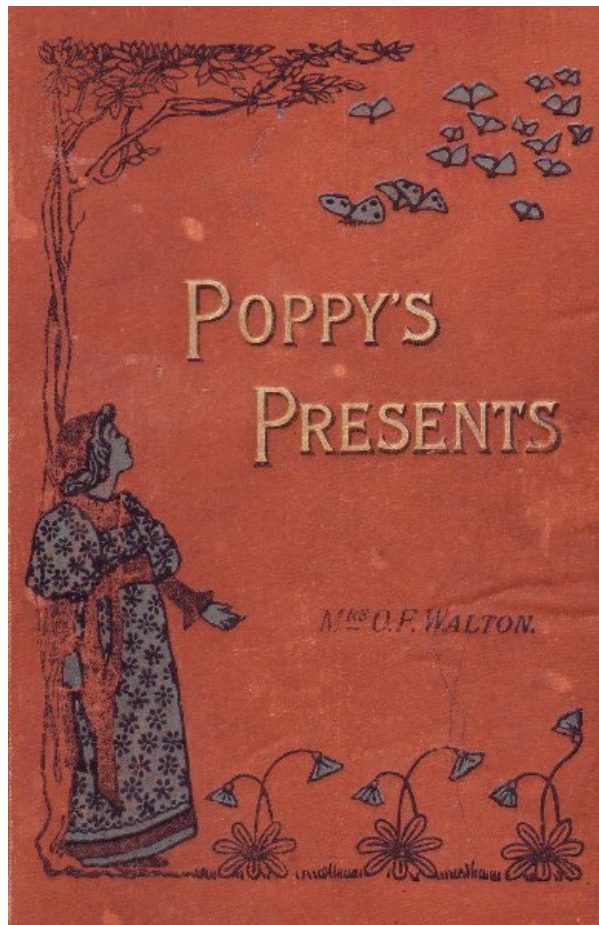
Author: Mrs. O. F. Walton

Release Date: June 18, 2009 [EBook #29153]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Nick Wall, Nadine Margaret Whitcombe and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <https://www.pgdp.net>

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[See p. 35.]

POPPY'S PRESENTS

BY

MRS. WALTON

AUTHOR OF 'CHRISTIE'S OLD ORGAN,' 'A PEEP BEHIND THE SCENES,' ETC.



LONDON

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY

56, PATERNOSTER ROW; AND 65, ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD

BUTLER & TANNER,
THE SELWOOD PRINTING WORKS,
FROME, AND LONDON.

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CHAPTER I.

THE LITTLE RED CLOAK.

The great cathedral bell was striking twelve. Slowly and solemnly it struck, and as it did so people looked at their watches and altered their clocks, for every one in the great city kept time by that grave old bell. Every one liked to hear it strike; but the school children liked it best of all, for they knew that with the last stroke of twelve lessons would be over, and they would be able to run home to dinner.

'Good morning, children,' said Miss Benson, the mistress.

'Good morning, ma'am,' said the girls, and then they marched out like soldiers in single file. So quiet they were, so grave, so orderly they went, almost as solemnly as the old bell itself. [Pg 8]

But only till they reached the school door. Then they broke up into a merry noisy crowd, running and shouting, chasing each other from side to side, jumping, hopping, and skipping as they went down the street.

'Oh dear, what a noise them children do make!' said old Mrs. North, as she got up and shut her cottage door.

But the noise soon died away, for the children were hungry, and they were hurrying home to dinner.

What is that little bit of red that we see in front of the crowd? It is a little girl in a scarlet cloak, and she is turning down a long straight road which leads into the heart of the city. Let us follow her and see where she is going. She is very tidily dressed; there is a clean white holland pinafore under the scarlet cloak, and although her shoes are old, they are well patched and mended. But she is turning into a very poor part of the city—the streets are getting narrower and more crowded, and they are getting darker, too, for the quaint, old-fashioned houses overhang the pavement, and so nearly meet overhead, that very little light or air can get into the dismal street below. [Pg 9]

Still on and on goes the little red cloak. And now she is turning down a court on the left-hand side of the street. An open court it ought to be, with a row of houses on each side, and an open space in the middle; but it is not an open space to-day, for it is everybody's washing-day in Grey Friars Court, and long lines are stretched from side to side, and shirts and petticoats and stockings and all manner of garments are waving in the breeze.

The little red cloak threads her way underneath; sometimes the corner of a wet towel hits her in the face, sometimes she has to bend almost double to get underneath a dripping blanket or sheet. But she makes her way through them all, and passes on to the last house in that long dingy court, and as she does so she notices a little crowd of women standing by her mother's door. There is old Mrs. Smith leaning on her crutches, and Sarah Anne Spavin and her mother, and Mrs. Lee with her baby in her arms, and Mrs. Holliday, with Tommy and Freddy and Ann Eliza. And as she looks up she sees several faces looking out of the windows overhead. [Pg 10]

What could be the matter? Had anything happened to her mother? Was her mother dead? That was her first thought, poor child. But nobody was looking particularly grave, and they laughed as they caught sight of the little red cloak coming under the white sheets and table-cloths.

'Why, here's Poppy!' said Mrs. Holliday, as she came up to them.

'Well, Poppy,' cried another, 'have you heard the news?'

'Your mother's got a present for you, Poppy,' said Sarah Anne Spavin; 'you'd better hurry in and have a look at it.'

'A present for me,' said the child; 'what is it?'

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But the women only laughed and bade her go and see.

And the faces at the window overhead laughed too, and said there was such a thing as having too much of a good thing.

Poppy passed them all and went in, and then she heard her mother's voice calling to her to come upstairs. Her mother was in bed, and she beckoned Poppy to come up to her.

'Poppy, child,' she said, rather sorrowfully, 'I've got a present for you.'

Just what the neighbours had told her; and the child wondered more and more what this present could be. It was a very long time now since Poppy had had a present; she had never had one since her father went away, and it was six months since he had left them.

Poppy often wondered where he had gone. Her mother never talked about him now, and the neighbours shook their heads when he was mentioned, and said he was a bad man. But he had often brought Poppy a present on a Saturday night when he got his wages; sometimes he brought her a packet of sweets, sometimes an apple, and once a beautiful box of dolls' tea-things. But since he went away there had been no presents for Poppy. Her mother had had to work very hard to get enough money to pay the rent and to get bread for them to eat—there was no money to spare for anything else.

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What could this present be, about which all the neighbours knew?

'Look here, Poppy,' said her mother; and she pointed to a little bundle of flannel lying on one side of the bed.

Poppy went round and peeped into it; and there she saw her present—a tiny baby with a very red face and a quantity of black hair, and with its little fists holding its small fat cheeks.

'Oh, what a beauty!' said Poppy, in an awestruck voice. 'Is it for me, mother?'

'Yes,' said the mother, with a sigh; 'it's for you, Poppy.'

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'But that isn't all,' said old Mrs. Trundle, who was standing at the foot of the bed; 'that's only half your present, Poppy. Look here!'

And in her arms Poppy saw another bundle, and when she had opened it, lo and behold, what should there be but another little baby, also with a very red face and plenty of black hair, and with its little fists holding its fat cheeks!

'Two of them?' said Poppy, in amazement. 'Are you sure they are both for us, mother?'

'Yes, they are both for us,' said the poor woman; 'both for us, Poppy.'

'Who sent them?' asked the child.

'God sent them, poor little things!' said her mother, looking sorrowfully at the two little bundles.

'Are they God's presents to me?' asked Poppy.

'Yes, to you and to me, Poppy,' said her mother; 'there's nobody else to look after them.'

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'Ay, you'll have your work set now, Poppy,' said old Mrs. Trundle.

But Poppy did not think of the work just then. Two dear little babies! And for her own! She was very very happy. She could scarcely eat any dinner, although Mrs. Lee took her across the court into her house, that she might get some with her children, and it was a great trial to her when her mother told her she must go back to school as usual.

'You'll get little enough schooling now, go while you may, Poppy,' she said.

The excitement in the court was not over when the child passed down it on her way to school.

The neighbours came to their doors when they caught sight of her red cloak, and some of them said, 'Poor Poppy!' and some of them shook their heads mournfully without saying anything. The child could not understand why they all pitied her so much. She thought they ought to be glad that such a nice present had come for her.

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On her way to school Poppy passed under a curious old gateway, which had been built many hundred years ago, and which still stood in the old wall of the city. Under the shadow of this ancient Bar was a shop—such a pretty shop Poppy thought it, and it was very seldom that she went under the gateway without stopping to look in at the window. For there, sitting in a row, and looking out at her, were a number of dolls—beautiful wax dolls with curly hair and blue eyes and pink cheeks. And Poppy had never had a wax doll of her own. Her only doll was an old wooden creature with no real hair, and with long straight arms; she could never even sit down,

for her back and her legs would not bend, and when Poppy came home and looked at her after she had been gazing in the toy-shop window she thought her very ugly indeed.

One day when Poppy was standing under the Bar, a lady and a little girl came up to the shop. The little girl was just as tall as Poppy, and she stood beside her gazing at the row of dolls. [Pg 16]

'I should like that one, mother,' she said; 'the one with yellow hair and a red necklace.'

That was Poppy's favourite too; *she* would have chosen that one, she said to herself.

The lady had gone into the shop and bought the doll, and Poppy watched the happy little girl walk away with it in her arms. And then poor Poppy went into a dark corner under the Bar, and cried a little to herself before she went on to school. If only *her* mother had money enough to buy her a wax doll!

But on the day Poppy's presents came she did not even stop for a moment to look at the wax dolls. What stupid creatures they seemed to her now! *Her* babies could open and shut their eyes, and none of these dolls could do that.

Her babies could move, and yawn, and cry, and kick; they were far better than dolls. [Pg 17]

And mother said God had sent them! He must have known how much she had wanted one of those wax dolls, Poppy thought.

CHAPTER II.

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POPPY'S WORK.

Poppy's work soon began in good earnest. Her mother had to go out to work, and whilst she was away there was no one but Poppy to take care of the babies. She liked her work very much at first. Their eyes were as blue as those of the wax dolls in the shop window, and their hair was quite as pretty.

But, as the days went by, Poppy could not help wishing that her babies would sometimes be as quiet as the row of dolls in the shop under the Bar. Poppy's babies were never quiet, except when they were asleep, and unfortunately it was very seldom that they were both asleep at the same time. Poor little Poppy! her small arms ached very often as she carried those restless babies, and sometimes she felt so tired she thought she must let them fall. [Pg 19]

Oh, how they cried! Sometimes they went on hour after hour without stopping. And then at length, one baby would fall asleep quite tired out, but no sooner did its weary little cry cease than the other one would scream more loudly than before, and would wake it up again.

