

**The Project Gutenberg eBook of Left to Ourselves; or, John Headley's Promise,
by Catharine Shaw**

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Left to Ourselves; or, John Headley's Promise

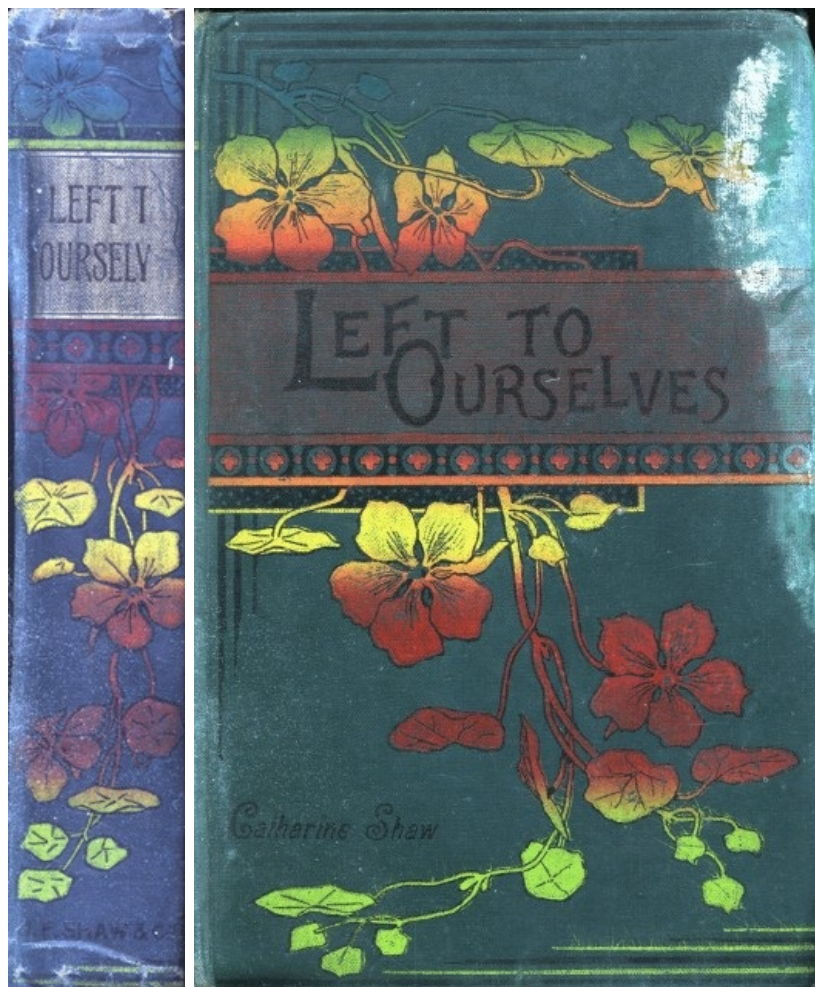
Author: Catharine Shaw

Release date: October 3, 2011 [EBook #37606]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Chris Curnow, Mark Young, Lindy Walsh and the
Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LEFT TO OURSELVES; OR, JOHN
HEADLEY'S PROMISE ***



LEFT TO OURSELVES;

OR

JOHN HEADLEY'S PROMISE.

Left to Ourselves;

OR,

John Headley's Promise.

BY

CATHARINE SHAW,

AUTHOR OF "AT LAST;" "ALICK'S HERO;" "THE GABLED FARM;"
"ONLY A COUSIN;" ETC.

NEW EDITION.

LONDON:
JOHN F. SHAW AND CO.,
48, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE FIVE	9
II. A PACKET	14
III. THE DARK CAVERN: AN ALLEGORY	19
IV. RESCUED	27
V. NEW ROBES	33
VI. AT LAST	37
VII. LAST DAYS	43
VIII. ONE INJUNCTION	52
IX. THE FIRST SUNDAY ALONE	65
X. THE GOLDEN OIL: AN ALLEGORY	74
XI. A CUPBOARD OF RUBBISH	85
XII. JOHN'S PROMISE	92
XIII. HUGH'S PROMISE	101
XIV. CHRISTMAS-DAY	109
XV. WHERE ONE PUDDING WENT	118
XVI. THE RAG CUSHION	128
XVII. THE LAST PUDDING	136
XVIII. NEW YEAR'S EVE	142
XIX. WORRIED	151
XX. A SURPRISE	158
XXI. THE MAGIC OF LOVE	169
XXII. MINNIE'S SECRET	177
XXIII. THE END OF THE JOURNEY	185



LEFT TO OURSELVES.



CHAPTER I.

THE FIVE.

Mother, I'm sure you may trust me!"

"My child, I trust you for all that you know; but there are things which no one but a mother can know."

"Of course there are. Oh, I don't for a moment mean that I shall do as well as *you*, mother, only ___"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Headley, thoughtfully, "you see, Agnes, your dear grandmother in America is pronounced to be failing very fast. I have not seen her for twenty years, and if I do not go now I may never see her again in this world."

[10]

"And father's having to go there on business now makes it so easy."

"Easy all but leaving you children."

"But I am nineteen now, mother—quite old enough to be trusted; besides, grandmama and aunt Phyllis live next door, and if anything happened I could run in to them."

Mrs. Headley smiled, looking half convinced.

"Who is it you are afraid to leave?" asked Agnes coaxingly. "Is it *me*, mother?"

"*You?*" echoed Mrs. Headley, stroking her face tenderly. "No, not you, dear."

"Then it is John."

"No, no; John is a good boy, he will help you I am sure."

"Then is it Hugh?"

"No; Hugh is steady, and very fond of his lessons; and he will be sure to do as you wish him, if he promises beforehand."

"Then is it Alice?"

Mrs. Headley shook her head.

"Then it must be Minnie, for there's no one else. And as to Minnie, you know I love her exactly as if she were my own child."

Mrs. Headley laughed a little, though bright tears filled her eyes and fell down into her lap.

"Don't you think I *do*?" asked Agnes soberly—not half liking the little laugh, or the tears either for that matter.

[11]

"You love her as much as you possibly can, dearest, but that does not give you my experience. No, Agnes, it is not Minnie or any one in particular, but it is the five of you all together that I'm afraid to leave. I am so afraid they might get tired of doing as you said."

"They never have yet, mother. You ask them, and see."

Mrs. Headley looked thoughtfully into the fire, and was silent for a long time. So was Agnes, till at last she roused up suddenly and put her hand into her mother's.

"There's one Friend I shall always have near, nearer than next door; always at hand to help and counsel—eh, mother dear? We had not forgotten Him, only we did not say anything actually about Him."

"Yes, my child, I do not forget; and if I were more trustful I should not be so afraid."

Mrs. Headley rose and left the room just as the door opened, and John came in.

"Holloa, Agnes, all alone in the dark," he exclaimed, stumbling over the stools and chairs. "Why don't you have a light?"

"Mother and I were talking, and we did not want any."

"About America? Don't I wish it was me instead of her, that's all!"

"But, you see, that is not the question," said Agnes, watching her brother lean back against the mantelpiece with nervous eyes. "John, you'll knock something down." [12]

"Not I. Of course it isn't the question; but why doesn't mother want to go?"

"She does want to go; only, you see, John, she's afraid we shall not all get on together."

"Is she afraid we shall quarrel?"

Agnes nodded.

"I shan't."

"Perhaps not."

"But Hugh will?" he asked, smiling.

"Hugh and John together," answered Agnes, smiling too.

"Very likely."

"Do you think you *will*?" asked his sister, drawing back.

"What a frightened question! Agnes, look here; I'll promise you——"

"What?"

"It takes two to make a quarrel, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll promise you to walk out of the room at the first indication of a squabble. Will that make things straight?"

"If you will not forget."

"If I do, you look at me, and I'll fly, or be 'mum'!"

"All right, I will," answered Agnes soberly. "John, I believe mother thinks she ought to go, and so I am sure we ought to make it easy." [13]

"I mean to."

Agnes kissed him gratefully, but did not speak, yet John understood, and when she had gone out of the room he fancied he felt a tear left on his coat.

He roused himself up, and turned round to poke the fire into a blaze.

"My eye!" he ejaculated, half audibly, "it will be a go to do without mother for three months."



[14]

CHAPTER II.

A PACKET.

Pother, here is a nice little square packet come for you by post!" said Minnie as Mrs. Headley entered the dining-room the next morning.

"Yes; Minnie has been turning it, and twisting it, and weighing it, and smelling it—doing everything except open it," said John, laughing.

"I do wish to know what it is though!" said Minnie shyly, "and I believe John wants to see just as much as I do."

"I will open it presently," answered their mother, smiling, while she seated herself at the head of the table.

"Minnie is always rather curious," observed Hugh, looking up from a lesson he had been conning over.

"This is something which will rouse your curiosity, and I will see who can tell me the meaning of it," answered Mrs. Headley.

[15]

"Then you know what it is, mother?" asked Minnie.

Her mother assented; and when they had finished breakfast, and their father had gone off to his business, Mrs. Headley took up the little package and began untying the knots.

"Cut it," said Alice.

"Catch mother cutting a knot if she can undo it," laughed Hugh, gathering his books together.

"It's a good thing it is Saturday," said John, "or we couldn't wait, however curious we might be."

"There, it is undone!" said Minnie, pressing nearer. As she spoke the paper fell open, and two dozen little square books came tumbling out.

The children were going to seize upon them, when Mrs. Headley placed her hand over them, taking up one at the same moment, saying. "What is this, now?"

"A little book," said John.

"Has it reading in it?"

She opened the first page, and to their astonishment there was nothing but a page of black to be seen.

"What a strange book!" said Hugh. "It would not be much trouble to learn a page of *that!*"

"It is a great trouble to learn that black page, though," said his mother.

Hugh peeped closer. "Let me read the outside, mother; perhaps it explains."

[16]

"Perhaps it does," said his mother, still showing only the black page.

"Well, what next? as we can't make that out," said Alice, who was looking on with her arms twined round her sister Agnes.

Mrs. Headley opened the next leaf, and they found it deep red.

"How strange," said Hugh; "is this difficult to learn, mother?"

Mrs. Headley smiled thoughtfully, and answered. "Not so hard as the other; oh, not half so hard—for us!"

"And the next?" said Agnes, with a tender light in her gentle eyes.

"Pure white!" exclaimed Alice; "and I believe Agnes guesses."

"What next, mother?" asked Hugh; "for I suppose you do not mean to tell us the meaning yet?"

"Gold!" exclaimed Minnie. "How lovely it looks! Is *this* difficult to learn, mother?"

"Ah no!" said Mrs. Headley, "that is the easiest page of all—nothing but glory."

"*Glory?*" asked Hugh, "you have told us the meaning of the last first. Now, what is it, mother?"

"What does the black remind you of, dears?" she asked, in answer to their eager look.

"Night," "discomfort," "blindness," "being lost," suggested several of them.

"Yes," said Mrs. Headley; "but anything else?"

[17]

"Is it sin, mother?" asked Agnes, in a low tone.

"Yes, my dear children, it is sin. The black is sin; 'hopeless night,' 'discomfort,' 'blindness,' 'being lost'—all you have said summed up in that one dark page—sin."

"Now I guess," exclaimed John hastily, "the red is Blood. Oh, I guess now!"

"The Blood of Jesus, the Son of God. Nothing else can take the black sin away. But that *can*; yes, the blood is easier to read than the sin, isn't it, dears?"

"I don't see why," said Hugh, looking puzzled.

"Do you not think it is hard to feel that we are utterly black and sinful, no good in us at all?"

"Oh, mother!"

"But turn over the page, and the Blood shuts out all remembrance of the sin. The Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world."

"How beautiful!" said Agnes.

Their mother turned to the next page, and went on.

"Then, when the Blood has cleansed us, what are we?"

"Whiter than snow," said Minnie reverently.

"That is right, little Minnie; and I think the white reminds us of two or three things. Can you suggest them, children?"

"How pure we ought to be?" asked Agnes.

"Yes, and how pure He is," answered her mother.

"These are they that have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," said Alice. "That was our text last Sunday." [18]

"So it was, and the end of it introduces us to our final page, and that lasts for ever."

"Gold," said Minnie.

"Glory," said Hugh.

"Everlasting glory, all joy and light for evermore. All purchased for us by that one page which cost Him His life's blood. Now, dear children, repeat over to me the lessons of this little book, that we may all remember them together—

Black—Red—White—Gold.

The children repeated the words as their mother turned the pages, and then she added:

Sin—Blood—Righteousness—Glory.

Mrs. Headley then passed a book to each of them, saying in a low tone, with an earnestness which impressed her young hearers, "May all of you fly from the first, take refuge in the second, be covered by the third, and share the last."

When their mother had left them Minnie stood looking long and lovingly at her little treasure, as if she would read its wordless leaves if she could.

"I think this book has a whole story on each page," said Agnes thoughtfully.

"I wish you could tell us one," answered Minnie, looking up wistfully.

"Perhaps I will next Sunday," replied Agnes.



[19]

CHAPTER III.

THE DARK CAVERN: AN ALLEGORY.



ou promised to tell us a story of the 'Wordless pages,' Agnes," said Minnie on Sunday afternoon, when the children had left their parents to a few moments' quiet, and were gathered in the drawing-room to spend the hour in which Agnes generally read to them.

"I have not forgotten," answered Agnes, "but, as mother said, the first page is very hard to read, and the second page—"

"Well?" said John.

"You will see," answered Agnes. "Come on my lap, Minnie; you will not be afraid if I describe something very dreadful?"

"I don't *think* so," said Minnie wondering; "but is it dreadful, Agnes?"

"Don't you think that first page looks dreadful? So black and hopeless!"

"Oh, yes, so it does."

"Then listen:

Black—Sin.

I seemed to be dreaming, and in my dream I beheld a rocky country stretched out before me.

On all sides were rugged stones, underneath which grew ferns and mosses, while short

[20]

brushwood, growing luxuriantly, gave the place a wild, unfrequented appearance.

By-and-by I heard the sound of voices approaching, and two boys came in view, who seemed to be travelling through this mountainous country.

They were jumping lightly from stone to stone, or pushing their way through the bushes in the more open parts, talking gaily as they came towards me."

"I have heard that there are some wonderful caverns somewhere about here, and I have determined to try and find them out," said one.

"The Guide-book says they are most perilous," answered the other, opening his knapsack and looking in a book he carried there.

"Oh, those old Guide-books always call everything dangerous," answered the other contemptuously, "and I am not going to be turned from my purpose by any such nonsense. Look here!"

As he spoke he too opened his knapsack, and proceeded to pull out two candles triumphantly.

"With these we shall do perfectly well," he added, laughing, "and shall prove the Guide-book to have been written for people with less sense."

[21]

"I should like to see the caverns," said the younger boy hesitatingly, "but——"

"No 'buts' for me," sneered the other, jumping up; "I am off to explore the mysteries. It is because you are afraid, I believe."

I thought that the younger boy seemed not to like being called afraid, for he got up reluctantly and followed his companion somewhat slowly; not at all as he had bounded over the rocks a few minutes before.

A call from the other announced that he had discovered the opening, and the colour flushed into the younger boy's face as he hastened on.

In my dream I seemed permitted to follow them unseen, and saw before me the mouth of the caverns, large and wide.

The boys laughed gaily, but I was not sure if I were right in imagining an uneasiness in their merriment.

They eagerly traversed the outer caves, which were quite light, and chose one of the many winding turnings.

"You will want your candle soon, Edred," said the younger.

"So I shall, and I mean to have it too, and see all the beauties of which I have heard."

They stopped to light the tapers, and I could not help wondering whether they would last long enough to guide them safely out again; but as I knew nothing of these dangerous caves, I could only follow silently, with an anxiety which increased as I perceived how headstrong Edred appeared to be.

[22]

They wandered on and on, the light from their tapers illuminating the wonderful caverns, and the boys were full of interest and enjoyment, while my eyes watched the quickly-lessening candles.

"You told me the Guide-book spoke of evil beasts," said Edred mockingly, "but I don't see a sign of them, and this place is like a fairy palace."

"I wish we were going out towards the light," said Alwin; "we have been going inwards so long, and I am sure we shall lose our way, there are such numbers of turnings."

"No fear," answered the other, "I can tell which way we are going; you have not a grain of sense. Alwin!"

Alwin sighed, "I'm afraid I am stupid, but I did hear a noise just now, and I have seen several shadows that I can't account for."

Did Edred look round nervously, or was it my fancy? The lights burned lower still, but the boys were too intent to notice.

"I am tired," said Alwin, "let us rest."

Edred glanced at him, and seemed to consider. "Well," he said, "I dare say we shall reach the end the sooner for a little rest; and I want to look right down the abyss which they say is to be found there; so let us sit down here."

Alwin willingly consented, but he suddenly started from his seat again. "They say," he exclaimed, "that there is a mysterious drowsiness which creeps over people in this cavern. Can we be falling into that, think you?"

[23]

"Nonsense," answered Edred, "this is only ordinary fatigue, five minutes' sleep will revive us, and we shall be as fresh as ever."

Already they had set down their candles near them; and as they leaned back against the rocky sides of the cavern a strain of music, soft and dreamy, filled the air, and they slept.

Long I watched, and would willingly have waked them, but that I found myself spell-bound. I was unable to speak or move. I could only look; and as I looked, the weird, dreamy music continued to lull them into deeper slumber, while their little lights burned lower and lower, and then slowly flickered out, and they were left in dense darkness.

Then the music seemed to change into a new key, and my fancy made me think it sounded like the distant cries of some in dire distress. The miserable moan seemed to disturb the sleepers, for I heard an exclamation of dismay, and Alwin's voice said, in a tone of horror, "Edred! Edred! where are we? our lights are gone out!" Edred seemed to be only half awake, and he grumbled an impatient answer; but Alwin shook him with a despairing cry.

[24]

"What is it?" said Edred, now thoroughly roused.

"We are in darkness; we shall never find our way out. Oh, what shall we do, Edred?"

"I do not know, I am sure," said Edred; "but we had better turn the way we came."

"But which way?" said the other.

"This, to be sure," said Edred, beginning to grope his way along.

"But there were numbers of turnings, Edred," said Alwin reproachfully; "and the Guide-book —"

"Stop that!" called Edred, with fierce anger, "we shall come all right; but let's have a truce to your whining."

Alwin was silent after this rebuke; but the caverns were by no means silent, for now the unearthly sounds seemed to increase, and the boys clung to each other in terror. Louder and louder grew the roar, and I heard one of them exclaim. "There is something coming towards us. Oh, see! what is it? what can it be?"

The anguish of those words I shall never forget.

Before them along one of the many passages, a faint light seemed to shine; it came apparently from the eyes of a fierce beast who was approaching. The light was not sufficient to discern his shape, but from the lurid glare cast upwards from his eyes I could see three letters traced on his brow—S-I-N. They were incomprehensible to me, but I think the boys understood them; for, as they confronted those mysterious letters, they fell back appalled. Well indeed they might, for such a dreadful creature as bore them I never before beheld. He approached nearer and nearer, while the boys shrank back against the rocks. The fiend looked as if he would devour them; but yet, as he came near, I perceived his intention was to torture them for a while first. He came close up to them, and seemed almost to enfold them in his embrace. He whispered to them, and as his eyes cast a light on their faces, I could see the misery and despair depicted there. The fiend then gave a growl of awful meaning, and set himself down at a little distance from them, as if to take some sleep.

[25]

"What did he say?" whispered Alwin mournfully.

"That he would *never* let us go," answered Edred in a despairing tone.

"Let us try to get away," again whispered Alwin; "will no one save us?"

"No one is so strong as he," said Edred hoarsely. "What fools we were, Alwin!"

"What shall we do? Do let us try to escape."

They crept forward a few steps, but the ground was noisome mire after the passage of this creature, and the boys were covered with filth at every step they took.

It was all in vain, however, for they knew not which way to go; and once, when a slight sound roused the attention of the fierce fiend, he turned as if to spring on them, uttering a deep growl.

[26]

"What did he say?" again whispered Alwin.

"That it is of no use our trying to escape," groaned Edred. "He says there is no return from this pit of darkness."

Then I awoke from my dream.

Agnes paused, and the children remained silent, till Minnie broke forth with passionate earnestness—

"But oh, Agnes, there *is* a way out! Oh, why were they left there to perish?"

"That was all I saw in that dream," said Agnes; "and when I woke these words were ringing in my ears, 'The wages of sin is death.'"

"But," said John, with kindling eyes, "there is a bit more to the end of that verse, Agnes."

"Not if we keep only to the first page of the 'Wordless Book,'" answered Agnes.

"But we need not keep to the first page, need we?" said Minnie, looking rather sorrowful.

"Oh, no, thank God! For Hugh shall finish that twenty-third verse of the sixth of Romans which begins so sadly."

So Hugh repeated: "'The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.'"

[27]



CHAPTER IV.

RESCUED: AN ALLEGORY.



Another Sunday came round, and the brothers and sisters again claimed Agnes's promise to continue the story of the "Wordless" pages. They had several times in the week asked if she could do so then; but she had always answered. "Wait till Sunday."

"Now Agnes," said John, "let us have the rest of that dream."

"I did describe to you all that dream," answered Agnes. "What I have to tell you to-day is another dream—a new page as it were; not black, but red."

"I thought it was to be a continuation," said Alice.

"Yes, it is; but you will not let me begin."

"Oh! yes we will," said Minnie. "Now then. Agnes."

[28]

Red—Blood.

Again I dreamed, and found myself in the same cavern where I had before been such a terrified spectator. Should I be able to see the dismal end of those miserable boys? I asked myself. At first the darkness seemed impenetrable, and as there was no sound to break the stillness, I feared that already the fierce beast had devoured those whom he had captured.

But hark! was not that a sobbing sigh from some one?

Again it met my ear, and I thought I could distinguish Alwin's voice, saying in a low, pleading tone:

"Edred, I am sure I read something in the Guide-book about the King's Son, who lives in that Palace we saw over the Hills there, being willing to rescue travellers, if they were in distress."

"Hush!" said Edred, in a frightened voice, "the fiend will hear you, and will spring upon us if he thinks we are meditating escape—however futile it may be," he added bitterly.

"He is half asleep over there," answered Alwin in a low tone; "see how he rests, and his eyes are shut. Oh, Edred, our position is so dreadful that it is worth a desperate effort to get free."

"No effort is of any avail," said Edred hopelessly. "If you only look at yonder monster, with his awful name shining on his forehead, you will know that he will never let us enter the King's Palace; he told us just now that his wages are death, and that we shall *not* escape."

[29]

"I know," said Alwin, "but all the same I have read enough of the Guide-book to believe there is some way of deliverance; do, Edred, try to recall what it was."

"I never read it," said Edred, "and to consult it now, when we are in this dire distress, seems like mocking the King who ordered it to be written."

He sighed heavily, and as I grew accustomed to the darkness, I could faintly perceive the two boys crouching down in a corner, watching the evil beast, never taking their wearied eyes from him for a moment.

Alwin seemed unable to let go his last hope, and began again imploringly, "Edred, I *know* it said

if people got into these caverns they were to call to the King; do let us try."

"Call and wake the monster?" asked Edred, mockingly. "Besides, who could hear?"

"I shall try," whispered Alwin, "for I feel I shall soon have no strength left."

Edred made a gesture as if to reply, when the enemy roused himself suddenly, and before either of them had time to speak or move, he had sprung across the cavern. I saw the two boys disappear beneath his awful form.

A fearful cry rent the air, a cry of agony, but a cry too which seemed to expect an answer.

The fiend grappled with them both, and gave them blow after blow. Still spell-bound I watched, feeling myself turned to stone with horror. [30]

But what did I hear? Surely above the cruel strokes which resounded on the bodies of these captive boys, surely above their cries for help, and moans of anguish, I heard another sound—a sound of rescue, coming nearer and nearer?

Did the evil creature hear it too? Did he not strike the faster, that there might be no deliverance; that the deliverance might be too late?

A strange light approached along one of the passages, and all at once One entered the cavern, and dealt a swift blow at the fiend, which made him relax his hold, only to tighten it more painfully. "I have come to deliver those that are appointed to die," said a voice of heavenly sweetness; but the fiend turned on Him with blows, fiercer and deadlier than those he had given the boys, and there ensued such a terrible combat that my very heart failed me.

By-and-by I found that the fiend seemed to grow weaker and weaker, and the Deliverer, though wounded and bleeding, was a Conqueror. The evil creature at last sank down in the mire, motionless, his grasp loosened from the poor boys, and the Conqueror came up to them and raised them from the ground.

Alwin had just sufficient strength left to clasp the feet of his Deliverer with a cry of love, but Edred neither spoke nor moved. [31]

"Edred," said the tender voice, "I have fought, and he who held thee is conquered; wilt thou come with Me?"

Edred groaned.

"Thou wilt not stay here, Edred?" again said the loving tone reproachfully.

"I am not worthy," moaned Edred, "I disobeyed——"

"Nay, nay, thou art not worthy; but I have loved thee, and have done it all for thee. Edred, wilt thou refuse?"

Then I heard a broken cry of grateful acquiescence, and the two lost, hopeless boys were clasped to that bosom of love.

And Alwin whispered, "Thou hast been wounded in the sore fight, for I can feel Thy blood flowing upon me!"

"That was the price at which I rescued thee," answered the Deliverer, "and thou shalt find when we come into the Light that the Blood of the King's Son worketh marvels for thee."

"Art Thou the King's Son?" asked Edred as they moved forward from this cavern of Death.

"Didst thou not know?" answered his Deliverer with a radiant smile, "no one else is 'Mighty to save.'"

When Agnes ceased the relation of her dream, she turned over the leaves of her Bible which lay on her knee, her brothers and sisters waiting to see if there were any more of the story. [32]

At last she looked up, and said earnestly, "You all like allegories, but they can only teach one side of a truth at once, and the Lord Jesus has done so much more than anything I can say for us. I have not told you half that Red page means, but you can seek it out for yourselves, dears. Think of all the love which brought Him down to redeem us, and what it cost Him, and let the Red page of the 'Wordless Book' impress this upon your hearts, never to be forgotten, 'Without shedding of blood is no remission;' 'God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet *sinner*s. Christ died for us.'"



CHAPTER V.

NEW ROBES: AN ALLEGORY.

"Have you another dream to tell us?" asked Minnie on the following Sunday.



"It is the end of the same dream, but it has a different page in the 'Wordless Book' as its suggestion," answered Agnes.

"Yes, the White page," said John.

White—Righteousness.

Then the boys passed out towards the Light, leaning on Him who had delivered them. I followed silently, still allowed to watch and listen.

"Dost Thou say that Thou wilt present us to the King?" asked Alwin hesitatingly.

Their Deliverer assented; for Edred immediately answered, "We are not fit to appear before Him! Thy power has indeed saved us from the destruction we merited; but we are so soiled and filthy from contact with the mire in this awful Cavern, that we could not appear before any one, least of all before the Great King." He spoke eagerly and half proudly.

[34]

"Dost thou not remember what I told thee? That My Blood, which has been shed for thee, with which thou hast been covered, will work—nay, has already worked, marvels; and when the Light shines upon thee, thou wilt see. Fear nothing, only believe what I tell thee."

They were silent after this, and were quickly approaching the end of the darkness. Then the boys could look upon their Deliverer, and could see the terrible wounds that He had sustained in His conflict with the foul fiend. And when they looked they wept—wept for sorrow that He should so have suffered for them—wept for joy that they were safe from the dreadful destruction.

They thought not of themselves; but when I could unfasten my eyes from the lovely face of the Deliverer, I was amazed to find that the boys were no longer arrayed in their former clothes, for in that mysterious passage from Darkness to Light all these had been changed, and they were now clad in a spotless robe of pure white.

By-and-by they perceived it themselves, or rather their Guide pointed it out to them.

"See," He said tenderly, "what My deliverance has done for you; now you can meet the King without fear. Covered by this robe, you will be accepted even in His eyes, because when He sees it He will remember that I have fought for you and prevailed; and He will count My merits yours."

[35]

He led them now swiftly, it seemed to me, towards a spot which He told them would be the Meeting-place, but for the first time I was unable to follow them. A thin cloud seemed to obscure my vision for a while.

When I saw the boys again their Guide had left them, and they were walking along the road towards the Palace of the King, which lay at the end of the journey.

They were busily engaged in perusing the Guide-book, which Edred had before so despised; but now his face bent over it with a look which was both inquiring and trustful.

"What does it mean, Alwin, when it says, 'Needeth not save to wash his feet?'"

"Does it not mean that we, who have been cleansed from all that filth by the wonderful efficacy of our Deliverer's Blood, still may get defilements in our path, and that these will need constant washing away?"

"I suppose it does," said Edred hesitatingly and looking round; "but where—?"

"Our Deliverer told us—do you not remember it?—that by our road we should find a cleansing stream, dyed by His Blood, to which we must needs constantly repair."

"He did, but I had well-nigh forgotten it; but see, Alwin, the end of the journey is not so very far off; just beyond those Hills, where the radiance is; there will be nothing to defile us *there*." [36]

Alwin looked towards the Hills in silence, with a rapt face, on which the glory seemed reflected. Then he added suddenly, "Our Deliverer said that He might fetch us Himself, instead of our travelling so far; that would be better still, Edred."

"Indeed it would," answered Edred earnestly. "I hope He will."

Then I awoke from my dream.

"And this text has been running in my head while I have been pondering over my dream," added Agnes, "'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin'—and—'He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.'"



[37]

CHAPTER VI.

AT LAST: AN ALLEGORY.

I am sorry we have come to the Gold page," said Alice, with a sigh, folding her hands together as she seated herself in the bow-window seat on the Sunday before their parents were to sail for America.

"*Sorry!*" echoed Minnie, "why, I am very glad indeed!"

"Because it is the last, I mean," answered Alice; "we shall miss our Sunday afternoon story dreadfully."

"I propose that Agnes tells us one every Sunday," said John.

Agnes shook her head, but answered, half-smiling. "Sometimes, perhaps, I may, but you know they cannot be all allegories."

"Oh, no!" said Hugh; "but let us begin our last page now."

[38]

Gold—Glory.

Once again I dreamed, and once again I saw the boys in whom I took so much interest.

This time they were nearing the Hills, above which the radiance shone.

The country was still of the same mountainous description, and I thought I could see beneath the steep ascent before me a River winding in and out.

The golden light seemed to shine down on some parts of the River, but generally it was dark and sombre.

Just now the boys were standing near it, and Edred was gazing down into its depths.

"It is rather dreadful, Alwin," he exclaimed, turning round and glancing in his companion's face, "to think of having to cross this before we reach the Palace of the King."

"Yes," answered Alwin, "and when we look down into it, instead of looking up at the Glory, we do get depressed. But, you know, Edred, our Deliverer has promised to bear us safely through."

"Of course He has. He would not leave those whom He has delivered at such a price to perish in the final water, Alwin. No; I will not look down into the River any longer, but rather, as you say, to the Glory beyond. But I wish I knew more of its delights."

"The Guide-book tells us a great deal about it; and often since we have neared this River, I have had to turn to the description of it to cheer my fainting courage." [39]

"I wish I were acquainted with the Guide-book as you are, Alwin; but I do love it much more than I used—I love it dearly! What does it say?"

"Shall I read it to you?"

"Yes, do," answered Edred, throwing himself down on the grass by the side of the water, and settling himself into an attitude of expectancy.

Alwin once more drew from his knapsack the Guide-book, which had seen much service since my eyes had first fallen upon it, and with one glance upwards at the radiance over the Hills, he turned towards his companion and read in a thrilling tone from the book in his hand, words which seemed familiar to me, though I could not tell in my dream where I heard them:

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. Then came unto me one of the seven angels..., and he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever." [40]

Alwin ceased reading, and Edred, whose eyes, from being turned on his friend's face at first, had been latterly directed upwards, now rose from the ground with a new light shining in them.

"Alwin," he said solemnly, "I always have dreaded this River, but I do not any longer. I have long known that I should soon have to pass through it. Ever since we were in that Cavern of Death I have known it, but now I fear it no longer. The words of the Guide-book have taken away my terror. See, I shall soon be where the light will never fade away." [41]

As he spoke a touch of golden light which had for a moment illumined the dark river passed away from it, and the gloom grew deeper.

But Edred thought not of it, his eyes were fixed on the Light beyond.

"You are not going to leave me alone?" said the younger boy yearningly.

"I must; I have been sent for by the King. He told me some little time ago that it would be soon."

"Oh, Edred!" murmured Alwin.

"He will bear you through too," answered Edred kindly. "I could not have believed that His words would have cheered me so. I am quite joyful in going now. I only long to cross."

As he spoke he stepped into the River, which looked to me so dark and drear.

Now a mist brooded over the River, between those standing on the bank and the Shore beyond, and so Edred was lost to my sight.

Alwin stood long looking after him, with tear-dimmed eyes; but by-and-by he turned once more to the Book in his hand, and as he read it I noticed that the sorrow passed away from his face. [42]

"A little while," he murmured to himself, and turned to go on his journey.

But I saw that his road lay close to the River; and, or ever I was aware, I found he too had entered the water, and was actually crossing over to the bright Land.

As the waters got deeper and deeper, his face only grew the more radiant, and when the mist almost hid him from my view, I heard a triumphant voice exclaiming, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift."

Minnie's little head was laid on Agnes's lap during the narration of this dream, and she now

raised it with an earnest look.

"And that is *all*?" she said, sighing.

"All, except that there is no *end* to the Glory," replied Agnes.

"No," said John, "I often think that is the best of Heaven—there will be no 'leaving-off' there."

"That is just it," answered Agnes, "and the summing-up of all these Wordless pages—of Sin—Blood—Righteousness—Glory—seems to me to be expressed in these words, 'That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.... Who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.'"



[43]

CHAPTER VII.

LAST DAYS.

"Isn't it awfully cold for you and mother to travel at this time of year, father?" asked Hugh as he buttoned up his warm great coat to set out for school for the last time before the Christmas holidays.

"Very; but you see, my boy, urgent business calls me; and urgent necessity calls your mother."

"Oh, yes! but I wish it were summer. Are you really going on Saturday?"

"Yes, God willing."

Hugh went into the hall, where he found his brother brushing his hat.

"I wonder why father always adds 'God willing,'" he said in an undertone, "so few people do. Do you care about it, John?"

"Well, I can't say that I've come to doing it myself," answered John candidly; "but I do feel this, Hugh, that when they're out on the Atlantic I'd rather know they had *felt* it was 'God willing,' than that they should have acted on their own responsibility."

[44]

Hugh whistled. "You ain't getting preachified I suppose, are you, John?"

"No; but, all the same, I know when I think a thing's right."

"So do I; leastways I know when I'm in the right, and that's generally!"

"Or you think so."

"Of course; comes to the same thing."

Hugh had a pleasantly good opinion of himself, which often roused the ridicule and annoyance of his brother and sisters; and so before John was aware he found himself caught in an argument which was beginning to rasp his temper.

"Well, I'm off," he said, abruptly turning on his heel, thinking within himself that if his promise to Agnes was to be kept during his parents' absence it would be well to begin at once.

"Beaten off the field?" asked Hugh, laughing, while he turned round to give his mother a passing kiss.

"Teasing again, my boy," she said gently.

"Only on the surface, mother," he answered lightly.

"Do you not think that the surface of a mirror sometimes gets scratched, and cannot reflect back the same perfect image it should?"

Hugh shook his head. "Mother, I shall be late," he said, turning the handle of the door, and wishing to escape.

She smiled archly. "Next week there will be no mother to run away from, so listen, Hugh. Can't you invent some remedy for that tongue of yours?"

[45]

"I wasn't doing a bit of harm, mother, then."

"But if you *could* you would be 'able to bridle the whole body.' Think of that, Hugh! Can you not

make up your mind to try?"

"All right, mother, I'll see about it."

"Not in your own strength though, dear."

He nodded, and seeing that he was let off, he darted through the door and was gone in a moment.

Mrs. Headley turned back with a momentary look of pain, then, as if those words were whispered in her ear she heard:

"In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike *good*." And at that word she went into the dining-room with a smile on her face, and seated herself at her preparations with peace in her heart.

"What are you going to do for poor people this Christmas, mother?" said Minnie, throwing her arms round her mother's neck in her warm-hearted little way.

Mrs. Headley looked up from the close embrace with a smile, and answered, "We shall not be able to do very much this year, Minnie; but I have not forgotten."

"I did not think you had, only I do like to know."

At this moment Agnes entered the room, bearing in her arms a heap of garments, which she deposited on the table, saying to her mother, "This is all I can find, and they will need a good many stitches." [46]

"I dare say they will," said Mrs. Headley; "but we must all help."

Minnie peered curiously at the assortment of clothes, and exclaimed, "Why, there's my old frock, Agnes! Whatever are you going to do with that?"

"This is part of what we are going to do for Christmas," said her mother.

Minnie looked incredulous, and turned over her brother's worn jacket with the tips of her rosy fingers rather disdainfully.

Agnes already had seated herself at the table, and was proceeding to examine each garment with critical eyes.

Mrs. Headley glanced at the little face opposite her, but made no remark as she leaned over to reach the old dress, which Minnie thought so useless.

"This wants a button, Minnie; get the box, and see if there is one like the others there."

Minnie sprang up to get it, and was soon engaged in searching for the button. "What's it for?" she asked.

"Some little girl who has a worse one than this."

"Are there any? I thought this was so very shabby." [47]

"Plenty, I am sorry to think; but if we get this ready for some one, there will be one less needing a frock."

"Why is Agnes helping?" asked Minnie, drawing nearer.

"Because she wants to do something to make Christmas happy to others."

"Will this make any one happy?" asked Minnie again, her puzzled little face gradually assuming a more contented look.

"Should you not think so, if you had a little bare frock just drawn together with a crooked pin, and hardly covering your shivering little shoulders?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," said Minnie, now quite convinced, eyeing her warm though cast-off frock with fresh interest. "Could I do anything to help make it ready?"

"You can put on the button, and fasten this little bit of hem."

"Why do you mend all these things? Could not their mothers do it?"

Mrs. Headley did not answer, so Minnie sat down; and while she put on the button she pondered the question.

Meanwhile Mrs. Headley with rapid fingers was darning and patching, aided by Agnes, who sat industriously stitching away, silently buried in her own thoughts.

At last Minnie exclaimed, "Is this all you are going to do, mother?" [48]

"No, my dear, we are making some puddings for three or four families."

"Oh, yes, of course! I knew you would; I do love Christmas."

"I wonder if Minnie knows or thinks about why we do it?"

"Because we love the Lord Jesus, I suppose," answered Minnie, looking up from her work with her tender little face.

"Not only that, dear, though that is one reason. Do you remember what we were reading the other day about dealing our bread to the hungry?"

"I think I do."

"And about visiting 'the fatherless and widows in their affliction'?" added Agnes.

"Oh, yes! but, then, *this* isn't visiting the fatherless and widows; this is making things at home."

"Should you like to help me take them when they are done, Minnie?" asked Agnes, looking up.

"That I should, if I might."

"You may, then," said her mother; "and I think you will understand their value better after you have been."

Just then John and Hugh came in from school, and guessing what their mother and sisters were engaged in, they suddenly disappeared; at which Mrs. Headley did not look surprised, nor did she either when they re-entered with her rag-bag, a large cardboard box, and a small parcel.

Minnie threw down her work and jumped up to examine this new marvel; but John, who liked to tease her, kept his intentions to himself, and taking a pair of scissors, bent down his head into the box, and was soon absorbed. [49]

Hugh, who was less particular, opened the parcel, and drew out a piece of bright-patterned *cretonne*.

"Oh, how lovely!" exclaimed his little sister, leaning over the table. "What are you going to do, Hugh?"