There was no end to Poppy's work. She was warming milk and filling bottles,—she was pacing up and down the room,—she was singing all the hymns she had learned at school to soothe them to sleep,—she was nursing and patting, and rocking her babies from morning till night.

Brave little Poppy! The tears would come in her eyes sometimes, when the babies were more cross than usual, and she would think how nice it would be to feel rested sometimes; she was always so tired now. But she never gave up her work; she would not have left her babies for the world; she loved them through it all.

Even when her mother came home in the evening Poppy's work was not finished. Poor tired mother, she came slowly and wearily up the court, and then sank down upon a chair just inside the door, almost too exhausted to speak. [Pg 20]

'Give me the babies, Poppy darling,' she would say.

But Poppy knew that her mother had been standing all the day at a washing-tub, and that she was almost too tired to speak, and so she would say, 'Oh, I'll keep them a bit, mother; get a cup of tea first.'

And so the evening wore away, and bedtime came; the time when most little girls of Poppy's age get into soft, cosy beds, and sleep peacefully till the sunbeams wake them gently in the morning. But even at night Poppy's work was not over. One or other of the babies was crying nearly all the night, and sometimes both were crying together. Poppy used to see her poor mother pacing up and down, backwards and forwards on the bedroom floor, trying to hush one of the fretful children to sleep. And then she would creep out of bed and say, 'Give it to me, mother, you are so tired and so cold.' [Pg 21]

And then Poppy would take her turn in that constant tramp, tramp across the floor, and at last, when the happy moment came, if it ever did come, in which both babies were worn out with crying and were laid asleep beside her mother, Poppy would creep cold and shivering into bed, and the night would seem all too short for her.

Yet, in spite of all the work the babies gave her, Poppy was very proud of her presents. And when her mother got out two white frocks which Poppy had worn when she was a baby, and dressed the poor little twins in them one Sunday afternoon, Poppy danced for joy.

'Don't they look lovely, mother?' she said.

'You must pray for them, Poppy, when we get to church,' said her mother. 'We are going to give them to God.'

'What will He do with them, mother?' said Poppy. 'He won't take them away, will He?'

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'No,' said her mother, 'He won't take them away just yet; but I want them to belong to Him as long as they live, and then He'll take them home by-and-by.'

Poppy was very attentive at church that day. How pretty her babies looked as the clergyman took them in his arms! Her mother had been very anxious that they should have Bible names, and after much searching, and after many long talks with Poppy on the subject, she had fixed on Enoch and Elijah as the names for the little brothers.

Poppy was very happy that Sunday as she walked home with little Enoch in her arms. But when they got into the house, her mother sat down and burst into tears.

'What is it, mother dear?' said the child. 'Are you tired?'

'No, my dear, it isn't that,' she said. 'I'll tell you some time when the babies are asleep.'

They were asleep much sooner than usual that night; the fresh air had made them sleepy, and Poppy and her mother had a quiet evening.

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'Tell me why you were crying, mother dear, when we came home from church.'

'Oh, Poppy!' said her mother, 'I don't know how to tell you, my poor little lassie.'

'What is it, mother? Do tell me.'

'You know you said God had sent a present for you, Poppy, when the babies came?'

'Yes—for me and you, mother,' said the child.

'Poppy,' said her mother, 'I think He's going to give you the biggest share of it. I think I'm going to die, Poppy, and leave you all. Oh! Poppy, Poppy, Poppy!' and she sobbed as if her heart would break.

Poppy felt as if she were dreaming, and could not understand what her mother was saying. Mrs. Byres, in the house opposite, had died a little time before, but then she had been ill in bed for many a month; and Mrs. Jack's little boy and girl had died, but then they had had a fever. Her mother could walk about, and could go out to work, and could look after the babies. How *could* she be going to die?

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'I didn't like to tell you, Poppy,' her mother went on; 'but it is true, my darling, and it's better you should know before it comes.'

'But, mother, you are not ill, are you?' said the child; and as she said this she looked at her mother. Yes, she certainly did look very thin, and pale, and tired, as she sat by the fire.

'I'm failing fast, Poppy,' said her mother; 'wasting away. I've felt it coming on me a long time, dear—before your father went away. And last week I got a ticket for the dispensary, and the doctor said he couldn't do nothing for me; it was too late, he said. If it wasn't for you and the babies, Poppy, I would be glad to go, for I'm very, very tired.'

'Mother,' said Poppy, with a great sob, 'however will we get along without you?'

'I don't know,' said the poor woman. 'I don't know, Poppy; but the good Lord knows; and He *is* a good Lord, child. He's never failed me yet, and I know He'll help you—I know He will. Come to me, my darling.'

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And the mother took her little girl in her arms, and held her to her bosom, and they had a good cry together.

But before very long the twins awoke, and Poppy and her mother began their work again.

CHAPTER III.

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A HOLIDAY.



he next morning when Poppy woke she felt as if she had had a bad dream. Her mother's words the night before came back to her mind. 'I think I am going to die and leave you all.' It could not be true, surely! She raised herself in bed and looked round. Her mother was up already; she could hear her moving about downstairs, and she had lighted the fire, for Poppy could hear the sticks crackling in the grate. The twins were still asleep, lying in bed beside her, and the child peeped at their little peaceful faces, and stooped to kiss Elijah's tiny hand, which was lying on the coverlet of the bed. They knew nothing about it, poor little things. It could not be true, Poppy said to herself; her mother could not be going to die; she must have dreamt it all.

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She crept out of bed very quietly, so as not to wake the babies, dressed herself, and went downstairs to help her mother to get breakfast ready. But she found everything done when she got into the kitchen, the cloth was on the table, and a cup for Poppy, and another for her mother, and two slices of bread, and two cups of tea.

'Oh, mother,' said Poppy, 'I didn't know I was so late.'

'You're going to have a holiday to-day, Poppy,' said her mother; 'do you know it's your birthday?'

'My birthday, mother?' repeated the child.

'Yes, you're nine years old to-day, my poor little lass,' said her mother; 'I reckoned that up as I was walking about with the babies last night, and I mean you to have a rest to-day; you've been a-toiling and a-moiling with them babies ever since they was born; it's time you had a bit of quiet and peace.'

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'But you're poorly, mother,' said the child.

'No worse nor usual,' said her mother, 'and I've got no work to-day. Mrs. Peterson isn't going to wash till to-morrow, so you're to have a real quiet day, Poppy.'

But Poppy, like a good child, could not sit idle when she saw her mother working, and so in the afternoon, as soon as dinner was over, her mother sent her out for a walk, and told her not to come home till tea-time.

'There's Jack and Sally, they've got holidays, Poppy; get them to go with you,' she said.

Jack and Sally lived in a house on the opposite side of the court; they went to the same school to which Poppy had gone before the babies came, and they had always played together since they were tiny children.

So Poppy put on her scarlet cloak, and the three children started in fine spirits. It was such a bright, sunny day, and everything looked cheerful and happy. There had been a hard frost the night before, and the road was firm and dry under their feet, and the three children ran along merrily. They went a long way outside the walls till they came to a river, by the side of which was a small footpath following the river in all its windings, and leading across grassy fields, which in summer time were filled with wild flowers, and which were now covered with pure white snow.

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Oh, how much Poppy enjoyed that walk! She had been so long shut up in that tiny house, she had so long been imprisoned like a wild bird in a small cage, that now, when she found herself free to run where she liked in the clear, frosty air, she felt full of life and spirits.

She had forgotten for a time the sorrow of the night before. All was so bright and beautiful around her, there was nothing to remind her of sickness or of death. She was very happy, and skipped along like a little wild goat.

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They walked more slowly when they got into the city again, for they were tired with their long walk, and as they passed the great cathedral Jack proposed that they should go inside and rest for a little time on the chairs in the nave.

'There's lots of time yet, Poppy,' he said; 'it isn't tea-time, I'm sure.'

It was getting dark for all that, and the lamps were lighted in the cathedral. Jack took off his hat as he pushed open the heavy oaken door, and the little girls followed him. Service was going on in the choir, and they could hear the solemn tones of the organ pealing through the building, and with them came the sweet sound of many voices singing.

'Isn't it beautiful?' said Poppy; 'let us sit down and listen.'

They were very quiet until the service was over, and when the last Amen was sung, and the doors of the choir were thrown open for the people to leave, they got up to go home.

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But as they were walking across the cathedral to the door which stood nearest the direction of their home, Jack suddenly stopped.

'Hullo, Poppy,' he whispered, 'look here,' and he pointed to a little door in the wall which stood ajar.

'What is it, Jack?' said both little girls at once; 'where does it go to? Is it a tomb?'

'Oh, no,' said Jack; 'it's the way folks go up to the top of the tower; you know we often see them walking about on the top; my father went up last Easter Monday. I always thought they kept it locked; let's go a bit of the way up, and see what it's like.'

'Oh, no, Jack,' said Sally; 'it looks so dark in there.'

'Don't be a silly baby, Sally,' he said. 'Poppy isn't afraid; are you, Poppy?'

'No,' said Poppy, in a trembling voice; 'no, I'm not frightened, Jack.'

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'Come in then, quick,' said the boy; 'I'll go first, and you can follow me.'

'But isn't it tea-time?' said Poppy.

Jack did not stop to answer her; he led the way up the steep, winding stone steps, and the two

little girls followed.

'Jack, Jack, stop a minute!' said Poppy, when they had wound round and round three or four times; 'I don't think we ought to go.'

'I believe you're frightened now, Poppy,' he said; 'I thought you'd more pluck than that! We won't go far. I just want to get to that place on the roof where we see the people stand when they're going up; it's only about half way to the top; come on, we shall soon be there!'

It took a longer time than Jack expected, however, for the steps were very steep, winding round and round like a corkscrew, and the children were tired, and could not climb quickly. They stood for a few moments on the roof outside and looked down into the city, but they could not see much, for it was getting very dark, and even Jack was willing to own that it was time to go home. [Pg 33]

It did not take them quite so long to go down the steps as it had taken them to go up, but they were slippery and much worn in places, and the little girls felt very much afraid of falling, and were very glad when Jack, who was going first, said they were near the bottom.

But Poppy and Sally a moment afterwards were very much startled, for Jack gave a sudden cry of horror as he reached the bottom step.