Agnes glanced up, and reminded Minnie of her own work; but she was too busy in conjecturing what Hugh was about to heed.

He laid the piece out on the table, folded it in half, and proceeded to thread himself a needle.

"Are you going to *work*, Hugh?" asked the never-satisfied little maiden.

Hugh nodded, nowise disconcerted at her surprised tone, and soon he had begun to sew up the sides, clumsily enough perhaps, but still effectually.

Minnie found work was to be "the order of the day," so she relapsed into silence.

After an hour's close application, during which time Minnie had watched with curious eyes John's hand diving in and out of the rag-bag, Hugh pronounced his contribution done, and went over to his brother and asked him if his were ready. A whispered consultation ensued behind the cardboard box, and then there was some mysterious pushing and man[oe]uvring, which raised Minnie's expectation to the last extent. Her brothers, however, enjoyed keeping up the joke, and there was a fine laugh when they laid a neatly-finished cushion on the table in front of the inquisitive little girl. [50]

"What is in it?" she asked, pinching and pulling it about.

"Only mother's woollen rags snipped up in tiny pieces," said Hugh.

"You should not have told her," remarked John; "but I say, don't my fingers ache! and isn't there a blister on my thumb?"

"Did you cut all that to-day?"

"No, we have been at the snipping business all the week, off and on, and I declare old Mrs. Hales will not have a bad pillow after all."

"Where is Alice?" said Hugh.

"She is doing her part," answered Mrs. Headley; "this is a busy time for cook, and Alice is helping her to make the puddings."

"When shall we go round, Agnes?" asked Minnie.

"On Christmas Eve, mother thinks."

"I wish it were here, then."

"I do not, for we must finish all this heap of mending first."

"You'll tell us who you give it to, Agnes, and all about your visits," said John, who loved a story as much as anyone. "It will make us 'good boys' when they are gone." [51]

"Oh, yes," answered Agnes.

"Then we will wait patiently till then; and if you can think of anything we can help in, we are ready, mother, now it is holiday time."

"I will consider it," she answered, "but while we plan to do something for those in need, let us remember, my dears, one thing."

The faces were turned affectionately towards the mother, who so anxiously watched over her children, while she said gently, "It is not *only* that we are to 'visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,' but we are 'to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.'"

"That's almost harder than the other," said Hugh thoughtfully.

"Except by 'looking off unto Jesus,'" said Mrs. Headley; "I can do all things, through Christ which strengtheneth me."



[52]

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE INJUNCTION.

I cannot leave you a great number of injunctions," exclaimed Mrs. Headley tearfully, on that last morning when all was ready for departure, and the day for the sailing of the steamer had really come.

"I think you have, mother," said Hugh, trying to hide his feeling under a joke.

"No, not to you, dear; to Agnes I may have."

"Yes, to *me*" said Hugh. "I am to mind Agnes, and not to mind John; and to mind I am kind to Minnie; and to keep in mind that Alice is younger than I; and to——"

"Shut up," said John; "we don't want to hear your gabble to the last moment!"

"I was going to say," resumed their mother gently, "that there was one thing I did want you to think of."

"Tell us then, mother," said Alice, putting her arm round her fondly, "we'll keep it as the most important of all." [53]

There was a momentary silence, and then Mrs. Headley turned to her husband with a mute appeal. "Tell them," she said brokenly, "what we were saying this morning."

"We want you all to think of one thing. In *any* difficulty, in *every* difficulty, in *all* circumstances, say to yourselves, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' If you wait and hear the answer, it will help you in everything."

"People generally do wait to hear the answer to their question, don't they, father?" asked John.

"Not always; especially when they are speaking to God. But you be wiser, my children. In the waiting-time for the answer an extra blessing often comes."

The children looked thoughtful; and then their father took from a paper a large painted card in an oak frame, which he proceeded to hang up on a nail ready prepared for it.

On the card were letters in crimson and gold and blue, and the children read:

"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

Then the sound of wheels suddenly reminded them that the parting had come. With a close embrace to each from their mother, and with an earnest "God bless you" to each from their father, the travellers turned to the door, followed by John and Hugh, who were to accompany them to the railway station. [54]

When the last bit of the cab had disappeared. Agnes turned round to her younger sisters and

put her arms round them both lovingly. "We'll be ever so happy together when we once get settled in," she said, choking down her own emotion, and bending down to kiss them in turn.

"Oh, yes," answered Alice with a sob, trying to look up bravely.

But Minnie could not look up. Her mother was her all, and her mother had gone. She threw herself into Agnes's arms in a passion of misery.

Agnes sat down and tried to make her comfortable on her lap; but the child wailed and sobbed, and gave way to such violent grief that the elder sister was almost frightened, and looked towards the window with a momentary thought of whether it would be possible to recall her mother.

It was only momentary, for how could she? Then her eyes fell on the new text, and her heart, with a throb of joy, realized that the Lord was with her.

"Always," she said to herself; "so that must mean to-day. 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?'"

She bent her head over the little golden one, and clasped her arms tighter round the trembling little form, and then she said softly:

"Minnie, have you read our text since father and mother went?"

Minnie listened, but only for an instant, then she sobbed louder than ever.

"Minnie," again pursued Agnes, "do you think you are carrying out what *He* would have you do?"

Minnie stopped a little, and clung more lovingly than before to her sister's waist.

"We must be sorry they are gone; we can't help it, and I don't think Jesus wants us to help it; but we ought not to give way to such grief as to seem rebellious to what He has ordered."

"Do you think I am?" asked the child brokenly.

"What do you think yourself?"

"I don't know," hesitating.

"Well, think about it for a moment. Look here. Minnie, I want to put up these things that are scattered about, so I will lay you on the sofa and cover you up warm; then you can think about it while you watch me. Come, Alice dear, you and I shall soon make things look brighter if we try."

Alice had been standing gazing rather forlornly at Minnie, but now turned round with alacrity. To do something would divert her sorrowful thoughts.

By-and-by a heavy sigh from Minnie made her sisters look at her. There she lay like a picture, her long curls tossed about over the sofa cushion like a halo, her dark eyelashes resting on her flushed cheeks, where the tears were hardly dry, asleep.

"What a good thing," said Alice in a low tone. "I thought she would cry herself ill."

"Yes, I am glad," answered Agnes, looking down upon her. "But, Alice, the boys will be back before we have done if we stand talking."

"Then we won't. Agnes, did not aunt Phyllis say she would come in early?"

"Yes; but I hope she will not till we have put away everything. Just take up that heap and come upstairs with me, Alice; and then run down for that one, will you? You don't mind?"

"I'm not going to 'mind' anything, as Hugh says," answered Alice earnestly, a tear just sparkling in the corner of her eye.

"That's a dear girl; it will make everything so much easier if you do that."

"I mean to try."

They left the room, closing the door after them, and went up with their loads—papers, string, packing-canvas, cardboard boxes, rubbish, shawls, and what not.

Agnes placed the various things in their places, while Alice watched and handed them to her, and at last all was done and the girls ran down, just as a double rap sounded through the hall.

"That's auntie's knock, I shall open it," exclaimed Alice, and in a moment she admitted a little lady, whose pale delicate face and stooping attitude betokened constant ill health.

"Well, my dears," she said cheerfully, "I knew you would have a few things to do after such an early starting, so I waited for a little time. Are the boys back yet?"

"No; we expect them every moment," answered Agnes, leading her aunt into the now orderly dining-room, and placing her in an arm-chair.

Miss Headley's eyes wandered round in search of little Minnie, and soon she saw the sleeping child.

"Not ill?" she asked, reassuring herself with her eyes before Agnes answered:

[55]

[56]

[57]

"She was tired with excitement, I think, and grief. I am so glad she is asleep."

"The best thing for her. And they got off well?"

"Oh, yes; but I hardly knew how utterly dreadful it would be to feel I could not call them back!"

Agnes turned away; she could not say any more. While the responsibility rested on her alone she had been brave, but now with her aunt's sympathy so near she began to feel as if she must break down.

"I know," said the soft voice, "do not mind me, my child; come here and let me comfort you."

Agnes knelt down and laid her head on her aunt's shoulder, while one or two convulsive sobs relieved her burdened heart.

"There will often be moments when you would give anything to have them here, my child; but the Lord knows just that, and has sent forth strength for thee to meet it all. We never know how very dear and precious He can be till we've got no one else." [58]

"I shall learn it soon," whispered Agnes.

"Yes, my child; and it is such a mercy to know that He suits our discipline to our exact need. The other day I was on a visit in the country, and had to go to an instrument-maker there to do something for my back. He told me he could not help me at all, for my case was so very peculiar, and he had nothing to suit me. But that's not like the Lord, my child. He knows us too intimately for that. He does not think our case too peculiar for His skill, but holds in His tender hand just the support, just the strengthening, just the treatment we want, and He gives us what will be the very best for us."

Agnes and Alice knew to what their aunt referred. An accident when she was a beautiful young woman of twenty had caused her life-long suffering, and obliged her to wear a heavy instrument which often gave her great pain and weariness.

Her niece raised her hand at those gentle words, and stroked her aunt's face lovingly.

"It is resting to know He understands perfectly, my child, isn't it?"

"Very. But oh, auntie, I wish you hadn't to suffer so!"

"Don't wish that, my dear, but rejoice that, in every trial that has ever come to me, I can say, [59]
"His grace has been sufficient for me."

Agnes knelt on in silence; and aunt Phyllis did not attempt to disturb the quiet till some hasty footsteps were heard along the pavement, which came springing up the steps, and in another moment the two boys, fresh from their walk, came bursting into the room; but not before Agnes had sprung up and seated herself at the table with her work.

"Hulloa, Agnes! Why, auntie, is that you? So you've come to look after the forsaken nest, have you?"

"How did they get off, John?" Agnes asked, looking up as quietly as if she had been sitting there for an hour.

"Very well; mother was cheerful to the last."

"And they had a foot-warmer?"

"Your humble servant saw to that."

"And you got them something to read?"

"Wouldn't have anything."

"And they did not leave any more messages?"

"None whatever. Now, Hugh, as Agnes has pumped me dry, let Alice take a turn at *you*!"

Alice, till her brothers came in, had been leaning over the fire, deeply buried in a book and now turned round to it again, as if she would very much rather read than do anything else.

Hugh seeing this, advanced a step nearer, and his eyes looked mischievous. [60]

"Well, Alice, don't perfectly smother a body with questions. One at a time. What's the first?"

"I don't know; I haven't any to ask."

"You mean you're too busy?"

"No," answered Alice, half vexed.

"Perhaps you're cold, you're such a long way off from that tiny fire!"

"I'm not cold," said Alice, putting her hand up to her glowing face.

"Not? Now I really thought——"

But a gentle voice interrupted what was becoming too hot for poor Alice's temper, and aunt

Phyllis said:

"Grandmama invites you all to dinner to-day, my dears, at two o'clock; will you come?"

At the word dinner Agnes started. "Oh dear, auntie, I forgot it was my duty now to see after dinner! I do not believe I should have thought of it for ever so long."

"Cook would have reminded you, I dare say," said her aunt, smiling.

"What are you boys going to do this morning?" asked Agnes.

"I'm going to my room to have a general turn out for the holidays, and shall not be visible again till five minutes to two."

"That's a good thing," said Agnes, laughing.

"Your politeness is only exceeded by your truth," said John, giving his aunt a kiss, and disappearing through the door before Agnes could give him back an answer, had she wished it. [61]

"And what is Hugh going to do?" asked Miss Headley, turning to him.

"Tease Alice," said Hugh, nodding towards the crouching figure by the fire.

"I was going to say that I have to go to see a woman in Earl Street, and wanted you to carry my basket for me, Hugh. Can you spare time, do you think?"

"All right, auntie."

"Where's Hugh going?" said Minnie, sleepily, opening her eyes.

"He is going out with me, darling; would you like to go too?"

"I don't know; I think I 'm going to sleep again."

She turned her back on the room, and vouchsafed no further notice of her aunt, nor of anyone else. Agnes gave a glance of apology, but Miss Headley answered by a look that it was not needed, and in a few moments took her leave, followed by her nephew, who ran in next door for the basket, and caught her up before she had reached the corner of the street.

Agnes left the room, and Alice woke up from her book to find herself alone.

She was just going to stoop again over it, when her eyes caught the unaccustomed frame upon the wall, and she could not but see the words, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" [62]

"I've nothing to do but this now," she said, drawing her shoulders nearer to the blaze. "It's holiday time, and I have not lessons or duties of any kind; I may do as I like."

But though she tried to read, she could not forget that question. At first she determined to shake it off, but by-and-by her book fell closed on to her lap, and she looked up straight at the words, thoughtfully.

"This is the first way I am keeping my resolves; a pretty way!"

"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

Then she waited, as her father had said—waited, looking at the words as if they would shine out with an answer. And so they did; for as her eyes rested on the last word, she suddenly started up.

"Do," she said, half aloud. "I don't suppose He likes me to sit here idling my time. I wonder if Agnes wants me? Or if not, I promised mother to practise a whole hour every day, and as I am going out to dinner I shall have to do that first."

Then her eyes met Minnie's wondering ones shining out from among the golden curls and crimson sofa cushion, and she heard a little voice say:

"Who wants you to 'do'?"

Alice pointed with her finger towards the text.

"Oh!" said Minnie, comprehending.

"But I didn't remember you were there, or I should not have spoken aloud." [63]

"I forgot what Agnes said, because I went to sleep; but——"

"Yes," answered Alice, waiting for what the little pet sister wanted to say.

"I don't think He would have liked me to cry so *much*, if I had asked Him first."

And with another little sob she rushed past her sister and flew up the stairs.

At five minutes to two o'clock, John opened his bedroom door and called Agnes.

She was just coming out on the landing, with her hat on, followed by Minnie and Alice.

"Come and see my arrangements," he said, opening the door wider.

"I don't see anything particu——Oh!" with a start, "why, John, where did you get that?"

"Out of these two hands of mine, to be sure, and these eyes, and that paint box, and that cardboard."

On the wall hung the same text that their father had prepared with such care downstairs, only that John's was not framed, but put up with four small nails.

"I thought I should see it more up here than downstairs."

"And he thought," added Hugh slyly, "that *I* should have the benefit of it here."

"I never thought of you at all," said John.

"It is very nice," said Agnes, coming in to examine it.

[64]

The others went down stairs, and the brother and sister were left alone.

"I've been thinking a lot, Agnes," said John, turning his back to her, as he busied himself at one of his drawers, "and I've made up my mind while I've been tracing the words of that text."

"What about?" asked Agnes, with a feeling that there was something unusual in his tone.

"I've determined to take it as my life text."

"John!"

"Yes. It seemed so horrid without mother, and I've been thinking about it, on and off, for a year past; and to-day, as I painted those words. I thought——"

Agnes was standing behind him, her soft cheek resting against the back of his shoulder.

"Yes," she whispered.

"He seemed to say to me, that the first thing I had to *do* was to come to Him."

"I'm *sure* it is."

"So now you know," said John huskily.

"And you did come?" asked Agnes, feeling as if she wanted to understand all before she could rejoice.

"Of course," answered John, turning round astonished; "I should not have said a word if that had not been the end of it!"



[65]

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST SUNDAY ALONE.



he next morning dawned bright and clear, and Agnes was the first awake.

She slipped on her dressing-gown, and went across to her brothers' door and tapped gently.

"It is time to get up," she called.

"All right, mother," answered a very sleepy voice, and there was a comfortable sound of smothering bedclothes, and then silence.

"Hugh and John, do wake," exclaimed shivering Agnes; "we shall be late for church, if you go to sleep again."

She tapped louder this time, and then John's voice responded:

"All right, old woman; I'm awake now."

"Really, John?" asked Agnes.

"Really," said John; and she heard a bump on the floor, and a pattering across the room.

She flew back, for if those feet were by chance Hugh's, a wet sponge would probably be trickling down her neck before she had time to escape. [66]

She had waked with the heartache, but her brothers' cheerful laughter had turned her thoughts, and as she dressed, though she considered soberly her responsibility as head of the house, yet it was trustfully too, and the remembrance of the great joy which John's words yesterday had brought her, made her so glad, that she felt ashamed of being dull or mopish because her parents were gone.

So she went downstairs, looking as bright as if no weight of care overshadowed her.

"This is our first day alone," she remarked as they sat at breakfast, "for I do not count yesterday anything, because we went out to dinner."

"I like going to grandmama's," said Hugh, "for she always makes us jolly comfortable."

"That's Hugh's idea of bliss," said Alice mischievously, "nothing to do—and plenty to eat."

"Oh, Alice!" exclaimed Agnes, shocked.

Hugh was not disconcerted, as it happened, but answered:

"Well, what if it is? We're all in the same boat it strikes me. One likes one sort of ease, and another sort; but there isn't much to choose between us."

"Thank you," laughed Alice, who was a little ashamed of her home truth; "but my idea of comfort isn't like yours, Hugh."

"What is yours, Alice?" asked John. [67]

"A warm fire and an interesting book," said Alice promptly.

"Like yesterday," said Hugh, whose memory was often inconvenient.

"Like yesterday," assented Alice soberly, remembering something about that which Hugh knew nothing of.

"I hope you will all be ready in time for church," said John, "for I mean to start whether you are or not. Agnes will be sure to be ready."

Agnes acknowledged the compliment with a smile, but candour forced her to add, "I'm afraid I'm not always ready."

Then they rose from the table, and Agnes stood hesitating for a moment, while the colour mounted into her face.

"John," she whispered, "could you take prayers, do you think?"

John shook his head.

"I thought, perhaps, since yesterday——"

"Oh, Agnes," he returned, "you'll do it twice as well; and the servants, and all—you will not mind. You were going to, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was; and if you would rather I did——"

"Much rather—of course I would. You need not be nervous."

The whispered conversation was unheeded by the others, who had gathered round the fire looking at their mother's bullfinch taking his morning bath on the mantelshelf. [68]

"I hope you won't forget his royal highness," said Hugh to Alice.

"I do not suppose I shall."

"If you do I'll remind you," said Minnie.

"When it is starved to death," answered Hugh.

Minnie looked distressed, and Alice rather defiant. "I mean to attend to him every morning before I taste my own breakfast."

"Oh, I am sure we shall think of him," said Agnes, joining the circle, while her hand pulled the bell for the servants, "we are so used to giving him his bath that his food will be sure to be remembered."

And then they sat down for their first prayers without their parents; and Agnes read with a voice that trembled nervously at first, but as she proceeded she took courage. Their text flashed across her, and she felt that what He wished her to do now was just this, and the thought made her wonderfully happy.

When they sat at dinner—Agnes taking the top of the table and John the bottom—Hugh

exclaimed:

"How awfully funny it is without father and mother!"

Minnie looked up quickly, and then looked down, and her knife and fork fell from her fingers.

John turned towards her kindly. "Why, Minnie," he said, "think how much good the change may do them; and if it were *you*, you would want to see your own mother, wouldn't you, after twenty years?" [69]

This roused Minnie's sympathy. She had never thought such a thing possible before as being separated from her mother for so long; so she swallowed down her tears and began her dinner, which, in spite of her woe-begone feelings, tasted very nice.

"What shall you do with yourself after dinner. John?" asked Hugh.

"I shall look out some texts I have to do, and enter them into my book."

"What book?"

John hesitated. "One I began some little time ago."

"What for?"

"To enter special subjects in that I am interested about."

"What sort of subjects?" asked Alice.

"Scripture subjects; or any others that seem to me to belong to that sort of thing."

Hugh gave a little shrug of his shoulders.

"What time are you going to read to us, Agnes?" asked Minnie.

"A little before four, I think. Hugh and Alice, you have your scripture questions to do for father, haven't you?"

"Yes," they answered.

"Then, John, can you come in the drawing-room to do your writing? Minnie and I shall not disturb you." [70]

He got up and followed her upstairs, smiling as he went.

Turning round on the first landing she saw the smile, and enquired:

"Well?"

"You're a good general," he said.

"Why?"

"Take care to separate your different regiments in case——"

"John!"