The little door through which they had come was closed. Jack shook it, and hammered it with his fists, but he could not open it; it was locked, and they were prisoners in the tower. The verger who had the charge of the door had remembered that he had left it unfastened, and had turned the key in the lock soon after the children had entered the tower. No one had been near when they had crept inside, and so the verger had no idea that any one had gone up the steps. [Pg 34]

'Oh! Jack, Jack, Jack, what shall we do?' said Poppy.

CHAPTER IV.

A LONG NIGHT.

Yes, they were locked in, there was no doubt about it! [Pg 35]

'But don't cry, Poppy,' said Jack, as she burst into tears, 'we'll soon make them hear; the verger sits on that bench close by.'

Jack hammered with his fists on the door, and the sound echoed through the hollow building. Then the three children waited, and listened, hoping to hear the verger's footsteps approaching the door. And when some moments had passed and no one came, he knocked again, and once more they waited and listened. But it was all in vain; no one heard the rapping on the door, no one came to let the little prisoners out. [Pg 36]

'He must have gone into the crypt,' said Sally; 'he goes down there when folks come to see the cathedral; maybe he'll be back soon.'

But Jack did not answer her; he was on his knees on the ground, peeping under the crack of the door.

'What can you see, Jack?' asked Poppy.

'It's all dark,' said Jack; 'the cathedral lights are out, and everybody's gone home; whatever shall we do?'

The two little girls sat down on the bottom step, and cried and sobbed as if their hearts would break.

'What's the use of crying?' said Jack, rather angrily; 'what we've got to do is to try to get out. Let's climb up again, and get out on the roof; maybe we can make some one hear if we shout loud enough.'

'It's so dark up there now,' said Sally, glancing fearfully at the narrow, winding staircase; 'we can't see our way a bit.'

'Never mind that, we can *feel*,' said the boy; 'come along.'

'Oh! I shall fall—I shall fall!' sobbed Sally. [Pg 37]

'You stop down here, then,' said her brother. 'Poppy and I will go.'

'Oh no,—no,—no!' cried the frightened child; 'don't leave me; I don't want to stop here by myself.'

Very slowly and carefully the three children felt their way up the steep steps, and many a tear fell on the old stones as the girls followed Jack. It seemed a long, long way to them, far farther than it had done before; and the wind, which had been rising all the afternoon, came howling and whistling through the narrow window-slits in the tower, and made them cold and shivering.

At last they reached the open place on the roof, but they found it was impossible to stand upon it; such a hurricane of wind had arisen, that they would have been blown over had they tried to

leave the shelter of the tower. So all they could do was to remain where they were, and to shout as loudly as they could for help; but the cathedral close was very large, and no one passed through it on that cold, stormy evening, and the street was far away—so far that the voices of the children could not be heard by the passers-by, but were drowned by the noisy, blustering wind. They shouted until they were hoarse, but no help came, and at last even Jack was obliged to acknowledge that he was afraid there was no help for it, but that they must make up their minds to stay there for the night.

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'Oh, dear, whatever will mother do without me!' said Poppy; 'she'll have nobody to help her; I *must* get back to my babies. Oh, Jack, Jack, I *must* get back to my babies.'

'But you *can't* get back, Poppy,' said Jack mournfully; 'there's nothing for it but waiting till morning.'

'I'm so cold,' sobbed Sally, 'and I want my tea; whatever shall we do without our tea?'

'It can't be helped,' said Jack, 'and it's no good crying; let's go to the bottom of the tower again, it's not so windy there as it is up here.'

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It was hard work getting down in the dark, and with the whistling wind rushing in upon them at every turn; the old stone steps were worn away in many places, for thousands of feet had trodden them since the day they were put in their places, and the children sometimes lost their footing, and would have fallen had they not held so tightly to each other.

When they reached the bottom of the stone staircase they crouched together close to the door, in the most sheltered corner they could find, and tried to keep each other warm. But it was a bitterly cold night, and the rough noisy wind came tearing and howling down the staircase, and found them out in their hiding-place, and made them shiver from head to foot. And as the hours went by, they felt more and more hungry; their long walk had given them a good appetite, and they had had a very early dinner.

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Poor little Sally cried incessantly, and the others did all they could to cheer her; but she refused to be comforted, and at last she was so tired and exhausted that she sobbed herself to sleep. Jack soon afterwards followed her example and fell asleep beside her, and only poor Poppy was awake, crying quietly to herself, and thinking of her mother and of Enoch and Elijah. She was too anxious and too much troubled to sleep, and the hours seemed very long to her. It was such a lonely place in which to spend the night: there was no sound to be heard but the howling of the wind and the striking of the great cathedral clock, which made Poppy jump every time it struck the hour.

How long it seemed to Poppy from one hour to another; the time went much more slowly than usual that night, she thought. Once she became so very lonely and frightened that she felt as if she must wake the others; but she was an unselfish little girl, and she remembered how much poor Sally had cried, and felt glad that she and Jack could forget their trouble for a little time. So she crept quietly away without disturbing them, and climbed slowly up the steep steps to the place where she remembered the first window-slit in the tower came. She thought she would feel less lonely if she could see the lamps burning in the streets, and would feel that the world was not quite so far away as it had seemed to her during all those long, quiet hours.

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Poppy did not like to go so far from the other children, and once or twice she turned back, but at length she climbed as far as the slit, and looked out. There were the lamps on either side of the long street which led to the cathedral, but they seemed a great way off, and the cathedral close was quite dark and empty.

'There isn't anybody near,' said Poppy to herself, as she looked down. And then she looked up,—up into the sky. It was covered with clouds which the wind was driving wildly along, but, as Poppy looked, there came a break in the clouds, and one little patch of sky was left clear and uncovered. And there, shining down upon Poppy, was a star,—such a bright beautiful star.

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It made her think of heaven, and of God who made the stars. 'God is near,' said Poppy to herself. 'Mother says He is always close beside us. Oh, dear, I quite forgot—I've never said my prayers to-night.'

The child knelt down at once on the cold stone steps, and prayed, and her little prayer went up higher than the towers of that great cathedral—to the ears of the Lord, who loves little children to speak to Him.

'O God,' prayed Poppy, 'please take care of me, and Jack, and Sally, and please don't let mother be frightened, and please make the babies go to sleep; for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.'

Poppy felt comforted after she had prayed; she crept down the steps again, and wrapping her little red cloak as tightly round her as she could, she lay down beside Sally, and fell asleep.

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CHAPTER V.

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FOUND AT LAST.



hat was a terrible night, and one which would never be forgotten in Grey Friars Court. Hardly any of the people of the court went to bed, for they were all helping in the search for the lost children. The bellman was sent up and down the city till late at night, that he might try to hear tidings of them; the policemen were making inquiries in all directions; the neighbours were scouring the city from one end to the other.

Jack and Sally's father and mother were walking about the whole night, looking for their children in all places, likely and unlikely. And Poppy's poor mother, who could not leave the babies, paced up and down her room, and looked anxiously from her window, and trembled each time that footsteps came down the court.

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She could do nothing herself to help her little girl, but she had a strong Friend who could help her. Again and again, through that long anxious night, Poppy's mother asked the Lord to watch over her child, and to bring her safe home again.

Only one trace of the children had been found when morning dawned; Sally had dropped her little handkerchief on the path leading to the river; this handkerchief had been found by a policeman, and it had been shown to Sally's mother, and she had said, with tears in her eyes, that it belonged to her little girl.

Could the children be drowned in the river? This was the terrible fear which the neighbours whispered to each other, as they met together after the night's search. But no one mentioned it to Poppy's mother.

'I wouldn't tell her about that there handkercher, poor thing,' said one to another 'maybe they're not in the river after all.'

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In the morning, as soon as it was light, search was to be made in the water for the bodies, and every one in Grey Friars Court waited anxiously for the result.

Very early in the morning the cathedral door was unlocked, and one of the vergers, an old man of the name of Standish, entered with his wife, old Betty Standish, and with his daughter Rose Ann, to make the cathedral fires, and put all in readiness for the services of the day. As the two women raked out the cinders and ashes from the stoves, the sound echoed through the hollow building, and woke the sleeping children in the tower.

Jack sprang to his feet at once, as he saw the dim grey light stealing down the staircase, and as he heard the voices in the cathedral.

'It's morning at last,' he said; 'now we shall get out;' and he hammered with all his might on the door.

But the women were making so much noise themselves that the sound did not attract their attention; they went on with their fire-lighting and took no notice. Then the children began to call out—

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'Let us out—let us out, please; we're locked in!'

The two women paused in their work and listened.

Again the shout came, 'Let us out—let us out; we can't get out; open the door, please.'

'Whatever on earth is it?' said Rose Ann, coming up to her mother with an awestruck face.

'Ay, my dear, I don't know,' said her mother, who was trembling from head to foot. 'I never heard the like; I never did. Call your father, Rose Ann.'

The verger was in the choir, putting the books in order, and making all ready for the service. He came at once when his daughter called him.

'Listen, Joshua, listen,' said old Betty.

And once more the children called. 'Let us out, please; we're locked in; let us out.'

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'Do ye think it's a ghost, Joshua?' said his wife, looking fearfully at the old tombs by which she was surrounded on all sides.

'Ghost! Rubbish!' said her husband; but he was as white as a sheet, and almost as frightened as she was.

'Let's go and tell the Dean,' said Rose Ann.

'Nonsense,' said the verger, who had recovered himself a little; 'let's listen where the sound comes from.'

'Let us out; unlock the door, please!' shouted the children again.

'It's some one in the tower,' said the old man; 'though how on earth any one could have got there it passes me to think.'

So the old people and their daughter went in the direction of the cries, and the verger took the great old key from his pocket which unlocked the tower door. Yet even when the key was in the key-hole he paused a moment, as if he did not like to turn it in the lock.

'I wonder whoever it can be,' he said timidly.

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'It's a ghost; I'll be bound it's a ghost,' said old Betty; 'they say they *do* haunt all these queer old places.'

'Well, we'll have a look,' said her husband, summoning up all his courage; 'so here goes.' He turned the key, the door flew open, and out came the three poor children, weary, pale, and shivering with cold.

'Well, I never!' said the verger's wife, holding up her hands in amazement.

'Wherever on earth have you come from?' said her husband.

'I know, father,' said Rose Ann; 'these must be the three children of Grey Friars Court. I heard the bellman crying them last night.'

'Poor little cold things!' said old Betty, 'and have ye been locked in the tower all night?'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Poppy, 'all night.'

'But however did you get there?' said the verger. 'That's what I want to know.'

'Please, sir, don't be angry,' said Jack; 'we found the door open, and we went in.'

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'Well, I never heard the like,' said Rose Ann. 'I declare they're shaking from head to foot. Such a night as it has been, too; it'll be a wonder if it isn't the death of them.'

'Come along, my poor bairns,' said the old woman. 'I've got some hot coffee on the hob at home; you shall have a drink at once.'

'Oh no, thank you,' said Poppy; 'I must go home to mother.'

'So you shall, my dear; so you shall,' said old Betty; 'but you'll go all the quicker for getting a bit of warmth into you; why, you're stiff with cold, I declare. Poor lambs, you *must* have had a night of it! Bring them across, Rose Ann.' And the kind old woman trotted on in front to stir her fire into a blaze, and to pour out the hot coffee for the poor children.

She made them sit with their feet on the fender whilst they were drinking it, and she gave them each a piece of a hot cake, which she brought out of the oven. And all the time they were eating it she and Rose Ann were crying over them by turns, and the old verger was shaking his head and saying: 'I never heard the like; it's a strange business altogether, it is.'

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As soon as they were warmed and fed, the verger, and his wife, and Rose Ann took the children home; and I wish you could have seen their arrival in Grey Friars Court. There was such a kissing, and hugging, and crying; such an excitement and stir; such a rejoicing over the children, who had been lost but were found again, and such a thanksgiving in the heart of Poppy's mother, as she saw the answer to her prayer.

No one could make too much of the three children that day. They were invited out to tea to every house in the court, and sweets, and cakes, and pennies were showered upon them, till the two mothers declared they would be quite spoilt, and till Jack announced he would not much mind spending another night in the tower, if they got all these good things when they came home. But Poppy and Sally shook their heads at this, and would not agree with him.

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CHAPTER VI.

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POPPY WRITES A LETTER.

'Poppy, I want you to write a letter for me, darling,' said her mother one day.

'Is it to my father?' asked the child.

'No, Poppy; it isn't to your father.'

'Why do you never write to my father, mother?' asked Poppy.

Her mother did not answer her at once, and Poppy did not like to ask her again. But after a few minutes her mother got up suddenly and shut the door.

'Poppy, I'll tell you,' she said, 'for I am going to leave you, and you ought to know.' And then, instead of telling her, the poor woman burst into tears.

'Don't cry, mother, don't cry,' said the child; 'don't tell me if you'd rather not.'

'But I *must* tell you, Poppy,' she said, as she dried her eyes and looked into the fire. 'Poppy, I loved your father more than I can tell you, and he loved me, child; yes, he *did* love me; never you believe any one who tells you he didn't love me. He loved *me*, and he loved *you*, Poppy; he was very good to you, wasn't he, my child?'

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'Yes, mother, very good,' said Poppy, as she remembered how kind he always was to her when he came in from work.

'But he got into bad company, Poppy, and he took to drinking. I wouldn't tell you, dear, only I'm going away, and so I think you ought to know. Well, bit by bit he was led away. Sometimes, dear, I blame myself, and think perhaps I might have done more to keep him at home; but he was always so pleasant with all his mates, and they made so much of him, and they led him on—yes, Poppy, they led him on—they did, indeed. And I saw him getting further and further wrong, and I could not stop him, and there were things which I didn't know about, dear—horse-racing, and card-playing, and all that sort of thing. And one day, Poppy,' said her mother, lowering her voice ('I wouldn't tell you, my dear, if I wasn't going away), one day he went out to his work as usual. I made him a cup of hot coffee to drink before he started; I always made him that, dear, if he was off ever so early.

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'Well, he was ready to go, but he turned round at the door, and says he, "Is Poppy awake?" "No, the bairn was fast asleep when I came down," says I. He put down his breakfast-tin by the door, and he crept upstairs, and I could hear his steps in the room overhead, and then, Poppy, I listened at the foot of the stairs, and I heard him give you a kiss. I didn't say anything, child, when he came down, for I thought maybe he wouldn't like me to notice it, and he hurried out, as if he was afraid I should ask him what he was doing.

'Well, dear, dinner-time came, and I always had it ready and waiting for him, for I think it's a sin and a shame, Poppy, when them that works for the meat never has time given them to eat it. But the dinner waited long enough that day, child, for he never came home. I began to think something must be wrong, for he always came home of a dinner-hour. I thought maybe he had had some drink; but, Poppy, it was worse than that, for oh! my darling, he never came home no more.'

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'What was wrong with him, mother?'

'He was in debt, child, and had lost money in them horrid races; and there were more things than that, but I can't tell you all, my dear, nor I don't want to tell. Only this I want to say: if he ever comes back, Poppy, tell him I loved him to the last, and I prayed for him to the last, and I shall look to meet him in heaven; mind you tell him that, Poppy, my dear.'

'Yes, mother,' said the child, with tears in her eyes; 'I won't forget.'

'And now about the letter; I wish I *could* write to your father, Poppy, but I've never had a word from him all this cruel long time—not a single word, child; and where he is at this moment I know no more than that table does.'

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'Then who is the letter to be written to, mother?' asked the child.

'It's to your granny, Poppy, I want to write; *his* mother, your father's mother. I never saw her, child, but she's a good old woman, I believe; he always talked a deal about his mother, and many a time I've thought I ought to write and tell her, but somehow I hadn't the heart to do it, Poppy. But now she must be told.'

'When shall I write it, mother?'

'Here's a penny, child; go and get a sheet and an envelope from the shop at the end of the street, and if the babies will only keep asleep, we'll write it at once.'

The paper was bought, and Poppy seated herself on a high stool, and wrote as her mother told her:—

'MY DEAR GRANDMOTHER,

'This comes, hoping to find you quite well, as it leaves my mother very ill, and the doctor says she'll never be no better, and my Father went away last year, and nobody knows what has become of him, and he never writes nor sends no money nor nothing, and Mother has got two little babies, and they are both boys, and she wants me to ask you to pray God to take care of us, and will you please write us a letter?

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'Your affectionate grand-daughter,
'POPPY.'

It was well that the letter was finished then, for that very night Poppy's mother was taken very much worse, and the next morning she was not able to rise from her bed.

And now began a very hard time for the little girl. Two babies to look after, and a sick mother to nurse, was almost more than it was possible for one small pair of arms to manage. The neighbours were very kind, and came backwards and forwards, bringing Poppy's mother tempting things to eat, and carrying off dirty clothes to wash at home, or any little piece of work which Poppy could not manage. And often, very often, one or another of them would come and sit by the sick woman, or would carry off the crying babies to their own homes, that she might have a little rest and quiet.

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But, in spite of all this kind help, it was a very hard time for Poppy. The neighbours had their own homes and their own families to attend to, and could only give their spare time to the care of their sick neighbour. And at night Poppy had a weary time of it. Her mother was weak and restless, and full of fever and of pain, and she tossed about on her pillow hour after hour, watching her good little daughter with tears in her eyes, as she walked up and down with the

babies, trying to soothe them to sleep.

Sometimes she would try to sit up in bed, and hold little Enoch or Elijah for a few moments: but she had become so terribly weak that the effort was too much for her, and after a few minutes she would fall back fainting on her pillow, and Poppy had to take the baby away and bathe her mother's forehead with water before she could speak to her again.

So it was a weary and anxious time for the child. The neighbours said she was growing an old grandmother, so careworn and anxious had she become, and Poppy herself could hardly believe that she was the same little girl who had gazed in the toy-shop window only a few months ago and had longed for one of those beautiful wax-dolls. She felt too old and tired ever to care to play again.



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CHAPTER VII.

A VISIT FROM GRANDMOTHER.

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The summer began very early that year, and it was the hottest summer that Poppy had ever known. Even at the end of May and the beginning of June the heat was so great that it made people ill and tired and cross. Poppy's mother, who was never able to leave her bed, felt it very much. The court was close and stifling, and the old window in the small bedroom would only open a little way at the bottom, so that very little air could get into the room, and the poor woman lay hour after hour panting for breath, and almost fainting with the heat.

It was no easy time for Poppy. The neighbours were still very kind, but the heat made them unable to do as much as before, and somehow everybody's temper went wrong with the hot weather, and there was a good deal of quarrelling in the court. Mrs. Brown quarrelled with Mrs. Jones about something, and Ann Turner would not speak to Mrs. Smith because she had offended her about something else, and once or twice there were angry voices in the court, which troubled the poor sick woman. And when the neighbours came in to see her they would pour out the history of their grievances, and this worried and distressed her a good deal.

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The babies, too, felt the hot weather very much. They were seven months old now, but they were poor sickly little creatures, quite unable to roll about the floor like other babies of that age, and needing almost as much nursing and care as they had done when they were first born. Poppy did her very best for them and for her mother, but she was only a child after all, and she could not keep them as clean as they ought to have been kept, nor the house as tidy and free from dirt as it used to be when her mother was able to look after it, and sometimes poor Poppy, brave though she was, felt almost inclined to give up in despair.

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There was one day when she was very much cast down and troubled. It was, if possible, a hotter day than the ten very hot days which had gone before it. And it was everybody's washing-day. The court was filled with clothes, steaming in the hot sun, and shutting out what little air might possibly have crept down to the rooms below. But there seemed to be no air anywhere that sultry day.

Poppy's mother was very much worn and exhausted, and Enoch and Elijah did nothing but cry. Hour after hour they cried, not a loud, angry scream, such as strong babies might give, but a weak, weary wail, which went on, and on, and on, till Poppy felt as if she could bear it no longer.

She left them on the bed for a few minutes beside her mother, and ran downstairs to make a cup of tea and a piece of toast for mother's dinner. They lived on bread and tea now, for they had nothing but what they got from the parish, and if the neighbours had not been very kind, and brought them in little things from time to time, even the parish money would not have been

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enough to keep them from starving.

When Poppy went downstairs she had a little quiet cry. There was so much to do, and somehow that hot day it seemed impossible to do it. She knew that the house was untidy, and the babies needed washing, and there were dirty clothes waiting to be made clean, and cups and plates and basins standing ready to be washed up. And it seemed too hot and tiring to do anything.

Poppy went to the window for a minute, and putting her fingers in her ears that she might not hear the wail of the babies, she stood looking up at the strip of blue sky, which she could just see between the houses of the court. How pure and lovely it looked! And God lived somewhere up there Poppy knew. And God loved her—Poppy knew that, too. Her mother said He had sent His dear Son to die for her—the only Son He had—He had sent Him to die on the cross, that she might go to live with Him in heaven. God must love her very much to do that, Poppy said to herself. She thought she would ask God to help her that hot day,—if He loved her she was sure He would feel sorrow for her, now that she was so tired and had so much to do.