"Now, don't you?"

"Not exactly——"

"I know you!"

"Well, come along; you cannot say that my generalship has not made you comfortable, anyhow."

"I don't wish to. What a glorious fire, Agnes; and what a nice arm-chair; and what a jolly little table; and what a nice inkstand; and——"

"There, John, leave off, or our afternoon will be gone; and those children will be up before we have had a moment's quiet."

She seated herself on the sofa, at one side of the fire, Minnie curling herself up by her with her book, and Agnes opening her Bible and bending over it.

Silence reigned for an hour; while John's pen scratched, and the leaves of his concordance turned over; and Agnes's eyes were fixed on one page, from which she hardly raised them, except to give Minnie an occasional caress, or to whisper something to her about her book. [71]

At last there was a stir downstairs. Chairs were pushed back; careful Alice put on some coal, that the fire might not be out when they returned to it; and then there was a rush, and the two came tearing up the stairs.

"How jolly comfortable you look!" exclaimed Hugh.

"We are," said John, preparing to close his book.

"Any room on the sofa for a fellow?" asked Hugh.

"Oh, yes! plenty."

"Sit next me," said Minnie.

"All right. I say, Agnes, how strange it will seem to have Christmas Day without them!"

"Yes; but we can make it happy if we try," said Agnes.

"How?"

"By *being* happy."

"That's all very well," said Hugh; "but then, you know, Agnes, *being* made happy depends on outward things."

"Of course it does; and on inward things too. If we have got a well of happiness inside us, it will make everything round us seem bright and beautiful."

"What do you call a 'well of happiness'?"

[72]

"I know what Agnes means," said Minnie.

"I was thinking then of the day father came home from America—last time; and we had received the telegram that he had landed at Liverpool. How we all went about singing and happy; how we never thought of quarrelling, but hastened to get everything ready for him."

"I remember that day," said Alice; "it was one of the nicest I ever spent."

"So that is what I mean by a 'well of happiness;' something which gives us joy, independently of anything else."

"And what's your Christmas 'well of joy' for this year, Agnes?" asked John with a smile.

Agnes gave an answering smile. "Oh, John, it is that we are His; that, through the coming of the dear Saviour, we have been given all other blessings—happiness and peace here, everlasting joy hereafter."

"And you think that ought to make up for all other deficiencies?" asked Hugh.

"If we have *got* it," said Alice thoughtfully; "but sometimes I wonder——" she looked down, and tears glittered in her eyes.

Agnes heard the quiver in the tone, and put her arm lovingly round her sister. "Is it so difficult to know?"

Alice shook her head.

"He gives the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."

[73]

The little party were silent; Alice's unusual feeling startled them. The Sunday afternoon was drawing in, and the light fading.

Presently Agnes said, "I have thought of a little allegory; would you like to hear it? It might help us to understand Alice's difficulty."

The question did not need repeating, and she began:



[74]

CHAPTER X.

THE GOLDEN OIL: AN ALLEGORY.



fell asleep and dreamed. Before me spread out verdant fields, picturesque villages, valleys of peace and plenty, cities of care and toil, the wide ocean restlessly tossing, the mountain bare and rugged.

At first my eyes seemed heavy with sleep, but after a time I began to see things more clearly, and in all these varied scenes I perceived there were children moving to and fro.

I was apparently at a great distance from them, and could not well understand what they did, nor could I hear what they said.

They appeared to be very busy, often eagerly running or walking; talking together in twos and threes; playing with the trifles which seemed to lie everywhere for their amusement; sometimes two quarrelling loudly over these same trifles, and crying pitifully if they could not have what they wanted.

[75]

In my dream I seemed to be drawing nearer and nearer to them, and I began to perceive the differences in their countenances and dress, and to find that there was only one point of resemblance in them all; and this one thing caused me great surprise.

Some were robed in dresses whose sheen, reflecting the rays of the morning sun, dazzled my eyes; again, others had garments of the dullest hue; and the clothes of others were so covered with mud and dirt, that I could not have told what they once were. But, whether gaily decked or dressed in sombre attire, each child had fastened round it a curiously-fashioned girdle, to which hung a small pitcher. The pitchers appeared to be all of one shape and size, but the materials of which they were made seemed to differ widely.

On some of the children, whose dress was of gayest hue, the pitcher, strange to say, appeared to be made of commonest material, for it looked dull and dark; while at the girdle of some who were most plainly attired hung vessels of brightest gold. This also was incomprehensible to me.

Presently my dream seemed to bring me so near that I could see what they were doing and hear a little of what they said.

A group of them were sitting on a bank of flowers, resting in the shade, and as they talked I drew near to listen.

"I do not believe it," said a sturdy little boy, as he threw a ball of flowers into the lap of a little maiden opposite.

[76]

"What do you not believe?" asked a grave-looking girl who was seated near.

"That there is any hurry to get the pitchers filled."

"Did any one say there was?" asked the girl, glancing thoughtfully at the vessel hanging at her side, while I perceived that it had the look of being neglected and soiled.

"Yes, there was a proclamation this morning that the pitchers might be needed this very day, and that all who had not the Golden Oil should, without delay, repair to the place whence it could be obtained."

"So there is every day," exclaimed a tall youth who was lying on the grass at their feet. "That is nothing new: it is the duty of the Herald to proclaim, and it is our duty to hear, but——"

"No one ever thinks of obeying," laughed the roguish boy, weaving his flowers as if all his life were centred in doing that only.

But the thoughtful girl looked up with a deep flush at those careless words. "I do not think *every one* does that, Ashton; for Esther here——"

She pointed to a child at a little distance who was threading daisies together wherewith to deck a tiny brother, who sat watching her little fingers with absorbed interest.

[77]

Now that my attention was directed to this little girl, I took note of her for the first time. Her dress was of some white material, her eyes clear as the deep summer azure, her face full of sunshine, while close to her heart a golden pitcher gleamed in the light, as her happy little figure turned backwards and forwards in her task.

"Oh, Esther always obeys!" said the youth from the grass, "and is the happiest little mortal in doing so; but that would not suit every one."

He turned round restlessly, and any one who cared might see that his pitcher was empty enough as it lay on the ground under his arm.

Esther was all unconscious that the eyes of the party were fixed upon her. When she had completed her chain of daisies, she took her little brother's hand in hers.

"Now, darling," she said softly, "you promised me you would go at once to get your little pitcher filled."

He nodded and trotted off by her side, while she continued, "It would be so sad not to have any Oil when night comes on, wouldn't it?"

"But you could lend me some," answered the child, confident in her love.

"You know I can't; I must not; no one can lend. So that is why I want you to get some for yourself."

As they turned round to go towards the place where I imagined the Golden Oil was to be obtained, I saw another strange thing about these children which I had not noticed before; each carried, fastened to the same girdle, a tiny lamp. I looked round to enquire the meaning of it all, but found myself unable to speak; so I could do nothing but follow the two children to see what would become of them. [78]

"But why must we have our lamps lighted. Esther?" asked the little one; "I go to sleep all night."

"Yes," said Esther; "but every night before I go to sleep I trim and light my lamp, and then, if the King were to come, I should only have to jump up and run out to welcome Him."

"But I should take hold of your hand, Esther!" said the little man.

"Oh, but the King says we must *obey*, Ernest; it is of no use thinking you will do all those things. You might not be able to find me in the dark, nor find the King. He tells us to ask for the Golden Oil, and to trim the golden lamp, and we have nothing to do but obey."

Esther pressed his little hand, and they hastened on. Presently, just by the side of the road I saw a Herald standing, with an open book in his hand, and though I could not catch all the words he said, I saw that the children understood.

"I do not like to go in," little Ernest was urging, as he pulled back Esther's hand; "I am afraid to." [79]

"But the Herald says, 'Whosoever *will*,' that means you, Ernest darling."

Then they turned in under an archway, Ernest, now that his mind was made up, running on before.

Esther waited just inside the gate. She could not follow right into the chamber where the Oil was given away, for each one who would get his vessel filled with the Golden Oil must go in alone to receive it.

In a very few minutes Ernest came out again, bearing the golden pitcher full of Golden Oil. His face was radiant, and as he took Esther's hand once more, he looked up into her face with large, wondering eyes.

"Esther," he said, "the King came down and spoke to me Himself, and put His hand on my head, and charged me to listen to the Herald's message, and to obey."

Esther's eyes glistened. "Is He not a gracious King, Ernest?" she said.

As my eyes followed these children I perceived that the possession of the Golden Oil seemed to bring them happiness and peace.

Everywhere they went they did loving little actions, said kind little words. Sometimes I wondered at the very smallness of these actions and words; and yet, as I noticed the faces brighten on whom they fell, I knew that they were understood and appreciated. [80]

By-and-by Esther joined the group of children from whom she had parted but a while ago. The sun had risen higher in the heavens, and had begun to descend by the time she and Ernest returned to them; but still they were where they had been, and were occupied in much the same way as before.

The tall boy in the grass had sauntered away for a walk with another companion, and though he again passed the Herald, his warning voice was still unheeded.

Esther sat down by the girl whom I had observed as being anxious about the Golden Oil, and as little Ernest ran to play with some other children Esther said, "I wish you had been with us, Allea; we have had such a happy morning."

"I cannot see that a walk with a little prattling brother can give such delight," she answered.

"But we have been to get his pitcher filled. Oh, Allea, I went almost into the presence of the King!"

"You *did*!"

"Yes; I was never so near before, except the day——"

"When?" asked Allea, looking into Esther's face.

"When He gave me the Oil Himself."

"You make so much of having this Oil," said Allea, discontentedly; "more than half the world gets on very well without it." [81]

Esther looked abashed for a moment. This was true certainly. Then her eyes were raised to the blue vault of the sky above her, and beyond it she saw, what all those who received the Golden Oil could see if they looked, a mystic word written—Eternity!—and as she read and re-read its well-known letters, they seemed to melt away and transform themselves into a wondrous palace

of beauty and light, where her King dwelt, and where He had promised to take those who obeyed Him during this little Journey. Still absorbed in the sight, she gazed upward till one by one the azure towers and palaces faded back; but before it vanished from her sight, once more the word Eternity stood like a fleecy cloud upon the blue, and then melted away.

Then her eyes came back to her companion's face: "Yes, Allea, you are quite right, half the world does very well without it *now*."

"Well?" said Allea impatiently.

"But when this little Journey is ended, or when night comes on, if the King suddenly calls us to come with Him, then, oh, Allea! what would it be to be shut out of the Everlasting City?"

Allea was silent, while one or two children who had noticed the earnestness of their talk had gathered round them to hear. "Will you not get your pitcher filled to-day. Allea?" pleaded Esther with wistful eyes. [82]

"By-and-by," she answered; "I shall be passing that way this evening."

"The night cometh when no one can work," whispered Esther, as if to herself.

"But I am going before night," answered Allea somewhat proudly; "you are too fast, Esther."

As they sat and talked, I fancied that shadows began to fall over the land. The children did not seem to heed it at first, but presently they seemed divided one from another by the deepening twilight, and before I knew where I was, I found myself following Esther and her little brother, who held by the hand one of the children who had been listening to the conversation.

Again we approached the portal where the Herald stood, and I could see that Ernest and Esther were both hurrying forward with all their speed, helping their companion along, who, though hastening as much as she could, seemed weary and spent.

Ever and anon upon the quiet evening air the Herald's voice sounded clear and full, 'The time is short—the day is far spent—ask and it shall be given you;' and as they ran under the archway darkness fell upon the land, and I could not follow them.

But while I pondered on these things, I saw a little glimmering light in a casement, and seemed drawn to approach near enough to see what it was. As I came close I could see the interior of a small chamber; hard by on a couch lay Esther, fast asleep, with her little brother's arms flung about her neck. Close beside them, and still fastened by golden links to their waists, stood the two Golden Lamps, burning brightly and steadily, while a King's Messenger, arrayed in white apparel, waited near, guarding the sleepers and the Lamps with watchful care. [83]

Long did I look, and was at last turning away, when a strange sound startled the midnight air: "Your King cometh! your King cometh!"

At the words, so long looked for, so eagerly expected, Esther sprang from her rest, caught her Lamp in her hand, looked round with joyful eyes for her little brother, who had also heard that cry, and then both ran out to meet the King. Did I see their companion of the evening before, holding aloft a Golden Lamp too, to welcome Him?

And then I thought I heard confused tones of regret, and sorrow, and wailing disappointment, as one and another, awakened by the lights and glad sounds, hastened from their couches—not to meet the King; alas! no—but to find He had come, and had taken those who were ready, into His glorious Palace, to go no more out for ever.

"Agnes," said Minnie, looking up solemnly into her sister's face, "I think I know, but isn't the Oil in that story meant for the Holy Spirit?" [84]

"Yes, darling, and the promise stands fresh and sure now, as it did eighteen hundred years ago, 'If ye...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.'"





CHAPTER XI.

A CUPBOARD OF RUBBISH.

What are you searching for?" asked Agnes, entering the schoolroom the next morning, which was littered over from end to end. Her brothers and sisters were busily engaged in turning out a large cupboard, and the contents were scattered all over the room.

They looked up with rather flushed faces.

"Oh, Agnes," exclaimed Minnie eagerly, "we are sorting my old toys over, to see what I can spare."

"What for?" asked Agnes.

"Don't you know? Why, for those poor little children who haven't any toys or pleasures!"

"Which children? I never heard."

"Didn't you? not what mother told us the other day?"

"No," said Agnes, sitting down by the fire and surveying the confusion with some curiosity.

[86]

"Then *I'll* tell you," burst out Hugh.

"Yes, you tell her," said Minnie.

"Well, they say that there are numbers and numbers of children who have hardly any enjoyment in their lives, who are sick and full of suffering, lying on beds with nothing to do, or seated in chairs from which they cannot move. The kind people at the hospital do all they can for them, you know, Agnes; but of course they must spend their money on necessary things, and on beds and food, and they cannot afford to buy toys."

"Well?" said Agnes.

"Mother told us that *anything* almost would be a treat to these poor little things, and so we are seeing what we have got."

"But this is all rubbish," said Agnes, speaking regretfully, for she felt sorry to disappoint her eager brothers and sisters.

They were not so easily daunted, however, having heard what very old toys give infinite delight to the poor little invalids, and Hugh answered:

"But you see, Agnes, these are for their very own, and when we have mended them——"

"Oh, if they are mended, of course, that is a different thing," said Agnes.

"So we shall," said Minnie; "see, the glue-pot is on already, and we are going to begin soon."

"The worst is," said Hugh, "where shall we begin, this is in such a muddle."

[87]

"I will help you," said Agnes kindly, "if you will give me any idea of what you mean to send."

"Well," said John, who had been persuaded to help, "here are some dominoes. You know we've that nice new set, and there are a good many of these, only the box is broken. What could we do for a box, Agnes?"

"Would a little bag do?"

John looked doubtful; but Alice, who had been busily sorting out while the others had been talking, seized upon the idea of a bag as the very thing, and wrote down on a piece of paper, "Wanted, a bag for dominoes."

"Very well," said Agnes; "now what next?"

"Here is a little horse with his head off; but I know the head is somewhere, and we shall come across it presently."

"That's for the glueing heap, then?"

"Oh, yes! Thank you, Agnes; now we shall get on," said Minnie.

"Here is a lot of small furniture, but it is very broken," said Hugh.

"Perhaps a few of them will do. Have you the box?"

"Here is an empty one."

"Perhaps you have a little dolly to put in with them?"

Alice went to a corner and produced a dilapidated Dutch doll.

[88]

"I will put her on a new frock while you sort the things," said Agnes.

"Here is a bit of pink chintz," answered Minnie; "and here are my scissors to 'pink' the edges."

The heap for glueing was fast increasing, and John said he had better begin, while the others collected for him.

"We have agreed not to quarrel over it," he added, smiling, "but to do whatever comes first, because——"

"Because?" said Agnes.

Minnie came close to her, and said softly, "We are trying to do something for *His* sake, you know. Agnes."

"I see," said Agnes; "I am so glad."

But though the glueing might be pleasant work, the sorting out such a heap of *débris* was a tiring thing, and taxed the patience of the children very much. Agnes sat by, helping with advice and interest, and feeling deep down in her heart that she was giving her little service to the Lord Jesus too. Had she not left the piano, where she had but just opened a new song? Had she not made all her arrangements to have an hour's practice this morning, when she could be certain of the piano to herself? But all this had been put aside, and now she heard the tender voice whispering, "Thou hast been faithful over a few things...enter into the joy of thy Lord."

And even now she was tasting that joy, which, some day, all who love Him, shall know in its fulness.

[89]

At last the floor was clear, and Hugh ran downstairs with a basketful of real rubbish, while the table now held many heaps, over which careful Alice kept guard.

"Not there," she would say, as a contribution was brought; "that must be for this heap, and those broken toys for John to glue."

When Hugh returned with his empty basket, they surveyed the present results of their labours. A heap of already mended toys, carefully bound together with thin string; a lot of pictures and scraps to be pasted into old copy books, of which several lay at hand; two or three very old dolls, which were to be freshened up, some with a little soap and water, some with a bit of odd ribbon, some with a new glazed lining frock, just run together and snipped out at the bottom; a few boxes containing the remains of dolls' furniture, dominoes, little cups and saucers, and the like; an old six-penny watch, with a bit of pink tape for a guard; and last, an old doll's perambulator, which John was now busily engaged in renovating.

Minnie looked at the things, while a deep sigh escaped her, "I wish we could do more," she said, "but we have so little money."

"We must remember," said Agnes, "that God accepts, not according to what we have *not*, but according to what we have."

[90]

"Yes," said Hugh; "and if we were to sit down to do nothing because we have no money to spend, quite thirty little children would go without what will give them a good many hours' pleasure."

"So they would," answered Minnie, looking more cheerful; "so now I will set about making the best of what I have."

It took a good many days before all the things were really completed; and sometimes they were tempted to get tired and give up; but one or other of them would remember for whom they had agreed to work, and this nerved them to make a fresh endeavour.

At last all was done. A box was found to send the things in, and the pleasant task of actually packing it was begun.

Agnes told them to let her know when everything was ready, and now came in, bearing a little tray-full of tiny bags of net, filled with sugar-plums.

She proceeded to tie one on each toy or doll, and placed one in a sly corner in the various toy boxes.

"Oh, Agnes, how kind of you!" they all exclaimed.

So the packing went on with great zest.

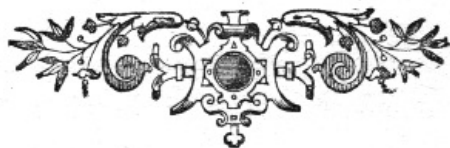
They all clubbed together to pay the carriage of the box by the Parcels Delivery Company, and with great pride Alice wrote the label, and pasted it on. Then Hugh and John carried the package into the hall, and when they came up again they all looked at each other with happy faces.

[91]

"I thought it would never get done," said Minnie.

"Did you?" asked Alice; "there is nothing like perseverance to get things finished."

"It is bringing forth fruit with *patience*," said Agnes.



[92]

CHAPTER XII.

JOHN'S PROMISE.

Thus the few days before Christmas passed busily on, while Agnes began to feel less anxiety as to her charge during their parents' absence.

The nearness of her grandmother and aunt were an untold comfort, but her mother had said to her before she left, "Do not run in to them with every little tittle-tattle, but remember there is a nearer Friend always close. Should any great emergency arise, be thankful that He has so placed you that you can ask advice of them."

The whole family, according to the usual custom, were to spend Christmas-day at Mrs. Headley's, next door, to which pleasure the young people looked forward in their different ways.

On Christmas-eve, while John, Hugh, and Alice were making and putting up the ivy and holly wreaths, Agnes and Minnie set forth on their errand of carrying the Christmas parcels to the poor people for whom they had prepared them; and when they came in, wet and cold, the others gathered round to know what they had done, and how the parcels had been received.

[93]

"It is bitterly cold to-night," said Agnes, coming forward to the fire; "you will let us get warm first, before we say a word, the wind blows through you."