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So, looking up at the blue sky, Poppy said aloud, 'O God, please help me, for I'm very tired, and I don't know how ever to get everything done, and please make me a good girl; for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.' Would God hear her prayer? Poppy asked herself, as she came away from the window; she wondered very much if he would. And, if He did hear her, how would the help come? It was not likely that He would send one of the neighbours in to help her, for they were all too busy with their washing to have much time to spare. There were the angels, *they* were God's servants, and Poppy had learnt at school that they came to help God's people; but she had never heard of an angel washing up cups and saucers, or cleaning a house, or nursing a baby, and that was the help Poppy wanted just then. Well, she had prayed to God, and mother said God always heard prayer; she would wait and see.

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Poppy filled the kettle, and was trying to put a few things in order in the untidy kitchen when there came a knock at the door. Poppy started. Could some one be coming to help her? The neighbours never knocked—they opened the door and walked in—and Poppy thought the angels would not knock, for her teacher told her they could come in when the door was shut. Who could it be?

She went to the door and opened it, and there she found an old woman with a large market-basket on her arm, who wanted to know if Mrs. Fenwick lived there. Yes, that was her mother's name, Poppy said. Whereupon the old woman came in, put down her basket, and then seized Poppy and gave her a good hearty kiss on both her cheeks.

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'Why, you're John Henry's bairn,' she said, 'and as like him as two pins is like each other.'

It was grandmother, dear old grandmother, who had come from her home far away in the country to see her son's wife and children, and to do all she could to help them. And grandmother had not been long in the house before Poppy felt sure that God had sent her, and that she was just the help the poor child so much needed.

Poor old grandmother! she was hot and tired and dusty, and she had been travelling in the heat for many hours on that hot summer's morning. She sat down on a chair by the door, fanning herself with her red cotton pocket handkerchief, and kissing Poppy again and again, as she called her 'my lad's bonny bairn,' and told her that she was the very picture of what her father was when he was her age, and how her John Henry was the best scholar in all Thurswalden School, and she felt sure his bairn must be a clever little girl too.

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CHAPTER VIII.

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JACKY AND JEMMY.

Now, my dear,' said grandmother, when she had rested for a minute or two, 'where's my lad's wife? Your mother, my lass; where is she?'

'Oh, she's in bed, grandmother!' said Poppy. 'She's very ill, is my mother.'

'I'll go up and see her,' said the old woman. 'To think that my John Henry has been a married man these ten years, and I've never seen his wife!'

But when she *did* see John Henry's wife, grandmother sat down and sobbed like a child. She was so white, so thin, so worn, that the kind old woman's heart was filled with love and with shame—love for her poor suffering daughter-in-law, shame that her son, the lad of whom she had been so proud, should have left her when she needed him so much.

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How long grandmother would have cried it is impossible to say, had not a dismal wail come from one side of the bed, followed almost immediately by another dismal wail from the other side of the bed. It was Enoch and Elijah, who had fallen asleep for a few minutes whilst Poppy was downstairs, but who had waked up at the sound of a strange voice. Grandmother sprang from her seat as soon as she heard them cry. She had not seen the babies before, for they were covered by the bed-clothes. She held them one in each arm, and kissed them again and again.

'Oh, my bonny, bonny bairns!' she said; 'my own little darling lambs! To think that God Almighty

has sent you back again! Why, I'm like Job, my lass; I lost them five-and-forty years ago;—ay, but it seems only five-and-forty days. Oh! my own beautiful little lads. I kicked sore against losing them, I did indeed, my lass, poor silly fool that I was! and now here's God given me them back again. I'm a regular old Job now, ain't I? Not that I was patient, like him; he was a sight better than me—a sight better. Oh, you dear things, won't your grandmother love you!

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'Had you twins of your own, grandmother?' asked her daughter-in-law.

'Ay, my dear, that I had, and little lads, too—the finest children you ever saw; why, it was the talk of the country-side, my dear, what beautiful bairns they was.'

'And how old were they when you lost them, grandmother?'

'Why, my dear,' said the old woman, '*my* child was ten months and one week old, and *his* child was ten months and three weeks old—just a fortnight's difference, my dear.'

'I thought you said they were *both* yours, grandmother,' said Poppy.

'Ay, my darling, so they was; but that was how we got to talk of them. You see, me and my master had been married nigh on five years, and never had no childer (we lived up at the farm at that time), and then these babies came, and I think our heads were fairly turned by them—*he* was well-nigh crazed, he was indeed, my dear. "Sally," he says, when he came in to look at them, "you pick one and I'll have the other—half-and-half, that's fair share," he says. "Now, Sally, you choose first."

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"Well," says I, "I'll have the ginger-haired one; it's most like me." I used to have ginger hair, my dear; you wouldn't believe it, for it's all turned white now, but I had, just like Poppy there, beautiful ginger hair. Some folks don't like the colour, my dear, but your grandfather used to like it. Why, he said when he was courting me that my hair was the colour of marigolds, and they was always his favourite flowers; he had, 'em in his own little garden when he was a tiny lad, he said.

'Well, I picked the one with ginger hair, and called it *my* child, and he picked the black-haired one, which was the very picture of him—why, he had a head like a crow's back, my dear. And so we each had a baby of our own, and would you believe it, my lass, he took that care of it, you'd have thought he was an old nurse—you would indeed. He washed it and he dressed it,—ay, but I did laugh the first time,—and he gave it the bottle, and he got a little girl from the village to come and mind it when he was out, and in the evening we sat one on each side of the fire, he with his child, and I with mine; and then at night, when we went to bed, his bairn slept in *his* arms, and my bairn slept in mine. Well then we had them christened, and his was Jacky and mine was Jemmy, and he *was* proud of his child that day—as proud as Punch; he was indeed, my dear. He carried him all the way—Oh, dear! oh, dear! what *have* I done!' said the old woman, as she turned to the bed and saw Poppy's mother in tears.

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'Why, you're crying, my dear; I oughtn't to have told you. What a silly old goose I am! I ought to have remembered that lad of mine, and how he's gone and left you, instead of giving a hand with his own babies, as my master did. Dear me, dear me, whatever was I thinking of?'

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'Oh, granny,' said her daughter-in-law, 'do tell me about them; I like to hear—I do indeed; please go on.'

'Well, my dear, if you *will* have it so, I'll go on. They grew up beautiful babies, they did indeed, and didn't folks admire them! There's lots of people drives through our village when it's the season at Scarborough; they takes carriages, my dear, and they come driving out with lads in red jackets riding on them poor tired horses—"post-williams," I think they call them. I'm telling you no lie, my dear, when I tell you them little lads has brought in scores of threepenny bits that the ladies have thrown them from their carriages, when the girl took them out by the lodge gate; they was so taken with the pretty dears, they was.

'Well, all went on well, my lass, till the teeth began to come,—oh, them teeth, what a nuisance they are! I've lost mine, my dear, all but two, and I'm sure it's a good job to have done with 'em—they're nothing but bother, always aching and breaking and worrying you. Well, the teething went very hard with the babies; his child was the worst, though, and one day little Jacky had a convulsion fit, and didn't my master send off for the doctor in a hurry; and all that night he sat up watching his bairn, for fear it should have another fit. Doctor came once or twice after that, for the little lad kept poorly, though the fits did not come back.

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"Ay, doctor," I says one day, when he had little Jack in his arms, and was saying what a pretty boy he was—"Ay, doctor," I says, "but look at *my* child," and I held up little Jemmy. "*He's* the beauty now, isn't he, doctor?"

"You're very fond of that boy, aren't you?" says doctor.

"Fond of him! Why, doctor," I says, "I love him till I often think I could go bare-foot all my life and live on bread and water if it would do him a bit of good."

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"Take care you don't love him too much," says doctor, looking quite grave; "folks mustn't make idols even of their own bairns. Don't be offended, missis," he says, "but it doesn't do to set your heart too much on anything, not even on your own little lad: you might lose him, you know."

'Well, I was huffy with doctor after that; I was a bit put out, and I says, "Well, doctor, if I thought I was going to lose him I would love him a hundred times better than ever." So, my dear, doctor

shook his head at me and went away, and (would you believe it!) only five hours after I had to send for him all in a hurry to come to *my* child. He'd taken a fit like Jacky had; but oh! my dear, he didn't come out of it as Jacky did; it was a sore, sore fit, and before doctor could get to him—and he ran all the way from the village—my bonny bairn was gone.'

'Oh, grandmother, you *would* feel that,' said Poppy's mother.

'Yes, my dear, I did indeed; and when bedtime came, and he had *his* child laid aside him, and *my* child was laid dead in the best room downstairs, I felt as if my heart would break. He wanted me to take *his* child, but little Jacky was used to father, and wouldn't come to me, and, my dear, I cried myself to sleep.'

'And how much longer did the other baby live, grandmother?' said Poppy.

'Only fifteen days, my dear, and we buried 'em both in one little grave,—I often go to look at it now;—and when we put *his* child in, and I saw my child's little coffin at the bottom of the grave, my dear, I wished I could go in too.'

'I was very hard and rebellious, ay, I was, I see it all now,' said grandmother, wiping her eyes. 'But just to think of God giving 'em back to me after five-and-forty years! Why, it's wonderful,' said the old woman in a cheerful voice. "'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.'" That's the verse for me, my dear, now, isn't it?'

And grandmother took up first Enoch and then Elijah, and kissed them and hugged them as lovingly as ever she had kissed her own little babies. [Pg 80]

CHAPTER IX.

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JOHN HENRY'S BAIRN.

I have read the story of a fairy who came down into a dark and dismal room, where a poor girl clad in rags was cleaning the fireside, and who, by one touch of her wand, changed everything in the room; the girl found herself dressed in a beautiful robe, and everything around her was made lovely and pleasant to look at. It was a new place altogether.

Now, I think that grandmother was something like that good fairy, for it was perfectly wonderful what a change she made, in the course of a few hours, in that dismal house. No sooner had she had a cup of tea, than she took off her bonnet and shawl, and set to work to put things in order. First, she gave the babies a warm bath, and cried over them, and loved them to her heart's content; and then, as they had no clean clothes to put on, she wrapped them in some of her own garments which she took from her bundle, and, soothed by the unusual comfort and cleanliness, Enoch and Elijah were soon fast asleep. [Pg 82]

Then grandmother trotted downstairs again for more hot water, and washed Poppy's poor sick mother, and brushed her tangled hair, and then dressed her in one of her own clean night-gowns, smelling of the sweet field of clover in which it had been dried, and put on the bed a pair of her own sheets, which she had brought with her in case they might be useful.