"You should have let us go," said John. "I knew it was more fit for Hugh and me than for that little scrap of humanity!"

"But Minnie was promised," answered Agnes, "and I am *very* glad I went—very glad."

"So am I," answered Minnie earnestly.

"Why?" asked Hugh.

"I must tell you another day; to-night I feel as if I could only thank God for all our mercies."

She sat down by the fire and looked into it abstractedly, while Minnie stood near her very soberly too.

"Were they so pleased?" asked Alice.

Agnes looked round on the warm room, with its comfortable curtains, clean wall-paper, tidy carpet, all lighted up with the glow of the log of wood which Alice had put on the fire to welcome her.

"If you could have seen!" she said, "how thankful you would all feel for *our* blessings."

At six o'clock the next morning the Christmas bells of joy rang out on the still morning air. They woke Alice, and she started up in bed and called to Minnie, who, after sundry groans and sighs, came to herself, and asked, "What is the matter?"

[94]

"Nothing's the matter, only don't you want to hear the Christmas bells?"

"Not very much," answered Minnie sleepily.

"You are a goose!" said broad-awake Alice. "But all the same, I wish you a happy Christmas."

"So do I," answered Minnie, trying to be polite; "but when I really wake up to-morrow morning

I'll say it better."

"Why it *is* to-morrow morning," laughed Alice.

After breakfast, just as they were going to open a package on which they had ventured many conjectures, a ring at the front door interrupted them.

"Perhaps it's another parcel," said Minnie, running to the window, while Agnes exclaimed:

"Oh, Minnie, don't expect things, pray. I should not like to be counting on presents—it is horrid!"

Minnie looked round astonished. "I didn't know——" she said, confused.

But the ring was quickly explained.

"Please, Master Hugh," said the housemaid, "there's a young gentleman in the hall, and he wants to know if you'll go out for a walk with him?"

"Who is it?" asked Hugh, vexed. "Did he say his name?"

"I'll enquire, Master Hugh."

[95]

"It's Master Tom Radnor," she said, returning.

Hugh threw down the string he was untying, and followed the maid into the hall.

"Holloa, Tom!" he said.

"I've nothing to do to-day," said the other; "and you said you'd go for a walk."

"You're remarkably early, or else we're remarkably late."

"Don't you want to go?"

"Oh, yes; but I'm busy just this minute."

"Not done breakfast?" asked Tom, grinning.

"You're wrong there! Look here, Tom, I'll call for you in half an hour, will that do?"

"All right."

So the front door opened and closed, and Hugh came back.

"What did he want?" asked Alice.

"To go for a walk."

"On Christmas-day? How funny."

"Not funny that I know of."

"Did you ask him to?" said Minnie.

"Yes—no—at least he said something about it when I met him yesterday."

"I should have said I couldn't," said Alice decidedly; "but never mind now, Hugh, let's open our things."

They gathered round the table, and soon had forgotten all about Tom in their interest in the presents their mother and father had prepared for them.

[96]

A beautiful work-basket for Agnes; a book for John; a new paint-box for Hugh; a desk, fitted-up, for Alice; and a long-shaped box for Minnie, on which was written, "Care—great care—little Minnie."

"What can it be?" exclaimed the child, peeping round it, and enjoying her anticipations.

And then John untied the string and raised the cover, while Minnie's little fingers tenderly lifted some tissue-paper, and disclosed to view a baby-doll of surpassing loveliness.

Agnes and the rest admired and exclaimed to the heart's content of the little mother, and then She took her doll away to show it to the servants.

Just then Hugh discovered that the half hour was nearly over, and started up.

"Are you not coming to church?" asked Alice.

Hugh stopped short for a moment, "Are you?" he asked.

"Yes, we are going with Aunt Phyllis."

"But I can't get out of this, Agnes, and father wouldn't mind?"

"No; he thinks Christmas-day is not like Sunday, and we need not feel bound about going to God's house as we are then; but for my own part I should like to."

"So should I," said Alice.

"Is John going?" asked Hugh, looking crest-fallen and vexed.

"Yes; I don't know that I had intended it though, for I look upon Christmas-day as a blessed holiday, but I've other reasons." [97]

"Then you think I can go with Tom?"

"As far as that is concerned," said John; "but I should hardly think Tom was a nice companion for you."

"Why not?" exclaimed Hugh, turning red.

"There are several things about him that are not satisfactory, and I should not like him for my friend."

"He is not 'my friend' exactly; but that's always the way with you, John, you despise other people."

"I'm sure I don't; but I've always told you. Hugh, that that boy's a humbug."

"How do you know he is?" Hugh answered angrily.

"He never looks you in the face for one thing."

"Nonsense. Did ever you hear such an absurd thing, Agnes, to judge by a fellow's looks?"

"Then he does not go with the good set at school, you can't say he does," pursued John.

"He goes with me, and I should like you to tell me I belong to the bad set."

"You will if you go on with him," John answered quickly; and then he saw Agnes move suddenly and raise her eyes from the table, where they had been fixed during the altercation.

One flash of thought, one glance at his sister, and then John stood still with firmly-closed lips. [98]

Agnes felt deeply thankful, but she said not a word.

"Have you anything more to say?" asked Hugh bitterly, "or have you exhausted all your powers in that last effort?"

John was still silent, but an earnest supplication went up that he might know his Lord's will and do it.

"Eh?" exclaimed Hugh, coming close to him and speaking to him in hot anger.

"I was thinking, Hugh," answered John slowly, "wondering whether I had been unkind in what I said, or right in warning you?"

"Warning me! If you had had a grain of sense in your body, you'd have warned me in private, and not before a pack of girls."

"Yes," answered John, hesitating a little, "I think I ought not—not like that, but it never occurred to me; we got into it before I knew."

"That is a very poor excuse for annoying your brother, and a very cowardly way of getting out of it."

"Cowardly?" said Alice, beneath her breath, to Agnes.

But John answered, "Having acknowledged that I should have told you in private, Hugh, will you forgive me? and may I come up with you and talk it over?"

"No," exclaimed Hugh; "never mention the subject to me again." [99]

And with that he gathered his painting materials together, and walked off, followed by Alice, who was looking grieved enough.

"Oh, Agnes!" said John, turning to her, "I meant to do right, but after all I have broken my promise on Christmas-day!"

"I can't see that you have," answered Agnes gently; "no one can guard against all difficulties."

"But I've quarrelled with him, and offended him more deeply than ever before, when I meant ___"

"But I do not see that you quarrelled, John, after all."

"It was far nearer to words than I ever dreamed of going."

Agnes felt very sorrowful, but at last she looked up.

"I wonder what *He* would have us do?" pointing to the text.

John followed her glance for a moment, then he left the room abruptly, and she heard his footsteps going three at a time up the stairs.

"Hugh," he said, entering their joint room, and closing the door, "I feel more sorry than words

can say about this."

His brother was sullenly preparing to go out, and did not turn round. "Then you shouldn't speak to a fellow so," he muttered.

"Hugh," answered John, seriously, "I dare not unsay what I *said*; that part of it was right. But I was wrong to have exposed your school affairs before anyone else. Can't you let us be friends again on Christmas-day? I would not have had it happen for any money, and I am sorry I have vexed you." [100]

John's tone was so earnest, and Hugh's anger had cooled down, so that he felt he could not do less than say, uncomfortably, "Oh, well, there is no need to make such a fuss; I'm sure I don't want to bother about it, so there, we'll say no more."

John sat on the edge of the bed, looking dejected, and Hugh finished his preparations, and turned to the door. "Why do you mind so much?" he asked suddenly, coming back again; for, after all, he was a kind-hearted boy, and did not like to see his brother annoyed.

"I have made two promises," said John, "and have not succeeded in keeping either."

"Two promises?" echoed Hugh.

"One to Agnes, and one to God," said John in a low tone half to himself.

"There!" exclaimed Hugh, "I'm sorry I was so cross; and—and I'll take to heart what you said about Tom. I'm off now."



CHAPTER XIII.

HUGH'S PROMISE.

It was time to start for church, and John went down to find his sisters.

His face was pale, and there was a disappointed look about him which was very unusual in the bright boy.

Agnes saw it, and walked along by his side, trying to think of something cheering to say. But, after all, when the heart is sore there is only One who can truly comfort.

Alice and Minnie had gone in to fetch aunt Phyllis, so the brother and sister were alone.

"Agnes," exclaimed John at last, when they came in sight of the church, "I'm so vexed with myself, so 'taken down a peg,' if you can comprehend such a phrase."

He gave a little sad laugh to hide a deeper feeling which Agnes perfectly understood.

"It's dreadfully unpleasant," she answered, "but I've gone through it before now." [102]

"You?"

"Heaps of times. Don't you suppose, John, we all trust in ourselves ever so much too much?"

"I suppose we do."

"Don't be discouraged," she said cheerily, "it's a comfort to feel He has got us in hand."

"What do you call 'in hand'?" asked John.

"Not letting us go our own way unhindered."

"But that's just what I didn't want, Agnes; I wanted with all my heart to go His way, and yet I failed."

"Yes," said Agnes slowly; "and He knew that. But perhaps, John——"

"Say on."

"Perhaps—I don't know, I only guess by myself—perhaps you felt you were strong, and could stand alone."

Agnes glanced up with eyes that glittered with tears as they went up the steps beneath the deep portico.

John squeezed her arm, and they entered the church.

If Agnes had given John a lesson, she had taught herself one too. That Christmas morning was a time never to be forgotten; and to John, who had gone there hoping for a little quiet time to renew his vows, to ask afresh what his Lord would have him to do, there came a very different discipline. Instead of being a soldier buckling on his bright armour, he found himself a beaten-down combatant who was returning home wounded and sore.

[103]

But a comforting thought came to him as he knelt with his face buried in his hands; all the same for his wounds and feeling of defeat, he was fighting under the great Captain, who loved him in spite of all.

And when the text was given out his lesson came home to him, and he raised his head joyfully as his eyes sought those of his sister.

"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before His presence with exceeding joy, be glory for ever. Amen."

After an instant's pause their minister began.

"I am not going to speak to the joyful this Christmas, for they do not need it so much; but I am going to speak to the downcast, that they may look forward to this exceeding joy."

Every word might have been meant for John, and he took it all humbly home to his heart. Never had his face looked like that before, and when they came out there were two people happy among the throng at anyrate.

Aunt Phyllis took Agnes's arm, while the rest lingered for a moment to shake hands with some friends.

"Agnes," said Miss Headley, "what has come to John; he looks different?"

Agnes pressed her aunt's arm, and whispered. "Don't say a word, auntie; but *God* has been speaking to him."

[104]

Aunt Phyllis gazed at her, then, with a wondrous gladness in her pale face, turned homewards.

They all separated at their different doors. "The children," as they were called, promising to come in at the right time.

"No fear of our punctuality to-day, auntie," said John, smiling.

"I don't know," answered his aunt. "I have known unpunctual people as late on great occasions as on small."

"Have you? Then we shall prove ourselves, I hope, to be not unpunctual people."

They ran up their own steps and found Hugh taking off his coat in the hall.

"Make haste, Hugh," said John; "auntie has been giving us a lecture on not being late."

"I don't call it much of a lecture," said Alice. "Aunt Phyllis never lectures."

The girls went upstairs "to make themselves smart," as Hugh called it, and the two brothers walked into the dining-room.

John glanced at Hugh, but his face did not invite conversation, so he took up his new book and sat down in the window.

"What a smell of beer!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I wonder what it is?"

Hugh turned scarlet. "I've had a glass," he said defiantly.

[105]

"*You?*" said John, too surprised to hide his grieved dismay.

"There's no sin in that, I hope," answered Hugh coldly.

John thought a moment. "No—no, Hugh, I don't know that there is."

"Then why blame a fellow?"

"I don't think I blamed you; at least, not in words. But——"

"Have it out then. Cut me up to your heart's content."

"I wouldn't for the world, Hugh, dear boy. What would father have wished you to do?"

"He never bound us."

"I think he did. He never thought we should wish to take any till we were of an age to decide for ourselves."

"Don't you call fourteen old enough? Tom says he calls it absurd to tie us down to an idea."

"Tom knows nothing about it, Hugh."

"How doesn't he?"

"Nothing about father's opinions, nor the principle of the thing."

"Do you mean to say father has ever forbidden me?"

"Perhaps not in so many words."

"Do you think he would have, if I had waited to ask him?"

"I believe so."

"I did not do it as an act of disobedience," said Hugh, "and your making it out so is horrid. I thought I was free to take it if I liked, so long as I didn't take much." [106]

John sat down by the fire, his face grave and troubled.

"Hugh," he exclaimed, in a beseeching tone, "say you won't be tempted to take it again till father comes home. Oh, Hugh, I would give everything I possess if you hadn't!"

Hugh was silent. In his present mood he did not feel inclined to promise.

"Where's the harm?" he asked at last.

"Father trusted us not to take it till we were old enough to judge of its dangers; he said we must take his judgment till then."

"And how long was that to last?"

"I don't know, but I was quite willing to leave it till then. Hugh, what does our text say, as father is not here?"

John's voice was low, and his face full of feeling.

"I hadn't *that* to look at out there!" murmured Hugh.

"No. Oh, Hugh, *say* you will not again till they come home?"

"I'm sure I wish I had not, now you say so much about it. John, you won't tell the girls?"

"Not 'the girls;' but I must tell Agnes."

"Then I shan't promise!"

John was staggered for a moment, but after an instant he said:

"I must not do evil that good may come. I'm sure you will think better of it, Hugh dear; and it would be such a comfort to me if you would." [107]

"At anyrate don't tell Agnes to-day, till I have had time to think it over. Do as much as that for me, John."

"I think I may promise that," answered John. "Hugh, we've had such a beautiful sermon this morning on, 'Able to keep you from falling;' it has helped me ever so much."

Then John left the room, and Hugh got up and walked round the table, and stood in front of the new frame: he stood long and silently, and did not move till the others came in.

"You are not dressed," said Alice; "we shall be late after all!"

"I shan't take long," said Hugh, hurriedly leaving the room.

"There is time yet," said John; "don't be a fidget, Alice. Is Minnie going to take her beloved baby?"

"Of course I am. Do you suppose I'm such a bad mamma that I should neglect my children?"

John laughed merrily. "Sometimes mothers like to show them off; that's one way, you know. Minnie."

"Well, you're not a mother, so you can't judge," answered Minnie saucily.

"Oh, that's it! Very well. But if you don't mind, I'll play 'father;' and see if you don't find the tables are turned." [108]

John shook his head so comically that Minnie hugged her new treasure closer, and retired behind Agnes, who said:

"You may trust John, Minnie; he will not do you or Dolly any harm."

"But I don't like being teased," said Minnie, looking shy; "I'd a great deal rather not, please John."

Just then Hugh came in, looking very fresh and nice, and the girls threw on their shawls and went in next door, bonnetless for once.

As they all crowded up their grandmama's steps, John felt a twitch at his coat, and Hugh's voice whispered:

"I'm awfully sorry now, John; and I'll promise."



[109]

CHAPTER XIV.

CHRISTMAS-DAY.

Though it was only three o'clock on this Christmas-day, the curtains of their grandmother's pleasant drawing-room were drawn, the gas was lighted, and everything was as bright and cosy as possible.

"Hurrah for Christmas!" said Hugh, sitting down on a stool at his aunt's feet.

She smiled, glancing up at her three nieces in their soft, warm, white dresses, so sweet and simple; their only ornament, a rosebud on a spray of maidenhair, which John had procured for them at Covent Garden late the evening before.

"Now, 'ain't they a pictur'?" he asked, bending to kiss his grandmother, though he had seen her once before that day, for he had run in the first thing to wish her a happy Christmas.

Their grandmother looked as if she thought so.

"Are you very hungry, dears?" asked Aunt Phyllis.

"Not particularly," answered Agnes; "we had some biscuits when we came home."

"Grandmama did not wish to dine before four, but I am afraid this will seem a long hour to you."

"Oh, no," answered John, "we are not so famished as all that."

"I have brought down some old interesting books for you boys," said Mrs. Headley, "and I want Agnes to help me with this piece of work."

She held up a roll of coarse canvas, only just begun, and asked Agnes to spread it out on the hearthrug.

Hugh had to get up, which he did with a lazy groan, while the girls took the different corners and held them down, Hugh taking a fourth, for the canvas would roll up again.

"Grandmama, what a lordly piece of work," said Agnes; "it will be a long task."

"Yes," answered Mrs. Headley; "but do you guess what it is?"

John, who was standing behind the rest, made them laugh by saying:

"I expect it's a mat for a flower vase."

"I expect nothing of the kind," said Hugh, bending down to examine it; "but I shall not hazard an opinion till the rest have ventured to say."

Their grandmother looked amused. "Well?" she asked, turning to Alice.

"I should say it is a fender-stool."

[110]

[111]

"It is too coarse," suggested wise little Minnie.

"And much too wide," said John.

"Then I'll tell you," laughed Hugh; "for I believe I'm right."

"As usual," stuck in Alice mischievously.

"Oh, hush!" said Aunt Phyllis, looking up, "it is Christmas-day."

"I'm afraid Christmas-day is not a coat of steel mail, auntie," said Hugh.

"Steel mail?" she asked, wondering at his serious tone.

"Doesn't make us quite invulnerable."

"No, no; nothing does that while we have such a traitor inside us; but it does help us to have goodwill to men."

Hugh glanced at John—a glance which was noticed but not understood by several there.

"But Hugh has not told us after all what he guesses about grandmama's work," said Aunt Phyllis.

"It's a mat to put in front of your stand of flowers."

"You are nearest," said his grandmother, smiling, "but you are not quite right."

"Then what is it, grandma?" asked Minnie.

"It is a worked hearthrug for your dear mother and father, which I hope to get finished by the time they come home."

"Oh!" exclaimed Minnie, opening her eyes very wide, "will it ever get done?"

[112]

"Yes; if I have health and strength," answered Mrs. Headley.

"I am sure they will like it very much," said Alice; "but what is Agnes to help in?"

"Only to plan out the pattern at the corners for me."

"You can buy these things traced out," said Hugh, "for I've seen them tied up by the corners in the fancy shops."

"You have not seen *these* things," said his grandmother, "they are far too old-fashioned to suit peoples' notions now-a-days."

"Well, if it's all like the piece you've done they haven't got good taste, that's all I can say."

Mrs. Headley then told Agnes where her difficulty lay, and she and the two boys were soon deep in the discussion of how the pattern was to be "mitred" for the corner, the boys going down on their knees and showing the greatest interest.

Aunt Phyllis stood looking on with a smile, happy in seeing four people entirely happy, content to leave her advice out, if an hour should be passed in peaceful occupation.

Minnie had turned to her beloved doll, and while the others were so busy Alice condescended to draw near her, and was soon playing with it as heartily as her little sister.

All were surprised when at four o'clock the dinner bell pealed forth, and John exclaimed:

[113]

"Auntie, we've accomplished it! I really thought it never was going to come."

"I'm 'going to come' down to dinner," said Hugh, "so help me roll it up, John, for grandmama's awfully particular about her work, arn't you grandma?"

Mrs. Headley nodded, well pleased with the compliment, and then John gave his arm to his grandmother, and they all went down.

When dinner was over they returned to the drawing-room, and their aunt produced some new games which she had been half over London to procure for them.

They all gathered round the oval table, which stood in one corner, and quickly took up the idea of the game, Aunt Phyllis making one of them. Minnie was too young for what Hugh called its intricacies, and contented herself with dividing her attention in a threefold manner between her grandmother, her doll, and the cat.

After tea they sang together, and the girls played a duet which they had practised for the occasion, finishing with some hymns in which all could join.

"This has been a happy Christmas in spite of their being away," said Alice, sighing deeply, as they stood round the fire before going home.

"And yet you sigh," said Hugh.

"Yes," answered Alice; "I do wish they were here, and I do wonder how they are getting on; but all the same, I've had a happy day."

[114]

"That's right, my dear," said Aunt Phyllis; "I am sure your dear parents would be glad to know it."

They stood soberly thinking for a few minutes. Agnes's eyes resting on John's face with an earnest look.

"For some things I wish they could know," she said at last.

"So do I," said Alice; but Agnes noticed that John and Hugh said nothing.

When they went home they found a fire in the dining-room, but Agnes proposed they should go at once to bed.

"May I help you to lock up, instead of John?" asked Hugh.

Agnes looked surprised, but said "Yes," though she would much have preferred her usual companion.

The rest wished good night, and went upstairs, and Agnes and Hugh turned to the lower regions.

When they came back to the warm lighted room, and Hugh had turned out the gas, he said hesitatingly.

"Agnes, I'm afraid you will be very angry with me, very upset about it, but I never thought it was so wrong in me, or I am sure I should never have done it."

"Done what, Hugh?" asked Agnes, trembling and trying to keep her voice natural.

"I was out with Tom——"

[115]

"Yes, Hugh. Don't be afraid to say, dear; only do tell me quick."

"We were hungry, and we went in and had some lunch."

"Well?" she said, feeling as if her heart would stand still, in her fear of she knew not what.

"I was thirsty, and Tom said ginger-beer was ridiculous on Christmas-day, and he persuaded me ——"

"To do what?" asked Agnes.

"To have a glass of beer," answered Hugh very low. "I saw no harm in it, as I had not signed; but John is awfully mad with me, and I've come to see that it was utterly horrid of me not to stand up against him."

"So long as you are sorry," said Agnes with a bitter sigh.

"Agnes, I am worse than sorry; I am dreadfully ashamed."

"Nay, dear," she answered, rousing herself and putting her hand round him, "let it only draw you closer to Him who will forgive us if we ask."

"I felt I could not look anyone in the face. Ought I to have told them?"

"I hardly know. Oh, Hugh dear, it is not so much the drinking a glass of beer. I would not wish to condemn anyone for doing that, if it were all open and above board; though of course I have long ago made up my mind about it. But I think where you feel wrong has been that you *felt* you were doing what father would disapprove, and you had not courage to resist."

[116]

"Yes," said Hugh sorrowfully.

"So that is what you want to confess to Him, and ask to have pardoned?"

They were silent, looking into the fire.

"I thought you'd scold me awfully," he said at last.

"Did you?" asked Agnes; "you should go to somebody who has not sinned herself if you want that."

"But you've never been tempted to go and take advantage of your parents' being away, and do exactly as you knew they'd hate you to do."

"No," answered Agnes, "my temptations may not be the same as yours, and yet I've just as much to be sorry for when I go to my Lord as you have."

"*Just* as much?" asked Hugh, looking in her face, "do you mean that really, Agnes."

"Yes, I do. I'm thankful every day of my life, that these words are written: "Who forgiveth *all* thine iniquities."

Hugh put his arms round her.

"Then you forgive me, Agnes?" he asked.

"All my share of it, dear. But——"

"Mother and father?"

"Oh, no, I was not thinking of them! I am sure they will——"

[117]

"I know what you mean," said Hugh very softly, "and I'll go to Him."

He left the room without another word, and Agnes had to do the rest of her locking-up alone. Blinded with tears she went to every room, and then ascended to her own chamber.

Alice and Minnie were in bed, and asleep.

She went and stood at the dressing-table, slowly unpinning her rose, when her eye fell upon a Christmas card, which had been given her by Hugh himself that very morning.

"*Jesus*: for He shall save His people from their sins."

She opened her door, crossed the landing, and tapped at Hugh's.

"Look here!" she said, handing it in, and bending to kiss him.

He looked at the words, then up in her face, and there was that in his eyes which made Agnes say:

"Hugh! you've been to Him?"

And Hugh whispered an earnest "Yes."



[118]



CHAPTER XV.

WHERE ONE PUDDING WENT.

Agnes was one of those girls who loved to be a true elder sister. Many a time, when she sat down to tell a story, she would have preferred to bury herself in an interesting book, or to go on with a piece of painting, or delicate needlework; but by experience she had learned the blessedness of giving rather than taking pleasure, and her restless brothers interested for an hour, or Alice's and Minnie's hearts warmed and stirred up by a story, was, in her estimation, something accomplished for her Lord and Master.

So when the day after Christmas-day dawned, and found them all a little out of sorts, with later hours, and more excitement than usual, she took the opportunity to gather them together to hear the account of where the puddings went, and how they were received.

John threw himself into an arm-chair with a yawn, Hugh stretched himself on the sofa with his face downwards, while Alice and Minnie sat on the hearthrug resting their heads against her knee.

[119]

Agnes was not offended at her brothers' positions, knowing that their fatigued dulness meant no disrespect to her, and would soon change to interest in her narration when once she began.

"Ahem!" said Hugh.

"Now don't, Hugh, I am going to begin; but I must have time to collect my thoughts."

"I shall be asleep then," he answered. "Agnes, why do you choose such a morning to tell us? we can't do justice to you."

For answer, Agnes only smiled and began.

"'Bother the children, they are in my way from morning to night! Not a bit of peace. And how I'm to do to-morrow I don't know any more than nobody!'"

"The words were spoken by a woman who looked inexpressibly worried and tired. The room was small, the children were many, the fire was poor, and the cold was severe. As she spoke she pushed one child into one corner, another into another; she hustled a big clumsy boy away from the little fire, and she swept down some poor little playthings off the table on to the floor with a sharp rattle which betokened a breakage of a toy, such as it was.

[120]

"A bitter cry from a little pale boy, to whom this small plate had belonged, arrested the mother's attention for a moment, but only to add to her exasperation.

"'Stop yer crying,' she exclaimed, 'or I'll stop yer!' and the little fellow swallowed down his tears as best he might, and wiped the rest on his sleeve, as he bent down to gather his little sticks together, picking up the remains of his one doll's plate, which had enabled him to have imaginary dinners and teas in his play for many a day.

"The children saw that they had better make themselves scarce, and though a keen east wind and sleet raged outside on this Christmas-eve, most of them turned out into the narrow street till tea should be ready.

"When, through the uncurtained window, they could see from their mother's movements that they might venture in, they gladly once more entered the little untidy room.

"Their mother had cut them each two slices of bread and dripping, and to this they sat down with ravenous appetites. Alas! much too soon were the pieces demolished, and the crumbs picked up off the comfortless bare table.

"'Ain't there any more?' asked the elder boy.

"'No, there ain't,' said his mother sharply; all the more sharply that she would have given anything to have been able to say yes instead of no.

[121]

"The big boy looked disappointed enough, and shuffled his feet about discontentedly.

"'What have yer got for dinner to-morrow?' he asked.

"'Usual fare,' said his mother; 'there ain't nothing but bread now-a-days, and not too much of that.'

"An ominous silence brooded over the only half-satisfied children, and the mother rocked the baby to and fro with a look on her face which was both sad and hopeless.

"'Why don't we have something nice, even if father's work is short? When it's plenty I should ha' thought we might ha' saved a bit,' grumbled the eldest.

"'Save!' exclaimed the poor mother, 'why, if we've got it, you know ye eat it, and if we ain't got it, we go without.'

"'Well, I don't like not having 'nuff to eat,' said the big boy vexedly. 'I brings home all I earns, and it ain't fair.'

"'And how much have you earned *this* week?' asked his mother crossly.

"'Well, look at this weather, for yer,' answered he; 'how can us earn when no one won't build at any price?'

"'Then shut up,' answered the tired mother, 'and wait for better times.'

"She rose, and prepared to put the baby to bed. The eldest little girl washed up the few cups, while the boys began an undertoned game at tickling each other, which soon resulted in laughter and subdued noise. This brought down on them a sharp reprimand from their mother, and finally a box on the ears all round.

[122]

"Somewhat quieted, but in no good humour, they retired into a corner, and proceeded to cut up some pieces of wood which their brother's trade supplied them with. They could muster but one knife between them, but a boy cautiously crept to the cupboard and abstracted one belonging to the housekeeping, the rest watching their mother's head lest she should discover the act of disobedience; for such it was in this little home, where a lost knife would be a serious misfortune.

"At last the baby was carried upstairs for the night, and the mother descended with her hands free for the time.

"'Off to bed you go,' she said to the next three, who were crowding over the little fire.

"There was no objection for once, but just as the little girl of ten years old was taking the lamp to light them to bed a knock came at the door and startled them all.

"The girl set down the light and opened the door.

"'Why if it ain't Miss Agnes Headley;' said the mother. 'Come in, miss, do.'

"'No thank you, I have only come to bring you a little present for Christmas, and I hope you will have a happy day,' said Miss Headley.

[123]

"The big boy jumped up in a moment, and took it from her, with a 'thank ye, miss,' which meant a great deal; but Miss Headley did not wait, and they closed the door from the bitter wind, while all crowded round the table in anxious expectation.

"At the top of the parcel was an immense Christmas pudding, of a size to satisfy the appetites of even that numerous party. On it was pinned a paper with these words written: 'This pudding is cooked, but must be boiled for an hour and a half to warm it through. The cloth is for you.'

"A shout of pleasure was forced from the delighted family as they viewed their promised treat.

"Under the pudding, which had been wrapped up in a whole newspaper, lay an old jacket, a comforter, a worn pair of trousers, and a frock for the girl of ten. Last of all was a piece of stout paper on which someone (Hugh Headley I think) had painted these words: 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

"On the back of this was written, 'Please pin this up on the wall for a Christmas text.'

"The eldest boy produced two or three nails, and had put it over the mantelshelf before they could say a word, and then, as the mother reminded them the pudding would come all the sooner for going to bed, they took her advice and disappeared, all but the big boy, who hung behind to say, 'I'm mortal hungry, mother, I suppose you ain't got a crust?' [124]

"Half an hour before she would have answered 'no' hastily enough, but there were tears in her eyes as she handed him the bit of bread which was to have served for her supper, as she said:

"'I'm sorry, boy, it's all so short, but you know what yer boots cost last week, and you can't have everything.'

"'Good-night, mother,' he said, stooping to give her a rough kiss; 'but it *is* hard to be hungry.'

"When the little door had closed upon her children the mother sat down in a chair with her hands drooping in her lap. Then she wiped away the unwonted tears as she looked round at the package on the table, and then back at the bright text in front of her. It was that text which had softened her heart, and made her cry. It was that text which had suddenly reminded her of old days when she had thought more of these things than she did now.

"'Come unto Me, all ye that are heavy laden.'

"The tired, worried, over-wrought mother buried her face in her hands. Long she sat and wept.

"'I thought He had forgotten me,' she whispered. And then she rose up and made the room ready for the father, repeating softly to herself all the while, 'I will give you rest, I will give you rest.' [125]

"After some time, much later than she had expected, the well-known footstep was heard at the door.

"The mother knew before the father entered that the foot bore a more cheerful sound than had been of late, and his words corroborated her thought.

"'Well, wife, so here you are all alone! Why, so they're all gone to roost!'

"To get the sooner to Christmas-day," answered the mother, her eyes falling, as his did, on the table scattered over with the things they had received.

"They needed very little explanation, and meanwhile the father was fumbling in his pocket for something, which he now laid on the table by his wife.

"'That's my share for to-morrow,' he said. 'I stayed out all these hours on the chance of a job, and at last I got one. A gentleman couldn't get a cab nohow, everything's engaged on this wet night, to say nought of its being Christmas; so I carried his heavy portmanteau nigh on four miles, and he gave me this half-crown. And now I want my supper, wife.'

"The mother rose quickly and stirred the little fire. Already the kettle boiled, and the cup was set on the table with perhaps, unusual care. But the fare was indeed scant—a piece of bread cut off for the father before she had begun for the children and a bit of dripping. Meanwhile she was hastily putting on bonnet and shawl. [126]

"'Where to?' asked he, surprised; 'there ain't no hurry to get a bit of meat. The butchers will be open for hours yet; so sit still for once.'

"'I shan't be a minute,' she said, and was gone before he could object.

"It was not much more ere she appeared again, bringing in her hand a large loaf, and a herring which she immediately placed on the fire, while she cut some fresh slices of the day-old bread, with a heart filled with pleasure that she had it to give him.

"'I've been looking at yon words,' he said, 'and they seem to say to me as we haven't thought so much of Him as we should, eh, old woman? We couldn't have a better day nor to-morrow to begin, eh?'

"'I've begun to-night,' she said. 'I've forgot Him lately, but He ain't forgot me!'"

Alice looked up now, as Agnes finished her narration, and said wonderingly, "I can't think how you know it, Agnes."

"I will not keep you in suspense then," she answered. "Mrs. Freeman came round early on Christmas-day to thank us for the things, and in a few simple words explained her despair and her comfort, and how the words, 'Come unto *Me*,' had put a new life before her, a life of rest and peace, even in the midst of outward turmoil. Our little effort for her, you see, did even more than we could have hoped."

[127]

"Have you any more stories?" asked Hugh.

"Not to-day. Minnie and I saw other things, but you will have to wait for those till we have another opportunity."



[128]

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RAG CUSHION.

Well, Agnes?" said John, one sombre afternoon soon after Christmas, as the brothers and sisters gathered round the fire with a heap of nuts each, which they intended to enjoy.

"Well?" echoed Agnes.

"Now for the stories of the other puddings."

"Oh, very well," said Agnes; "to resume, then."

"After we had left Mrs. Freeman's door, Minnie and I went a little further up the street. We were not sorry, I assure you, to get rid of our first heavy parcel, for our arms ached with it. At last, in the wind, and rain, and darkness, we found the house where Mrs. Hales has her home. This, you must know, consists of one little stuffy room on the second floor.

"We groped our way up the dark staircase, and, after some fumbling, we found the door of the back room and knocked at it.

[129]

"A feeble voice bade us 'Come in,' and we found ourselves in the presence of the dear old woman.

"Well, my dear,' she said, holding out her thin hand, 'so you've come, like a Christmas blessing, to see me.'

"We sat down by her, Minnie holding the parcel in her lap. I was quite used, as you know, to her ways, so let her take her own plan, as on other days. She was seated in a high-backed chair, with an old shawl tucked behind her head as a support, and her feet resting on a small wooden box in front of the very tiniest fire you ever did see.

"She seemed very silent after the first greeting; so, as Minnie was most impatient to open our package, I asked her if she felt equal to looking at what we had brought for her.

"She assented, and Minnie's little eager fingers soon untied the strings, and presented your bright cushion, John and Hugh.

"Her poor pale face smiled when she saw it, and she asked me to draw out the old shawl, and replace it by the cushion.

"And now the shawl will do for my knees,' she said, 'which do feel the cold very much.'

"And here is a little Christmas pudding for you, and a tin of groats, and a trifle to buy some coals with, and a text.'

"My dear,' she said, 'you are very loving, and the Lord is very loving, and He has sent me just what I wanted most, and that's the way with the Lord, my dear. He knows about us—just all about us. He knows my head has been weary enough without a cushion; He knows my knees have been cold; He knows I wanted some gruel; and when He brings me near enough to Him to say from my heart—truly, my dear, from my very heart—"Dear Lord, I'm willing to wait Thy time, Thou knowest best for me"—then, my dear, He lovingly sends you round (you don't mind my saying *He* sent you, my dear) with just the very things of all others I wanted. He's a *dear* Lord.'

[130]

"There were tears on her wrinkled cheeks as she laid her hand on Minnie's little one, which rested on her knee.

"Here's the text,' said Minnie, holding up the one you painted for her, John.

"My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.'

"Ah, my dear,' she continued, 'and it isn't only our needs for this world. We are very apt to think, all of us, that it means food, and clothes, and fire; but it don't, my dear—not only that—it's that He supplies *everything*—He supplies grace to bear, patience to wait, faith to trust, and hope to look forward to the time when we shall be with Him for ever.'

"She looked up now, beyond the walls of the little room, beyond the dingy paper, on to the everlasting Home which is coming to all who wait for Him.

[131]

"When she brought her mind back, as it were, from these thoughts, I asked her if she could bear two or three nails driven in somewhere. She looked a little surprised, but I produced Hugh's little hammer, and soon had put her text where she could see it without turning her poor head. Then I drew forth from the bottom of the parcel the unworn end of our old wool door-mat, and with her permission nailed it securely to the top of her wooden footstool, and when we had seen her with great satisfaction place her feet upon it again, we left her, while we retraced our steps homewards, the Christmas bells ringing in my ears all the way with these words borne upon them, 'My God shall supply all your need—all your need—all your need.'"

"Who thought of the piece of old mat for her stool?" asked Hugh.

"I think I did," said Agnes. "I was reading to her one day, when I noticed how thin her shoes were, and how comfortless the old box looked. But she never repines; though she has only that little miserable room, which she never leaves, she says not a word, but is always full of thanksgiving for her many mercies."

"I believe the less people have the more grateful they are," said Alice.

"I don't see that at all!" exclaimed Hugh. While Agnes said:

[132]

"Oh, no! that isn't it, Alice. But sometimes, when people lose all earthly possessions, they are brought to seek that great heavenly possession which makes up for every other loss. That's what it is."

"Then the humdrum people who are just comfortable don't get such a good chance as the poor ones, according to you, Agnes," Hugh observed.

She shook her head, smiling. "Sometimes they have to lose something they value very much before they can be brought to receive the great possession."

"What sort of thing?" asked Hugh quickly.

"I do not know," answered Agnes thoughtfully. "Each one of us values some one thing more than another; and if we love it better than Him, it will have to go."

"But what, Agnes? Can't you say the kind of things?"

"Our own way sometimes," she answered slowly, "that's often hardest of all; at least to some people."

"Yes," said Hugh, laughing a little; "some of us always do think we know best."

At this moment a diversion occurred.

"You're wanted in the drawing-room, Master Hugh," said the maid; "there's the same young gentleman that came on Christmas-day, and his sister."

Hugh turned very red, and was hastening away, when he came back to say, "Agnes, come and help a fellow, will you?"

[133]

Agnes followed him upstairs, wondering what they had come for.

"Good afternoon, Miss Headley," said the young lady, bending, but not offering her hand. "My brother asked me to come and intercede with you to allow your young people to join our little party next week?"

"I?" echoed Agnes, surprised. "I really did not know they were asked. Hugh, did you forget to tell me?"

Agnes felt uncomfortable, and wished Hugh had explained before they came up.

"Well, no," answered Hugh; "I told Tom we couldn't come."

"He said," answered Miss Radnor, "that he was sure his sister would not approve."

"It would have been better for Hugh to have asked me," answered Agnes; "but now will you kindly tell me what it is you wish?"

Miss Radnor looked as if it were all a great bore, but answered politely:

"Tom has set his heart on having Hugh and his two younger sisters to his party next week. Will you allow them to come? I believe they are to refer to you, as their parents are away."

"Thank you very much," said Agnes, hesitating a little, "you are very kind, but I believe my father would prefer our declining."

[134]

"But why?" asked the girl; "I really cannot take no for an answer."

"I should not feel at liberty to make any fresh acquaintances while our parents are away."

"How ridiculous! How can a schoolfellow be a fresh acquaintance?"

"I am sorry to seem discourteous," said Agnes gently; "but I know my parents' feelings on these subjects, and must beg you to excuse us till their return."

"Oh, just as you like, *of course*," said the girl, rising; "I don't think we should have done your charge any harm."

"I am sure you would not mean to," answered Agnes gravely—so gravely that Miss Radnor flushed angrily.

"Are we such undesirable acquaintances?"

"I did not mean that," answered Agnes, raising her eyes steadily, "but it is so difficult in these days to keep in the path——"

"What path?" she asked impatiently.

"The narrow path that leadeth to Life," Agnes answered very low. "Do not be vexed with me, we are strangers, and may never meet again; but we do want to keep in that, cost what it may."

Miss Radnor laughed haughtily. "I had no idea you were so religious!" she exclaimed. "I beg your pardon for coming; good-day."

With that she swept out of the room, followed by Tom, who only gave Hugh a passing grimace, which Hugh was at a loss to interpret. Did it mean sympathy with him, or with his sister?