Oh, how grateful Poppy's mother was!

'Granny,' she said, as she gave her a kiss, 'I haven't been so comfortable never since I was ill; I declare I feel quite sleepy.'

'Well, go to sleep, my lass,' said grandmother; 'that's the very best thing you can do.' So she laid the babies beside their mother in bed, and she and Poppy went downstairs. [Pg 83]

'Now, my little lass,' said the old woman, 'you and me will soon tidy things up here.'

It was wonderful to Poppy to see how quickly her grandmother could work. She was a brisk, active old woman, and in a very short time all the cups, and saucers, and plates were washed and put by, the fireside was swept, and the kitchen table was scoured. Then, leaving Poppy to wash the floor, her grandmother carried off the heap of dirty clothes lying in the corner into the tiny back kitchen, and, long before Poppy's mother or the babies woke, there were two lines of little garments hung out to be quickly dried in the scorching afternoon sun.

'And now, Poppy,' said grandmother, 'fetch my basket, my good little lass, and we'll unpack it.'

Oh, what a basket that was! Poppy's eyes opened wide with astonishment when she saw all that it contained. There was a whole pound of fresh country butter, a loaf of grandmother's own home-made bread, a plum cake she had made on purpose for Poppy, a jar of honey made by grandmother's bees, and a box of fresh eggs laid by grandmother's hens, a bottle of thick yellow cream, and, what Poppy liked best of all, a bunch of roses, and southernwood and pansies, and lavender from grandmother's garden. [Pg 84]

It was very pleasant to get tea ready, when there were so many good things to put on the table, and it was still more pleasant when Poppy's mother woke, to take her a cup of tea with the good country cream in it, and to watch how she enjoyed some thin slices of grandmother's bread and butter, and a fresh egg laid that morning by 'little Jenny, the bonniest hen of the lot.'

'Now, Poppy,' said grandmother, when tea was over, 'you get on your hat, and go out a bit. You're a good little lass if ever there was one—bless you, my darling, my own John Henry's bairn! But you want a bit of rest and play, you do indeed.'

'Yes, that she does,' said her mother. 'Why, it's weeks since she got out for a walk—not since I was in bed, bless her!' [Pg 85]

So Poppy put on her hat and went out. It was a lovely summer's evening; the great heat of the day was over, and a gentle breeze was blowing, which was very cooling and refreshing to the tired little girl. She went slowly past the great cathedral, and she thought how beautiful it looked, standing out against the quiet evening sky. Then she climbed up a flight of stone steep, and these took her to the top of the old wall, which went all round that ancient city.

And now Poppy had a beautiful view, over the tops of the chimneys, and across the black smoky courts, to where the green fields were lying in the evening sunshine, and the river was lighted up by the rays of the setting sun. And there on the top of the old city wall, in a quiet little corner where no one could see her, Poppy knelt down, and thanked God for hearing her prayer, and for sending grandmother to help her. On her way home she met Jack coming to meet her. 'Poppy,' he said, 'I've got a present for you.' [Pg 86]

He put his hand under his thick fustian jacket and pulled out something tied up tightly in a red cotton pocket-handkerchief.

'Come and sit on this doorstep, Poppy,' he said, 'and look what it is.'

It was a large green apple.

'Why, Jack,' said Poppy, 'where did you get it? It's a funny time of year to get an apple; I didn't know there was any left.'

'No, it's a real curiosity,' said Jack, 'and I said to myself when I got it, "Poppy shall have that big 'un; she was such a plucky girl that night in the tower—she never whimpered nor nothing." So I tied him up in that handkercher, and there he is.'

'Thank you so much, dear Jack,' said Poppy gratefully. 'But however did you get it?'

'Why it was old Sellers, the greengrocer, gave him to me,' said Jack,—'him as has a shop in Newcastle Street; he called me in and he says, "Do you want a job, my lad?" and when I told him "Yes, I do," he set me to clean out his apple-room, where he stores his apples in winter. So he took me in, and it *was* a sight—such a sight as *you* never saw, Poppy! Scores of 'em all rotten and smelling. Ay, they *were* horrid!' said Jack, making a face, 'all but half a dozen that were quite good. Well, I picked 'em out, Poppy, and took 'em to old Sellers, and he gave me half of 'em: so I ate one myself, and I gave one to Sally, and I kept the biggest of 'em all for you.' [Pg 87]

'It *was* good of you, Jack,' said Poppy.

'Well, eat it then,' said the boy—'they're very nice—as good as can be,' and he smacked his lips at the recollection.

But Poppy had rolled her apple up in her pinafore, and did not seem inclined to begin to eat it.

'Whatever are you keeping it for?' said Jack, in rather a disappointed voice.

'Jack,' said Poppy, stopping short, and looking up in his face, 'is it for my very own?' [Pg 88]

'Why, yes, Poppy—of course.'

'To do just whatever I like with it?'

'Why, yes, of course,' said Jack again.

'Then I shall give it to my grandmother,' said Poppy; 'she's come to-day, and she's ever so good to us; and God sent her, and she's cleaned the house beautiful. I shall give it to my grandmother, Jack.'

'All right,' he said; 'only I'd like you to have just one bite yourself, Poppy, to see how good it is.'

He was quite satisfied when Poppy promised to ask her grandmother to give her the last bite; and the little girl hastened home, feeling very happy, and picturing out to herself what a great treat that big apple would be to the old woman.

'Here,' she said, holding it out to her, 'it's all for you, grandmother—only Jack wants me *just* to have the last bite.'

'All for me,' repeated the old woman, as she looked up from the work she had in her hand—a little old torn frock of Poppy's, which she was mending. [Pg 89]

'Yes,' said the child, 'all for you.'

'Well, it's a beauty, I'm sure!' said grandmother, turning it over in her hand; 'but you see, my dear, many's the long day since I've eat an apple. Why, my little lass, what can an old body with only two teeth do?'

'Do try, granny,' said Poppy, holding the apple to her mouth; 'it isn't so very hard, and Jack says

CHAPTER X.

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THE MOTHER'S LEGACY.

And grandmother *did* try—for she did not want to disappoint Poppy. But somehow the two teeth would not go into the apple; they were too far apart, and there were no teeth below to help them; and so, after many attempts, the poor old woman was obliged to say she was afraid she could not manage it.

'If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again. That's a good rule, my dear; but it doesn't always answer, Poppy. But I'll tell you what, my little girl,' said she, as she noticed how disappointed the child was, 'I'll put it in the oven and bake it for my supper, and then I *shall* have a treat!'

'Oh, granny, I'm *so* glad!' said Poppy, throwing her arms around her neck—'I do love you so very much—you are so good to me!' [Pg 91]

'Why, you're John Henry's bairn,' said granny, as she held her fast in her arms—'how could I help loving John Henry's bairn?'

'Polly, my dear,' said grandmother the next day to Poppy's mother, 'Polly, my dear, I'm going to take you home with me.'

But the sick woman shook her head.

'Don't shake your head, my dear,' said grandmother; 'I believe if I could put you down on the top of the moors, and if you could get the breezes off the heather, why, my lass, I believe you'd get well in no time!'

'You must ask the doctor, grandmother,' said Poppy's mother; 'he is coming to-day.'

So when the doctor had paid his usual visit, grandmother trotted after him downstairs.

'Now, doctor,' said she, 'I'll tell you what I'm going to do; I'm going to take her home with me. Country air is the best physic after all, now isn't it, doctor? You can't say anything against that, I'll be bound!' [Pg 92]

But the doctor shook his head.

'Dear me, doctor,' said grandmother, 'don't *you* go and shake your head. Surely she'll be well enough to go in a week or ten days. Or maybe a fortnight or three weeks, doctor,' she added, as she saw that he looked very grave.

'My good woman,' said the doctor, 'you don't know how ill she is! It is only a question of time now.'

'You don't mean to say, doctor,' said grandmother, 'that she won't get better?'

'She may live a week,' said the doctor, as he put on his hat, 'but I do not think she will live so long.'

Poor old grandmother, it was a great downfall to her hopes; she had thought, and hoped, and believed, that the country air would soon make John Henry's wife well again, and now she was told that she had only a few days to live. [Pg 93]

She could not go upstairs with such news as that. So she bustled about the kitchen, pretending to be busy, washing up the tea-things, and sweeping the fireside, and stopping every now and then to wipe away the tears that would come in her eyes. And all this time Poppy's mother was waiting, and listening, and wondering why grandmother did not come to tell her what the doctor had said.

At last she could wait no longer, but rapped on the floor with the stick which grandmother had put by her bedside.

Slowly, very slowly, the old woman went upstairs. But even when she was in the bedroom, she did not seem inclined to talk, but began to wash Enoch and Elijah, and never turned her face towards her daughter-in-law, lest she should see how tearful her eyes were.

'Grandmother,' said Poppy's mother at last, 'tell me what the doctor said.'

'He won't let me take you away, my lass,' said grandmother, shortly. [Pg 94]

'Does he think I shall not live long?' asked the sick woman. 'Tell me what he said, grandmother, please.'

'He said you might perhaps live a week, my dear,' said grandmother, bursting into tears, and rocking Enoch and Elijah in her arms.

Poppy's mother did not speak, but she did just what king Hezekiah did when he got a similar message, she turned her face to the wall. Grandmother did not dare to look at her for some time, and when she did she saw that her pillow was wet with tears.

'Poor lass, poor lass!' she said tenderly; 'no wonder ye cannot help fretting; it's a fearsome thing to die, it is indeed.'

'Oh, it isn't that, grandmother,' said Poppy's mother; 'it isn't that. I was thinking about the poor children.'

'And what about the children, bless 'em?' said the old woman.

'Why, I'm afraid it will go hardly with them in the House,' said the poor woman, beginning to cry afresh. 'They do say some of them old nurses are not over-good to babies, and they think 'em such a lot of trouble, poor little motherless dears! And there's Poppy, too; she's been ever such a good little girl to me, and she'll feel so lonesome-like in that big, rambling place. I don't suppose they'll let her be with the babies, for all she loves them so.'

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'Now, Polly, my dear,' said grandmother, starting from her seat, 'never you say another word about that. If you think I'm going to let John Henry's bairns go into the Workhouse, why, my dear, you don't know what sort of stuff John Henry's mother is made of! Why, my lass, it would be throwing God Almighty's gifts back in His face. I've wearied for my twin babies all these years, and fretted and fumed because I'd lost them, and then as soon as He gives 'em back to me, I go and shove them off into the House! No, no, my dear,' said grandmother, 'I'm not such an old stupid as that. And as for Poppy, my lass, why, she'll be my right-hand woman! They shall come home with me, my dear, and I'll be their mother—dear, blessed little chaps—and Poppy shall be their nurse, and we'll all be as happy as ever we *can* be without you, my dear.'

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'Oh, grandmother, it seems too good to be true,' said Poppy's mother; 'but you can never keep three children.'

'Yes, my dear, I can; my good man, he was careful and thrifty, and he saved a good tidy sum. And my lady's very good to me,—why, I live in the lodge rent free, and get my coals, and many's the coppers the folks in their carriages throws out, when I go to open the gate. You see it's a sort of a public road, my dear, and there's all kinds of folk goes by. So I've enough and to spare; only I'm lonesome often, and haven't nobody to speak to for hours together. And now the Lord's going to send me good company, and I shall be a happier woman than I've been since my good man died, and my John Henry went away; I shall indeed, my dear.'

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Poppy's mother was almost too happy to answer her; a great load was lifted off her heart, and she lay quite still, with her eyes closed for some time, trying to tell her best Friend how grateful she was to Him for all He had done for her. Meanwhile, the poor old woman was rocking the babies in her arms, and wiping away the tears, which would come in her eyes as she thought of what the doctor had said.

Then Poppy came in, bright and happy, with a bunch of white roses in her hands, which Jack's friend the greengrocer had given him, and which he had sent to Poppy's mother. She was very much distressed to see her grandmother crying.

'What is it, granny, dear?' she said, putting her arms round her neck, and kissing her; 'are you poorly?'

'You had best tell her, grandmother,' said Poppy's mother; 'it will come less sudden-like on her after.'

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But grandmother could not speak. She tried once or twice, but something in her throat seemed to choke her, and at length she laid the sleeping babies on the bed, buried her face in her apron, and went downstairs.

'What is it, mother?' said Poppy; 'did the doctor say you were worse?'

'Poppy,' said her mother, 'shall I tell you what the doctor said, my darling?'

'Yes, please, mother,' said the child.

'He said that in a few days more I should be quite well, Poppy; well and strong, like you, my dear—no more pain—no more weakness—for ever.'

'Then why does granny cry?' said Poppy, with a puzzled face.

'Because, darling, grandmother wanted me to go to *her* home and get well there; but instead of that, God is going to take me to *His* home, Poppy, to be well for ever and ever. Will you try to be glad for me, darling?'

'Yes, mother,' said little Poppy with a sob,—'I'll try; but, oh mother, I wish He'd take me too!'

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CHAPTER XI.

THE STORY OF THE RING.

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Polly, my dear,' said grandmother, when she was sitting beside her the next day, 'aren't ye feared to die!'

'No, grandmother,' said the poor woman, 'I'm not afraid.'

'Well, *I* should be,' said grandmother, 'if I knew I was going away in a few days; why, my dear, I should be frightened out of my wits, I should indeed.'

'And so should I have been, two years ago,' said Poppy's mother; 'but I'm not afraid now. I'll tell you how it was, granny, that I got not to be frightened to die. I used to go to a Mothers' Meeting of a Monday afternoon, before John Henry went away, and before I had to go out washing, and while we did our sewing a lady used to read to us.'

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'Who was it, my dear?'

'Miss Lloyd; she's the clergyman's sister, granny. Well, one day (I remember it so well) she brought a beautiful ring to show us. Oh! it *was* a beauty, grandmother. There was a ring of lovely large diamonds all round it. She told us that some old lady had given it to her for a keepsake, just before she died, and that she would not lose it for a great deal. "Now," she said, "you are all my friends, and I want a bit of advice. I'm going to start to-morrow on a long journey; I am going to travel in foreign parts, and stop at all sorts of inns and lodging-places. Now do you think it would be safe for me to take my ring with me?"

"Well, ma'am," said old Betty, who's always ready with her tongue, "I wouldn't advise you to do so. They're queer folk, them foreigners, and maybe you'd be washing your hands at some of them outlandish places, and take off your ring, and then go away and leave it behind, and never see it no more."

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"That's just what I've been thinking," said Miss Lloyd; "thank you for your advice, Betty. I'm sure my ring will not be safe, and I can't keep it safe myself; well then, what shall I do?"

"Couldn't you trust it to somebody, to take care of for you, ma'am?" said another woman.

"Thank you, that's a very good idea. I think it's the best thing I can do. Now let me think," said Miss Lloyd; "I must get some one who is *able* to take care of it, and who is *willing* too. Oh! I know," she said; "there's my brother—he is *able*. He has a strong box at the bank, where he keeps his papers; he can put it in there, and I feel sure he will be willing to do it for me. I hear his voice in the next room; I'll call him in, and ask him."

'And did she ask him?' said grandmother.

'Yes, she brought him in, and she said: "Now, Arthur," she said, "these friends of mine advise me to trust my ring to you. I can't keep it safe myself, but I feel I can trust you. I know you are able to keep it for me whilst I am away; I commit it to your care." So up she got from her seat, and handed the ring in its little case to Mr. Lloyd, and he put it in his waistcoat pocket, saying, as he left the room, "All right, Emily, don't you trouble about it; I'll take care of it.'"

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'Well, my dear,' said grandmother, 'all that was very nice, I've no doubt; but how it makes you any happier to die, it beats me to see.'

'Oh, but you haven't heard the end of it, grandmother,' said Poppy's mother.

'No, nor I won't hear it till you've had a cup of tea, my dear. You're as white as a sheet. I oughtn't to have let you talk so long.'

But when she had had the tea, and an hour's quiet sleep, and when the babies were asleep, and grandmother and Poppy were sitting beside her in the twilight, the poor woman went on with her story.

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'When Mr. Lloyd had gone, grandmother, his sister said, "I can't thank you all enough for your good advice. I feel quite happy about my ring. And now you won't mind my asking you what are *you* going to do with *your* treasure?"

"Well, ma'am," said old Betty, "the only ring that I have is my wedding ring, and that's not worth sixpence to anybody but myself, so I don't suppose it stands much chance of being stolen."

"Betty," said Miss Lloyd, turning to her, "you have a treasure worth *far, far* more than my ring. I mean your precious soul, which will live for ever and ever and ever somewhere; your undying self, Betty. Only your body will go in the grave; you yourself will be living for ever. Dear friends," she said, speaking to all of us, "I want each of you to ask this question: What about my soul? Is it safe?"

'Then she told us, grandmother, that we were travelling through an enemy's country; Satan and his evil spirits wanted to get our treasure. She told us we could not keep our soul safe ourselves; if we tried we should certainly lose it, as she would have lost her ring. "And oh, dear friends," she said, "what shall it profit you, if you gain the whole world, and lose your own soul?"

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'Well, she was right there, my dear,' said grandmother.

"Now, then," she says, "I want you to do as you advised me to do. I want you to get some one to keep your treasure for you—some one who is able, some one who is willing; who shall it be?"

"I suppose you mean the Lord, ma'am," said old Betty.

"Yes," she said, "I mean the Lord Jesus. He is able, for He has all power; He is willing, for He died on purpose that He might do so. Won't you trust your treasure to Him?" she said. "Won't you go straight to Him, and say, Lord Jesus, here is my soul; I can't keep it myself; Satan wants to get it for his own. I trust it to Thee; I commit it to Thee to be saved."

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'Well, grandmother,' said Poppy's mother, 'I didn't forget what she said, and that night, when John Henry had gone upstairs to bed, I knelt down in the kitchen, and trusted my soul to the Lord Jesus to be saved, because He had died for me; I put my soul in His hands, grandmother, and I know He will keep it safe.'

'Well, my dear,' said grandmother, 'it's to be hoped He will.'

'I *know* He will, grandmother; I don't doubt Him,' said Poppy's mother. 'Miss Lloyd taught us a verse about that: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." And she said if we were to begin doubting that our soul was safe when we had taken it to Jesus to be saved, it would be the same as saying we did not trust Him. "What would you think," she said, "if I were to be saying all the time I was away Oh, dear me, I'm afraid I shall never see my ring again; I'm afraid it isn't safe after all?"

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"Why, ma'am," said old Betty, "you'll excuse me saying so, but I should think you was very rude to Mr. Lloyd, and if I was there I should give you a bit of my mind; you mustn't be offended at me saying so," says Betty, "but I should indeed."

"And what would you say, Betty?" says Miss Lloyd.

"I should tell you, ma'am," says Betty "that if you had trusted your ring to Mr. Lloyd, it was as safe as safe could be, and it was an insult to him to doubt it."

"Betty," says Miss Lloyd, "you're quite right; and that's just what I feel about the Lord Jesus. I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that soul which I have committed unto Him."

'Well,' said grandmother, 'it seems all right when you put it like that, and I wish I was as happy as you are, my dear;—but I'm a good-for-nothing old woman, I am indeed, and somehow I'm afraid He wouldn't do it for me.'

'Poppy,' said her mother, 'do you think you could find me a Mission Hymn-book?'

'Yes, mother,' said Poppy; 'here's one on the table.' The poor woman turned over the leaves with trembling fingers, for she was very weak and tired.

'Poppy, dear,' she said, when she had found the place, 'read this hymn to grandmother.'

And Poppy read:

Jesus, I will trust Thee, trust Thee with
my soul!
Guilty, lost, and helpless, Thou canst
make me whole.
There is none in heaven or on earth like
Thee;
Thou hast died for sinners—therefore, Lord, for me.
Jesus, I do trust Thee, trust without a doubt,
Whosoever cometh Thou wilt not cast out:
Faithful is Thy promise, precious is Thy blood—
These my soul's salvation, Thou my Saviour God!

'Oh, grandmother, and oh, Poppy,' she said, when the child had finished reading, 'trust your soul to Jesus *to-night*.'

'Well, my dear, I will,' said poor old grandmother, wiping her eyes.

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'And you, my own little Poppy?'

'Yes, dear mother,' said the child; 'I won't forget.'



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THE WONDERFUL FIRE.

'Polly, my dear,' said grandmother the next day, as she was washing the babies, 'I didn't forget what you asked me to do last night; but I'm afraid, my dear, I'm very much afraid.'