[135]

"Hugh," said Agnes, "you should have told me."

"I never thought there would be another word. What a hateful girl, Agnes."

"I do not suppose she is; though I can't say I admired her."

"She looked round on all our things as though they were dirt!"

"Nonsense. But I daresay she is richer than we are."

"Oceans! They have twice as big a house."

"And half as big hearts perhaps," laughed Agnes. "Oh, Hugh, I pity that poor Tom."

"So do I, now I see what sort of a sister he's got. But he doesn't think her bad; he told me she was 'a stunner.'"

"I daresay. Well dear, are you satisfied with what I said? I wish I had said it better."

Hugh kissed her. "I couldn't have had half the courage you had," he answered; "and they'll be all the better for it some day, depend upon it. Don't look downhearted, you're a dear old girl."



[136]



CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAST PUDDING.

Agnes and her brothers and sisters ran down the steps of their London home, one frosty morning towards the end of the holidays, and turned their steps toward Regent's Park. While the roar of omnibuses was for ever in their ears there could be little talking, but when they began to find quieter streets they gathered close to Agnes, begging for "a story." This was a usual custom with them, and Agnes quickly responded by beginning cheerfully:

"Oh, yes, you have never had the account of our other visit on Christmas-eve; so I must begin where I left off last time.

"When Minnie and I reached home, with the bells ringing the refrain of peace and contentment, we just came in to warm our fingers, and then started forth again on our last errand. This time our parcel was even heavier than before, and we were very glad when we reached the house to which our steps were bound.

[137]

"House it was not, being just a large room over a stable, where, as you know, Martha, our former housemaid, lives, since she married Jim, the cabman.

"We picked our way as well as we could over the stones, slippery and wet with mud, and at last came to the door leading to the staircase which runs up by the side of the coach-house. We found it ajar, and as the bell was broken we made our way up in the darkness. All was pitchy black, but a baby wailing above told us there must be somebody within. We found the door of the room at the top, and knocked. A voice, sharp and quick, which I should hardly have known for Martha's soft one, answered, 'What do you want?' and on this invitation we entered.

"No light was in the room, but the gas-lamp of the yard shed flickering and uncertain gleams through the window into the barest and untidiest of chambers.

"We could see, as our eyes became used to the dim light, that Martha was seated near the empty grate, holding the baby in her lap, while three little mites were huddled up against her knees on the floor.

"Desolate indeed everything seemed.

"'Why, Martha,' said I, 'are you all in the dark? Shall I find a light for you?'

[138]

"'Is it you, Miss Agnes?' said Martha, in somewhat of her old tone of respect. 'I beg your pardon, miss, but I'm that harassed with all my troubles, that I don't rightly know what I'm doing.'

"'What is it?' asked I, advancing. 'What has come to you?'

"'Everything bad,' she moaned, in the saddest of tones. 'You know I would marry Jim, though Mrs. Headley told me he was not a steady man, and too soon I've found her words true; we've been going on from bad to worse, till one by one all my nice clothes went, then our bits of furniture, and now we haven't a morsel to eat, nor a scrap of fire, nor an end of candle!'

"Too utterly miserable to hide her woe under her usual mask of reserve, and encouraged by the darkness, she continued in a voice husky and dry with suppressed grief:

"'And it's all through drink! He used to be kind to me; but that's long past. Then, when he missed the things in the house, he used to ask angrily for them, and when I told him we couldn't starve, and if he spent the money on drink we couldn't have food, then he'd up and beat me.'

"'Oh, hush!' I whispered, 'don't let the little ones hear you say so.'

"'I don't care,' she answered, 'they've seen it often enough, and nothing matters now; here's my baby, my only boy, dying of hunger!'

"I had sat hitherto spell-bound by her words, but now I started to my feet. 'Dying!' I said, 'What can I get quickest?'

[139]

"'Nought'll save him now,' she said, without a shade of hope in her voice; 'but if you can get him a drop of milk, it would ease me to think he hadn't died hungry.'

"There was a sob now in her tearless voice; but not stopping to say a word, I hastily found the

door, and descended the steps.

"You may be sure it was not long before I had got a little milk in a can from a neighbouring shop, and a bit of candle which the woman lent me at my earnest request, and I ran back with them as fast as my feet could carry me.

"Happily a match was forthcoming, and the milk was soon put to the baby's lips. He was about eight months old, but was shrunken up to skin and bone. He took with great difficulty a little of the milk, and then nestled again against his mother.

"Why didn't you tell us?' I asked, forced to say the words.

"I couldn't; there, I couldn't, miss. I've never begged yet, and I can't begin. I can die, and they can die, but I can't beg.'

"Oh dear, Martha!" I said, my voice choked with tears, 'if we'd only known!'

"She wept now, hanging her head over the baby with despairing sobs.

"But aren't you all hungry?' I said suddenly.

[140]

"She nodded her head.

"Again I flew out, leaving poor little scared Minnie sitting there; and hurrying off to a baker's, bought a stale loaf, and hastened back, ordering on my way a little coal and wood.

"In a few minutes Minnie and I had drawn the shivering little mites from their mother's knees, and had set them near the fireplace, in which I hoped there would soon be a blaze, and had given them some slices of bread, while I handed a piece to poor broken-hearted Martha.

"Then the coals came lumbering up the stairs, and, thanks to mother's teaching, Minnie and I quickly built up a warm little fire, and we had time to look round. Then our eyes fell on the parcel. We opened it with all speed, and arrayed the little cold mortals in the old clothes we had brought, and when the pudding was laid aside for another time, I drew out our third text, that it too might carry its message to these sad hearts: 'Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.'

"Rich!' said Martha, with a hoarse laugh, reading the words in spite of herself with her dim eyes, as I pinned them up, 'it's little riches I shall ever see!'

"But what about the baby? If he should die now, will he be poor then, do you think?' I asked softly.

[141]

"She moaned as she hugged him tighter. 'I love him more than anything in this world, or out of it,' she exclaimed.

"And perhaps—oh, Martha, I don't know—but perhaps God loved you too well to let you. You would rather be rich with him there, some day, for ever, than just keep him a little while here?'

"She shook her head; but while she rocked him in her arms, her eyes were fastened on the paper before her, and her pale lips repeated, 'He became poor, He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.'

"We stopped a little while longer, till we had seen the poor little dears cuddled together asleep under their mother's only remaining shawl, and with a promise of sending round the first thing in the morning, and that I thought I knew of some work which I might get for her, Minnie and I came away, too sad at heart to say a word to each other.

"But when I laid down that night in our warm snug bed, Minnie, who was awake, whispered to me softly, 'It was kind of Him to become poor for us, Agnes, wasn't it? For what comfort could we give her if He hadn't?'

"And I thought so too, and could not but thank Him over again before I slept for His love in taking our flesh and bearing our sorrows, that we might some day share His glory."

[142]



CHAPTER XVIII.



call it extremely selfish of you and John to have had this secret all this time, and never to have told us," said Hugh, on the morning before New Year's Day, as they all sat at breakfast.

Agnes looked up over the "cosy," a surprised hurt look overshadowing the brightness of her face.

"You do not *really* think it unkind, Hugh?" she asked; "you are only trying to tease me."

"I'm not joking at all," answered Hugh, dropping his eyes so as not to meet her beseeching ones. "For you and John to have kept this to yourself all this time is exceedingly selfish."

"Why, I didn't know," said Minnie.

"Nor I," said Alice.

"That's different!" exclaimed Hugh hastily; "you're *girls*; but I'm only two years younger than John, and I don't see any reason why you should not have told me."

[143]

"There was no reason," said Agnes gently, "except just this: Mother thought that it would be a little pleasure for New Year's Eve, and a secret that is told to everyone is no secret."

"But I might have been told; I should not have let it out like a girl."

"I dare say," said Alice, her eyes sparkling with displeasure; "and so because we are girls we are not to be trusted with anything, while because you are boys—for no other reason—you—"

She paused, Agnes's face stopped her, and then her eyes turned to John's, and she noticed that his were fixed earnestly on the text, which was just touched by the morning sunshine, as it crept silently along the wall—

"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

"Oh, John," she said softly; "I quite forgot."

And then they all noticed that John had not forgotten.

At Hugh's first angry word, just as he was turning to answer, the light on the text caught his attention, and his promise to Agnes flashed across him; his promise that while their parents were away he would try with might and main to refrain from quarrelling with his brother.

There was a few moments' silence, while each of the five assembled there had time to remember their resolves, and to ask for strength to keep them.

[144]

At last Alice spoke. "Do you mind telling us, Agnes, what you are going to do then?"

"Well, you know my morning Sunday-school class that I have given up to another teacher while mother is away?"

Alice nodded.

"Mother thought it would be nice if we asked them to tea to-day, and hoped it would keep them together better; and then John and I have been devising how we could please them."

"Did you think of a Christmas-tree?" asked Hugh eagerly.

Agnes shook her head. "It was of no use thinking of it; we hadn't money enough. No, we thought of games; only the boys are apt to get rough, and without mother and father it seemed a great undertaking."

"So it is," said Alice; "for don't you remember what a dreadful noise they made one year when we had them?"

"Yes," answered John; "so, as I was passing along the Strand the day after father went to America, I noticed 'magic-lanterns for school treats,' posted up very large in a window, and it gave me the idea of using mine for our little treat, and hiring a few more slides to make it last longer."

"Yes, we haven't so very many slides," said Minnie, considering.

"Pretty well," answered John; "but at anyrate two dozen more will be an advantage."

[145]

"And after the magic-lantern is over?" asked Alice.

"Agnes is going to talk to them, or tell them a story, and after that they'll have an orange."

"Oh!" said Minnie, "I shall like that."

"Which," asked Hugh, "the 'talk,' or the 'story,' or the 'orange'?"

Minnie blushed, but after the late little breeze determined not to be vexed, and answered, "You know perfectly well what I meant, Hugh; so it's no good trying to make out anything else."

"Do you want me to do anything to-day. Agnes?" asked Alice.

"Of course I do," exclaimed Agnes; "I have a perfect list of things to be done. Cakes to be made by Alice; room to be got ready by Hugh; chairs brought from everywhere, seats devised, flowers arranged—there, I can't tell you all till we are in it."

"And is there anything for me to do?" asked Minnie, getting up and coming round to lean against her sister's shoulder.

"Yes, I want you to be willing to run messages all day long, and never to mind how often Alice sends you upstairs, or Hugh sends you downstairs, but to have feet of love for to-day."

"All right," said Minnie.

"And then for pleasant things, between whiles, you shall go to buy the oranges, and some buns, and some gingerbread nuts, and so on, and we'll have I hope as happy a day as any since they went away." [146]

As Agnes turned at the door to give a parting direction, Hugh put his arm round her and said humbly:

"I'm awfully sorry I was so stupid, Agnes—so wrong—but I'm for ever forgetting."

And Agnes said, "I'm sorry too, Hugh, that we made a secret of it, for I see now it would have been nicer for you to have known; but I didn't mean to be unkind."

After that they worked on happily together all the morning, though Hugh felt a twinge whenever any one remarked, as Minnie and Alice were apt to do all day, "How funny it seems not to have known."

"It's the last secret I'll have, John, that I can help," said Agnes to him when they were left alone for a few minutes, and were busy pinning up the sheet.

"Yes," answered John, reaching down from the top of the steps, where he was astride, and taking the corner from her outstretched arm, "Yes, Agnes. I don't believe in secrets."

"Nor I," answered Agnes, "I have seen it before, and it will this time be a lesson to me."

"But we didn't quarrel over it, exactly."

"Oh, no; but we might have if you had not remembered in time. I do not mean that I defend Hugh for being so cross over it, but I see once more that nobody likes to have things kept and then given all of a heap." [147]

"You are very lucid."

"Well," she answered, laughing and blushing. "I remember on my seventeenth birthday you all thought it would be nice to give me my presents at tea, and so they were kept all day, and it was a wretched birthday."

John was descending the ladder. "I never knew that," he said.

"Oh, it is not worth remembering," said Agnes; "I only thought of it as an illustration. It was not that I cared so much about the presents, you know, John, it was because everything seemed incomplete. After all I had a much better present than I ever dreamed of, for father gave me my dear little watch."

"I see what you mean," said John. "Now, Agnes, for the other end; that hangs very straight, doesn't it?"

"Nicely. This long curtain-pole is a fine idea for magic-lantern exhibitions."

"Yes, I am glad you thought of it. Agnes, how do you like being left to ourselves?"

"Not at all," answered Agnes decidedly.

"Are we better or worse than you expected?"

"I am worse—you are better," she answered, laughing a little; but it was as near a sob as a laugh.

"How?" asked John earnestly. [148]

"Well, I mean that in one way, and not in another. I think I expected we should all be more perfect than we are."

"You did not expect me to break my promise, for instance?" asked John gravely.

"I hardly think you did. Oh no, John, you have been better in every way than I could have hoped, and I have been worse!"

"I don't see it," he answered fondly.

"But I do; I trusted in myself too much."

"We all do. Agnes, I'm inclined to think this being left to ourselves will turn out for our good."

"I am sure I hope so."

"Don't be desponding. Look at Hugh! Who ever heard him acknowledge himself in the wrong before? and yet just now, you know what he said to you? He would not have done that a month ago."

Agnes looked up. "Do you think so?" she said. "Oh, John, what a comforter you are."

"Then cheer up. Are you not doing what He would have you to do?"

"I try to."

"Then thank Him," said her brother cheerfully, "and take courage."

All was in readiness by the hour fixed for the arrival of their little guests, and very punctually to it, in fact a quarter of an hour before five o'clock. Minnie, who was always the one to watch at the window, announced that two of them were loitering about outside.

[149]

"How cold they'll be," she said pitifully.

"Not they," said Hugh.

"I should be," answered Minnie.

"Oh, *you!* but these poor little mites are used to be in the streets all day."

"So they are. But I wonder if Agnes will let me bring them in?"

"Not yet," answered John, who came in at that moment, "wait till it strikes five; as Hugh says, they are used to it."

Before the hand was on the hour, twelve or fourteen children crowded up the steps, and one of them, the boldest of the party, ventured to give a single 'dab' at the door, which brought Hugh to open it; and then began the disrobing, which orderly John had promised to superintend.

They were ushered into the dining-room, where tea was laid all ready, and it did not take them long to sit down and begin.

After all were satisfied, the table was pushed back into a corner, and in a few moments John and Hugh packed the children round the room so that all could see well, Minnie squeezing herself into a little corner by the sheet, where she would not have at all a good view, remarking, "Of course it does not matter a bit about *me*."

John smiled, but did not see where he could put her better, and, after all, was it not her little offering of love to her Master?

When it was all over, and the views had been seen, and the story told, and the oranges eaten, and the happy children gone, Hugh said:

[150]

"I *have* enjoyed it."

"So did everyone, I think," remarked Alice.

"In spite of its having been a secret," he went on, smiling; "but another time (though I oughtn't to have been cross over it), if you want to give a fellow pleasure, don't surprise him."

"We will not," said Agnes, glad to see the twinkle in Hugh's eye.

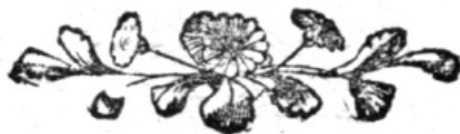
And then tired-out they hastily ate some supper and hurried off to bed, too fatigued to fulfil their intention of sitting up to see the year out.

"I'll set the alarum and wake you all," said John.

So the alarum was set, and they went to bed in peaceful anticipations of waking just in time.

By-and-by it went off with a peal which always startled him in spite of his determination, and out John sprang and struck a match.

"Hugh, get up," he called, "it is ten minutes to—why it is ten minutes *past* twelve, and no good at all!"



[151]



CHAPTER XIX.

WORRIED.

Agnes, my child, being left in charge does not agree with you."

"Why, auntie?"

"Your mother will find but a shadow of the rosy girl she left behind her."

Agnes sighed, and then got up and looked in the glass.

"I do not see that I am different," she said, after a moment's contemplation.

"No, I daresay you would not notice it in yourself from day to day. But you have nothing special to trouble you, my dear, I hope?"

"Not at all, auntie. But I had no idea the anxiety of a family would be so great."

Aunt Phyllis smiled a sweet placid smile, which proceeded from a heart at rest after storms.

"You ought not to be carrying your own burdens though, dear child," she said softly.

Agnes had seated herself at her aunt's feet, on the wide stool which the children said was made on purpose for them to share, and now looked up in her aunt's face with tearful eyes. [152]

"No," she said; "that is often what grieves me. I am afraid, auntie, I thought I should be *sure* to get on, and trusted in my own cleverness too much, and then when difficulties come I get downhearted."

"And do you try the remedy of taking everything to your Lord directly it comes?"

"Yes; but things are so difficult to decide, and I am so disappointed in myself."

"You thought you were so much stronger than you find yourself?"

"Yes; and John looks up to me, and I hoped I should be a help to him; and instead I've done nothing but find out that I'm no good at all."

"I suppose you are rather tired of gazing in the looking-glass, then?" said Aunt Phyllis quaintly.

"Auntie?"

"I'd look towards the sky next, if I were you!" she added, smiling, as she got up to go and fetch some work.

Agnes was left alone; and she glanced first in the fire, and then at the mirror above her head, and then her eyes wandered to the window.

"I see!" she exclaimed, a light breaking over her downcast face; "I'm to look off to Jesus; that's what auntie means!"

That morning Agnes had passed through some of those little difficulties which so often arise in daily life. [153]

First the housemaid had accosted her with the ominous words, "Please, miss, could I speak to you?" and had thereupon given her a month's notice.

On her pressing for a reason the maid had said, with many blushes, that she was intending to be married directly her time was up.

"But can you not wait till mother comes home?" pleaded Agnes. "I trust she will be home in March; that would be only another month. Could you not arrange it so?"

But the girl persisted that she could not alter; and so Agnes had had reluctantly to make up her mind to a fresh responsibility, and determined to consult her Aunt Phyllis on the subject.

And while her mind was perturbed with the annoyance of having to install another servant in her mother's absence, came another small trouble.

Alice sauntered into the room with a book in her hand, and sat down on the hearthrug close to the fire.

"Alice dear," said Agnes looking up, "have you cleaned the bird's cage? It is the day for fresh sand."

"I did it yesterday," answered Alice absently, bending over her book.

"I think not," answered Agnes, "in fact I am sure of it; because, don't you remember, we all went out with Aunt Phyllis the moment after breakfast?" [154]

"Then it was the day before."

"So it may have been; but mother likes new sand put every other day, without fail."

"I'll see to it presently," said Alice, a little frown just settling itself on her brows.

Agnes made no further remark, though she felt ruffled, and was sure Alice would forget after all.

Then John came in. "Agnes, Hugh and I want a fire in our room. As it's the last day of the holidays, we are going to have our long-deferred turn-out."

"Very well; but, John, don't you toss everything out on the landing for me to clear up."

"Is it likely?" asked he, surprised.

Agnes did not feel as if she could look up brightly in answer, so she turned to her desk and began to search for something.

"Lost something?" asked John, bending down and looking in her face.

"I don't know," she answered, detecting a significance in his kindly tone.

He kissed her and went off, and then Hugh walked in.

"Agnes, I want to know if you could find John and me a curtain to stretch across our large room?"

"Whatever for?"

"To divide it. John likes a place to himself; we want to make it into two rooms. It has two windows, and so we are going to make ourselves cosy." [155]

"Oh, Hugh, I do not know of any curtain; I really think it will have to wait till mother comes."

"But we wanted to do it to-day. Don't you think you know of anything?"

She shook her head.

"Not an old table-cloth, or a couple of done-with window curtains?"

"I do not know in the least, and I should not like to search in mother's stores."

"She wouldn't mind."

"She might. Oh, Hugh dear, it must wait."

"Very well," answered Hugh, looking disappointed.

"Did John tell you to ask?" said Agnes.

"No, not exactly; he said he wished you could, but he was afraid it was too much bother."