'What are you afraid of, granny?' asked Poppy's mother.

'Why, I'm afraid of getting cold and hard again, my dear,' she said; 'it's all very well for Poppy, but I've been putting off so long, I'm afraid of slipping into all the bad, old ways again. Why, my dear, I've tried to pray and to read my Bible scores of times before, but my mind has soon gone a-wandering away to my chickens, or to my butter or to the bit of washing I do for the Hall, and all such like things. Now, my dear, how do I know it won't be like that again?'

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'Ye can't get cold and hard, granny, if the fire burns bright; and the Lord will keep it alight. He will indeed.'

'What do you mean by the fire, my dear?'

'Why, granny, I saw it at the Mothers' Meeting, Miss Lloyd showed us it, such a pretty picture! I've often thought of it since.'

'Tell me about it, my lass, if it won't bring the cough on.'

'No, I feel so much easier to-day, granny, it doesn't hurt me to talk like it did last week. I'll stop if it tires me. Well, there was a fire in the picture, burning on the hearth, a bright, cheerful, little fire, like I used to make of an evening when John Henry came home. And in front of the fire, granny, was a man throwing buckets full of water on it to put it out; but the fire was blazing away, and did not seem a bit the worse for it.'

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'That was a queer thing, my dear!' said granny.

'Yes, but Miss Lloyd showed us that, behind the fire, on the other side of the wall, another was standing; and this one was quietly pouring oil into the fire to keep it burning. And it never had a chance of going out, granny, for the oil did it a deal more good than the water did it harm.'

'Well, my dear,' said grandmother, 'of course it would be so: oil makes a deal of blaze when it falls on fire; but what has that got to do with me and my poor old heart?'

But Polly had a bad fit of coughing, and the good old woman would not let her answer her question till she had had two hours' quiet rest. Then she seemed brighter again, and was able to go on.

'Miss Lloyd explained it beautiful, granny. She told us the fire was the work of grace in our hearts. As soon as we trusted our souls to Jesus to be saved, she said that fire was lighted, the good work was begun. But then, she said, "Don't forget you've got an enemy. Satan will try to put the fire out. He'll send somebody to laugh at you, or to plague you about turning religious. That's one bucket of water! He'll send you a lot of work to do, to try and make you think you've no time to think about your soul. That's another bucket of water!" He'll have all sorts of pleasures, and cares, and difficulties ready, all of them buckets of water, granny.'

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'Ay, my dear, I see that, and I'll be bound there's a bucket not far off coming on my poor little fire. But what about the oil, my dear?'

'I'm coming to the oil, granny. Satan has his buckets of water, but the dear Lord has His bottle of oil. It's the Holy Spirit, granny, who alone can make us good, or keep us good. And if the Lord puts His Holy Spirit in our hearts, it's of no use Satan trying to put the fire out; he'll have to give it up for a bad job. Reach me the Testament, granny, there's a verse I'll read to you.'

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She turned over the leaves for some time, and at last she found the words she wanted, and she put a mark against them, that granny might find them for herself when she had gone away.

The words were these, 'He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.'

'Polly, my dear,' said granny, after a pause, 'do you think He'll do that for me?'

'Do what, granny?'

'Do you think He will give me His Holy Spirit?'

And then Polly's mother gave grandmother another text; but this time she did not find it, for she knew it by heart, 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, *how much more* shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?'

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Grandmother sat by the side of the bed long after Enoch and Elijah had fallen asleep. She seemed to have no heart to bustle about that morning. She wanted to feel sure that her soul was safe.

And when she thought that Poppy's mother was fast asleep, with her babies lying beside her, granny knelt down and said aloud, 'O Lord, I'm a poor sinful old woman, but I want Thee to save me. O Lord Jesus, Thou hast died for me. I trust my soul to Thee. Here it is, I put it into Thy hands. Oh give me Thy Holy Spirit; keep the fire bright in my soul, please, Lord Jesus, do. Amen.'

But Poppy's mother was not asleep, she was only lying with her eyes closed. And as the old woman got up from her knees she smiled, and said softly,

'The soul that to Jesus has fled for repose,
He *will* not, He *will* not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
He'll never, no never, no never forsake.'

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'Amen,' said granny, 'Amen.'

CHAPTER XIII.

[Pg 119]

POPPY'S FATHER COMES HOME.

Ihe doctor was not wrong. In less than a week the Lord took Poppy's mother to His beautiful home, where there is no more sickness nor pain. And grandmother, and Poppy, and little Enoch and Elijah were left behind. But, as the grandmother and the child stood beside the grave where her body was laid to rest, they knew that she was far away, safe in His keeping to whom she had trusted her soul. They knew that she was well, and happy, and full of joy, and they tried to be glad for her sake.

Grandmother was anxious to get home, and, as soon as all could be arranged, she set off with Poppy and the twins. The neighbours were very kind, and did all they could to help them, and Jack rubbed away something with his sleeve, which was very like a tear, as he saw their train steam out of the station.

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It was a new life for Poppy. Grandmother lived in a lovely valley, full of beautiful trees and running brooks, and quiet, peaceful glades, where in the daytime the squirrels played and the birds sang, where in the dim evening hours the rabbits came to nibble the grass, and where, at night, when Poppy and her little brothers were asleep, the solemn old owls sat in the trees, and called to each other in harsh and ugly voices.

Through the middle of the valley ran a white smooth road, winding in and out amongst the trees, and on this road came the carriages, driving quickly along, with the postillions in scarlet coats riding on the horses in front, and the ladies and gentlemen, who had come to see the beautiful valley, leaning back in the carriages behind.

It was Poppy's delight to open the gate for these carriages, and in this way she was able to save her grandmother a good deal of running about. She used to climb up the hillside, and watch until they were in sight, and then run down as fast as she could, that she might have the gate open in time for them to pass through. That was Poppy's work out of school hours, for grandmother sent her regularly to the pretty little country school, and would let nothing keep her away from it.

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Dear old grandmother! how hard she worked for Poppy and for the babies! she thought nothing a trouble that she could do for them, and Poppy loved her more and more every day.

As the months went by, little Enoch and Elijah grew fat and strong; the fresh country air and the new milk made a wonderful change in them, and, when the next summer came, they were able to run about, and could climb on the hillside with Poppy, and gather the wild roses, and the harebells, and the honeysuckle, and would sit on the bank, near the cottage, watching the carriages, and trying to catch the pence which the people threw them as they drove by.

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One Saturday afternoon, at the end of the summer, as Poppy was playing with them outside the lodge, she caught sight of a man coming quickly down the road. She ran to open the gate for him, but as she did so she gave a sudden cry of joy. It was her father, her long-lost father, come home again!

'Why, Poppy,' he said, 'my own dear little woman, what are *you* doing here? Come and kiss your poor father, Poppy. And who are these two bonny little lads?' he asked, as Enoch and Elijah came running up to him.

'They're our babies,' said Poppy. 'God sent them after you went away, father; they both came on one day.'

'Dear me, dear me; and to think I never knew,' said her father. 'Poor Polly! And so you've all come to see grandmother. I never thought I should find you here; I was going home to-morrow. I must run in and see mother. Is she with grandmother, Poppy?'

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See mother! Then he did not know. And Poppy could not tell him. She followed him with a very grave and sorrowful face, holding little Enoch and Elijah by the hand.

Grandmother came to the door at the sound of his voice.

'Why, if it isn't my John Henry!' she cried.

'Yes, mother, it's your John Henry, ashamed of himself at last. And so you've got poor Polly and the bairns here. Where is Polly? I wonder if she'll ever forgive me?'

'Then you haven't been home yet, John Henry!' was all grandmother could say.

'No, mother; I only got to Liverpool this morning, and I took you on my way; I was going home to-morrow.'

'Where's Polly?' he said, pushing past her, and looking first into the parlour and then into the kitchen. 'Is she upstairs, mother? Polly! Polly! Polly!'

'John Henry,' said grandmother in a trembling voice, 'Polly has gone home.'

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'Gone home, and left the children behind her!' he exclaimed.

'Ay, my dear,' said his mother, bursting into tears; 'the Lord sent for her.'

'You don't mean to say she's *dead*, mother!' he moaned.

'Nay, my dear, she is living with the Lord,' said the old woman.

'Oh, mother, mother,' he sobbed, 'to think I left her like that, and she never knew how sorry I was!'

It was a long, long time before he could speak, or could tell them his story. He had been in America in dreadful straits and in many dangers. At length he fell ill with fever, and lay for many weeks at the point of death, in a log cabin, with only a boy of ten, the son of a poor emigrant, to do anything for him. But this trouble had shown him his sin, and he had come to the Lord Jesus for forgiveness, and ever since then God had blessed him. He had not become a rich man, but he had earned enough to bring him home, and he had saved a little besides, and with this he hoped to start life afresh.

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'But you'll never rob me of my bairns, John Henry,' said the old woman, in alarm; 'you'll never take them away, when we've all been so happy together!'

And the bare possibility of losing the children seemed quite to damp poor old grandmother's joy in getting her beloved John Henry home again.

'Well, mother, we must see,' he said; 'we must ask God to order for us.'

And God did order most graciously, both for mother and son.

The old woman told her trouble to 'my lady,' the next time that she drove through the lodge-gates in her pony-carriage, and she was very sympathising, and most anxious that the children should not have to leave their happy country home. She mentioned it to the squire, and he very kindly offered Poppy's father a situation on his estate as gamekeeper. His life in America had made him far more fit for that kind of work than for carrying on his old trade, and he was most thankful not to have to take his children back to the city. So they all lived on together in the pretty lodge in the lovely valley, a happy little family, all loving the same Lord, and walking on the road to the same Home.

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But Poppy never forgot her mother. And as Enoch and Elijah grew older, she would sit with them on the hillside and talk to them about her, and pointing to the blue sky she would tell them that their mother was waiting for them there, and would be very much disappointed if they did not come.

And often, as they sat outside the lodge in the quiet summer evenings, they and their father would sing together, 'Mother's favourite hymn,' and dear old grandmother would come to the door, and join in a quavering voice in the beautiful words:

'Jesus, I will trust Thee, trust Thee with my soul!
Guilty, lost, and helpless, Thou canst make me whole.
There is none in heaven or on earth like Thee;
Thou hast died for sinners—therefore, Lord, for me.'

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THE END.

Butler & Tanner, The Selwood Printing Works, Frome, and London.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK POPPY'S PRESENTS ***

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