"I am afraid I can't manage it," she answered regretfully.

All this time Alice's eyes had been raised from her book, as she was interested in the discussion, but as Hugh was turning to leave the room she took up her book again.

"I should think Alice would be glad to begin lessons," he observed, stopping short with his hand on the door.

There was a mischievous look in his eyes.

"I shall not," answered Alice.

"When are you to begin?"

"I don't know."

"To-morrow," answered Agnes.

"To-morrow?" echoed Alice; "I thought we should have holiday till they came back."

"What, nearly two months more to roast over the fire and read novels!" laughed Hugh.

"I don't read novels."

"Stories then."

"And I don't roast over the fire."

"What do you call this?" he asked, advancing to her and passing his hand down her shoulder. "My eye, Alice, you are next door to on fire!" [156]

"I'm not! I wish you wouldn't come bothering. Hugh."

Having lodged his bombshell he departed, leaving Alice writhing under the certainty that now "beginning lessons" was put into Agnes's head nothing would get it out again.

"I am going in to Aunt Phyllis," said her sister, getting up and putting away her desk.

"I shall come too then," said Alice.

"Do not come just yet, dear, I want to talk to auntie."

"You're always talking to auntie, I think," grumbled Alice.

"*Always?*" asked Agnes, feeling as if that were the last worry, and she could not bear more.

"Well, not always; but, Agnes, I hope you will not let her persuade you to begin school with Minnie and me to-morrow because——"

[157]

"Well?" asked Agnes.

"I don't know exactly why, but it's horrid if you do, because I haven't had half enough time; and I never *thought* we should begin when the boys did."

"I never thought anything else," answered Agnes; and then she had gone in next door with a sense of utter failure.

And so Aunt Phyllis was right when she advised her to raise her eyes heavenward.



[158]



CHAPTER XX.

A SURPRISE.

"**I** say, John, 'this 'ere' is rather tiring; and when we've done there will be nothing to show for it."

"Only our possessions will be in order, and we shall start straight for the next term."

"I don't know about that. Look at my possessions, and see if you call that 'straight'?"

John picked his way over the drawers and boxes scattered everywhere, and surveyed his brother's treasures. There they were, lying in a heap—clothes, collars, neckties, papers, nails, string, knives, corks, ships, balls, fishing tackle, all mixed up pell-mell.

"Is that your idea of tidying?" he asked.

"Yes; put 'em all together, and then you know what you have to do, and can act accordingly."

"I should think so! Act! all I can say is, I'd rather it was you than me."

"How do you do it then?" asked Hugh hopelessly, watching his brother step back to his own precincts.

[159]

"I take out one thing after another, and put those I want on the bed—so, and tear up and burn what I don't want."

"And a nice smell you make!" said Hugh, laughing.

"Eh? oh, well, that's what a fire's for, to air the room."

"With a vengeance. I wish Agnes could have found us a large rag of some sort."

"You'd have been for ever playing pranks behind it, and peeping through the holes of your 'rag;' I'm not sorry on the whole she could not."

"I shouldn't have. However, that's neither here nor there. I'm going up to the attics to find my hammer; I believe Agnes has put it away tidily."

He went off, and presently John heard him shouting for him to come up.

"What do you want?" he called in answer.

"You."

"What for?"

"A find; a grand idea."

John went up, expecting a hoax, but yet reassured by the earnestness of Hugh's tone.

"Look here," exclaimed a voice from the depths of a small attic where only a few boxes were kept, "if you don't think I've lighted on a splendid plan. Here's a room for you all ready, and we've nothing to do but carry up the bed, and there you are." [160]

By this time John stood in the low doorway of the little room, and looked round.

His mind quickly placed a little furniture round it, and hung his pictures and text on its bare walls, and in a few moments it became his own little room, full of his own things.

"Or I could have it," broke in Hugh's voice.

"Oh, no," answered John hastily, "I should like it very much. But what will Agnes say?"

"*She* won't mind so long as we do no mischief. Let's surprise her."

John looked dubious.

"It can't be any harm," said Hugh.

"I'll just go and tell her," answered John.

He ran down. "Where's Agnes?" he asked of Alice, who was still reading.

"In next door," said Alice, "at least she was, but I believe I saw her go along with grandmama just now."

"When will she be home?"

"I don't know."

"I say, Alice, you'll make yourself ill so near the fire. Where's Minnie?"

"She went in after Agnes."

John withdrew, and returned to Hugh.

"She's out, Hugh," he said.

"That's all right then. We'll have a jolly time, and get it done to surprise her." [161]

"But what about your grand heap?"

"Stuff them in again; they can't be worse than they were."

"I wonder if we ought to sort them out first?" said John, considering.

"I'm not going to; that would be no fun at all."

John yielded for a moment, then he paused.

"Hugh, Agnes would be right down vexed with us, and we should deserve it. I won't do a stroke till we've cleared this."

Hugh made a face; but when John's voice took *that* tone it was of no use objecting, so they sorted out and put up as quickly as they could, Hugh privately shirking any idea of thoroughness, till about twelve o'clock order once more reigned, and the boys' spirits began to rise.

"I say," remarked John, surveying his new domain, "I wish I'd asked Jane to clean this while we were putting up, it looks mighty dusty and queer."

"Well, we can't now," said Hugh.

"No, I daresay it would take ages."

"I can sweep it," said Hugh; "but that would be a hindrance; let's get in the things and they'll cover up the dirt."

"Nice that!" remarked John; "but as it is not *your* room it won't matter."

"No," assented Hugh; "and if it were, I should not care particularly. Now, John, what is the first thing to do?"

[162]

"Bring up the chest of drawers."

"That's my chest of drawers. You don't mean to say——"

"Well, what am I to do?" said John, pausing in this first difficulty; "you can't suppose I can go without a chest of drawers."

"No; I don't see that you can; but, then, no more can I."

"That's unanswerable; but as there's only one, what's to be done?"

"I can have it," answered Hugh slyly; "it belongs to my room!"

As his brother did not immediately reply, Hugh saw he had gained an advantage.

"Here's a go," said John, looking round in dismay. "Now I shouldn't wonder if you didn't claim the washstand too."

"Then I *will* claim it," said Hugh with a wink.

And sure enough Hugh kept the washstand.

"Well, I've got my own bed," said John; "you can't take that from under me."

Decidedly with lowered spirits he descended to see about the bedstead, unforeseen difficulties in the direction of Agnes looming before him; but the delight of planning how it was to go through the door whole, turned off his thoughts.

At last the actual moment arrived. The clothes and mattresses were heaped on Hugh's bed, and they began wheeling it about in fine style.

[163]

It was just too wide to go through the door, but the boys did not take long to turn it on its side. They had succeeded in almost clearing the back and tallest end, when the banisters proved an insuperable barrier to further progress.

"We must take it down," said John.

"I'm stuck. I say, John, did you ever happen to mistake your fingers for the painted legs?"

"Not that I know of. Look, what a precious mark you've made on the door that side."

"Where?"

"There! just where you say your fingers grazed it."

"It'll come off," said Hugh, applying his pocket-handkerchief, having first conveyed it to his tongue; but it didn't, and Hugh shrugged his shoulders.

"Lesson No. 1. Don't knock your fingers," he said.

"Lesson No. 2," remarked John. "Do you know how to take down these precious things?"

"Lesson No. 3. Shall learn."

"Then do go up and get us a screw-driver; if this comes to grief I shall tell Agnes it was all you."

"You seem afraid of Agnes," laughed Hugh.

"Not at all. But you know we are 'on the spree;' and I don't want to do what she would not like, which would be no spree."

The screw-driver was found, and then they began in earnest; but before long the bumps and scrapes brought Jane up from below.

[164]

"Now, master John, are you gone mad?" she asked.

"Don't you say a syllable, Jane, or I'll skin you," said Hugh coaxingly; "it would spoil all our fun."

"What on earth are you doing then?" she asked.

"I'll call you up to see when we've done; but do leave us now, there's a good soul."

She went down again, looking rather scared; but the cook happened to be busy, and did not notice it.

The bedstead now lay at their feet in pieces, which they quickly carried upstairs, and by-and-by were able to set up to their great satisfaction.

"Well, I call that prime," said Hugh; "now for the clothes and things."

These were soon on; and the room began to look "like a room," as John said.

"Might that window be grey ground glass, or might it be dirt?" asked Hugh, going up to examine it, and drawing his finger down it.

The question did not need answering, for he left a line of clear glass behind him.

"Wait till I've got the rest of my furniture up, and then I'll see to things," said John.

"The rest of it?" laughed Hugh. "I think this is all of it; the rest belongs to me."

"Hugh, you're a cheat! Do you mean to say I'm not to have a chair?"

"Oh, yes, I'll spare you a chair!"

[165]

"And that little table's my *own*; so now, Mr. Hugh!"

"So it is; what a bore! Why I was perfectly counting on that table when your things were gone off it."

"Very likely; you're sold there! But what shall I do to wash on? I dare say Agnes has got a basin somewhere."

"There's an odd set in here!" exclaimed Hugh, springing up and hurrying into the box room next door.

John followed quickly enough, and to his joy found an old mahogany stand which would do very well for the crockery which he discovered on a top shelf covered with dust.

"How shall we wash it?" he asked.

"I'll get our towels; Agnes'll *have* to give us clean ones."

They pulled about the boxes and things till they had secured their prize, and then went back in triumph to John's "castle."

"Hugh, I shall never have you in here," said John.

"Grateful," said Hugh.

"I mean, without asking."

"Oh, of course not! Nor I you."

"I must come in when I want my things out of my drawer," said John ruefully.

"What a pity we can't find a chest to match that jimcrack in the corner!"

[166]

"Let's go and see."

No sooner said than done, and sure enough there was a set, but on looking every drawer was full.

The boys were now so thoroughly in the spirit of the thing that they forgot all caution, and after a rapid glance to see where they could stow the things, out they bundled them heap on heap, till the drawers were empty, then they paused and looked at each other.

"I say, Hugh, we are in for it now; I don't believe we ought to have done this."

"It can't be helped now; we must eat humble pie."

"Look here, I won't do a thing more of this sort. Here's a precious mess for that poor Agnes, and I scouted the idea of giving her any trouble."

"She'll be home soon, if she isn't now."

"Then let's make haste. Fetch up my things. Hugh, will you?"

Hugh ran down and soon brought up a drawer full, and hastened off for another. For the girls to see it before it was accomplished and in order, would spoil everything.

"Now for the window," exclaimed John; "and my pictures. I say, there's no carpet."

"Do without."

"I shall have to."

"There's lots in there," nodding towards the box-room.



"Out they bundled them heap on heap, till the drawers were empty."

p. 166.

"Not I," answered John. "I'm not fond of this sort of thing, Hugh; I wish I'd waited." [167]

"Well, make the best of it now," said Hugh; "we have done no *harm*."

"Oh, no!" said John.

John was hard at work on the window, making his towel in a worse mess than it was before, when an exclamation from Hugh made him turn round.

"They're coming up," he called excitedly. "All three of 'em. I can hear their voices."

For Jane had said, in answer to Agnes's enquiry as to where her brothers were:

"Right at the top, I believe, miss."

So up they came, and all Hugh's "humble pie" was demolished before he had time to produce it.

"John! Hugh! whatever *are* you after? Are you gone out of your wits?"

"Come and look, Agnes," said John, hurrying to her, "and don't be vexed, there's a darling. I wanted a room to myself, and we meant to surprise you; but when we'd got half through it I began to fear you would be more than surprised."

An hour or two ago Agnes would have been vexed, almost angry; now she had been to the Fountain of Strength, and coming refreshed from Him she answered gently:

"I can't say that I would rather you had done it, but I'll try to like it if you wish."

She kissed their hot, dusty faces and looked round. [168]

"If you point out anything wrong I'll say 'Hugh did it,'" smiled John, "and he is to say 'John did it' if he is blamed."

"I see," answered Agnes.

"Isn't it a nice little room?"

"Very. I wonder mother never thought of it before."

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Hugh. "Now, Agnes, you'll not mend that; it's as good as a whole volume of permission. Let's go down to dinner after that."

But as they went down John said to her:

"You're not really vexed, dear girl?"

"No, dear," she answered, looking up brightly. "If you are pleased, I'm sure mother will not mind till she has time to think about it. But, John, the dirt——"

"Oh, that'll come all right," said John.



[169]



CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAGIC OF LOVE.

The next morning everything was bustle till the boys were off; for imperceptibly they had got a little later during holiday time, and on this first day of school they discovered it, in finding no breakfast ready when they came down.

But by dint of a little hurrying, and a decidedly short meal for the boys, they really did start in time.

"Thanks to you girls," said John gratefully, as he caught up his books and ran off. "My last term at school, Agnes!"

"Now here we are once more," said Agnes with a deep sigh, gazing round on the room, which looked ever so much more empty than if her brothers had just started for an ordinary walk.

"Now I suppose *we* have to begin school?" said Alice with a wry face. But the wry face was put on, and the frown was gone—gone from her heart too; for yesterday she had looked once more at the text on the wall, and had yielded herself again to its influence.

[170]

"I was thinking," answered Agnes, "that we would give ourselves a holiday to do John's room."

"Jolly!" exclaimed Minnie. "I can clean and scrub beautifully; Jane says I can."

"We must all help to surprise him, for they will be home at one, and we have plenty of work before us."

"What shall we begin on?" asked Alice.

"I have to do a very quick piece of business, which if you like you may come up to the top to superintend; and then, Alice, I want you to go round to the picture-frame shop in Southampton Street, and tell the man I will send for it at eleven o'clock."

She ran upstairs without explaining further, followed by the wondering girls; and then they saw her take down John's cardboard text very carefully, and wrap it in paper.

"Now, Alice, as fast as you like there and back; and Minnie must go with you."

"But you will do ever so much before we come," said Alice, looking disappointed.

"No; I am going down to see about the dinner, and if you are not long will wait till you return."

"But will the man understand what is to be done?"

"Yes; I went about it yesterday, and I told him it was a secret, and so he would have to do it expeditiously."

[171]

"I see. Well, come along Minnie, the sooner we are off the sooner we shall be home."

In half an hour's time they were back, and met Agnes coming up from her confabulations with the cook.

"Just in time," she said, smiling.

"Should you have begun without us?" asked Minnie.

"Not till ten."

"That's all right. Now then, Agnes, what are we to do?"

"Go down and ask Jane for some cloths, and brooms, and a tin basin."

Minnie opened her eyes, but Alice ran off.

They met Jane on the stairs with a pail and scrubbing-brush. "Are you going to help us?" asked Alice; and Jane nodded with a smile.

Up they all went, and found a bright little fire burning in the already clean grate of John's little attic.

"Oh!" exclaimed Alice; "whoever thought of that? What's it for?"

"What are fires generally for?" asked Agnes.

"To warm people," said Minnie.

"And don't you think we should feel it rather cold to be up here for three hours, straight off, this bitter day?"

"So we should. Well, Agnes, what first?"

[172]

"Jane is to properly clean that smeary window; and we will wash the chest of drawers and the washstand and the crockery while she is doing it."

"Whatever for?"

"To get off the dirt," laughed Agnes.

"I can't think why things get dirty!"

"It's London smoke," remarked Alice sententiously.

"And dust," said Agnes. While she spoke she handed two aprons to her sisters, and a clean piece of flannel each; and before they could ask any more questions she had lifted out the drawers, one by one, and was sweeping the ledges inside. Then she began washing and rubbing and drying in fine style, the little girls imitating her example as fast as they could.

But Jane's window was done before their furniture, and she immediately began to clean the paint round the room.

"This paper looks dirty, miss. I wish you would let me rub it with some bread."

"I do not mind," answered Agnes, looking up from under the washstand, "if you think it will look better."

"I'm sure it will, miss."

"I'll run for the bread," exclaimed Minnie, starting up.

"Mind you say a stale loaf, miss; and a knife!" called Jane, turning round, to see only the tip of one of Minnie's curls flying down the stairs.

[173]

Then all was sober work for another half-hour, and after that came a pause.

"This floor looks black; it wants doing, I think," remarked Minnie.

Jane laughed.

"Don't you think it does, Jane?" said Minnie soberly. "Look there, and there; but it's all over."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Jane.

"Then do you mean to do it?" asked Minnie.

For answer Jane went down on her knees and began to scrub, while Agnes led the way into the box-room, the children following to see what she was going to do.

She drew out the roll of carpet which Hugh had fixed his eyes on the day before, and they carried it to the landing and spread it open under the skylight.

Agnes selected what she wanted for her purpose, and told Alice to roll the other up again. Then she produced from her pocket a skein of thread and two large needles, and handing one to Alice, she proceeded to thread her own.

"What am I to do?" asked Alice.

"Sew up that bit of seam that is ripped."

Alice sat down on the ground, and after some difficulty succeeded in reducing a rent of a quarter of a yard to a pretty respectable seam.

"Well done!" said Agnes. "Now let us have another look. Oh, yes, there is a place torn! and while

I do it will you two go round again for my frame? The room will be dry, and we can do the final touches all together." [174]

There could be no objection to this, and the children hastened away just as Jane came out with her pail and brushes. "It's all done, miss," she said.

"Then, when they return, will you come up again, Jane? I shall not want you till then."

They all ran down, and left Agnes alone. She finished the carpet, and then went into the box-room and looked round.

"Oh, Master John," she said, half aloud, "of course you were not going to give me anything to do; but just look here! However," she added, smiling to herself, "perhaps *this* was Hugh!"

So patiently she set herself to make the best of it. She folded, and sorted, and pinned up in bundles, and had nearly finished tidying the great heap, when the children came hurrying back, bearing in their arms a nice Oxford frame, through the glass of which shone out what was to be John's life-text, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

"Oh, Agnes," said Minnie, "did you buy it with your very own money?"

"Don't you like it?" answered Agnes.

"I wish *I* had one," said Alice wistfully.

"If you will paint one for yourself I'll have it framed," promised Agnes.

Then up came Jane, and once more they set to work. [175]

Agnes found a piece of red valance for the top of the window, and got out two clean toilet-covers, and they laid the carpet down, hung the frame on the wall, and Alice dusted the mantelshelf. Then they paused and looked round.

"It is lovely!" said Minnie. "I wish it were *my* room."

"So does everybody," said Alice. "Is it really finished, Agnes?"

"I think so. Now as we still have half-an-hour, let us go and see what can be done for poor old Hugh. His room looks rather forlorn as it is."

"So it does," said Minnie; "and the place where John's bed stood is all bare."

"He wants a table *dreadfully*," said Alice, "now John's is gone."

"Well, I haven't one for him; but we will go and have a look, while Jane sweeps a little; perhaps we may find something which will serve for one."

They went back into the box-room. "Here is a little round table with one leg off," announced Alice, from the depths of a corner.

"Is the leg there?"

"I can't see it."

"Then it's of no use."

"My eyes are sharp," exclaimed Minnie, jumping over the boxes and bundles and sliding down somewhere near Alice.

"How you startled me!" said Alice; "but however sharp your eyes are, Miss Minnie, you won't find it here." [176]

But she did for all that. She went to work carefully, poking about with her little hands without disturbing anything, and when the others had given it up as hopeless, a joyful cry from her announced its discovery.

They were just fitting it into its place and considering whether Hugh would be able to mend it, when the two boys came rushing up the stairs from school.

"I'm moved up!" exclaimed Hugh, long before he got in sight of his sisters. "Whatever are you girls doing up here? Isn't that jolly for me?"

They congratulated him on this joyful piece of school news, and then Agnes, who had been holding the handle of John's door in her hand all this time, said solemnly:

"John, the dirt in your room has disappeared by magic!"

"*How?*" asked John.

"By magic—look!"

She flung the door open, and the boys crowded in.

"Well," exclaimed John, "words fail me!" Then he paused as his eyes fell upon his text in its new setting.

"Agnes!"



CHAPTER XXII.

MINNIE'S SECRET.

And so the time slipped away. Alice and Minnie found that when once they made up their minds to regular lessons with their sister they began to take an interest in them, and were really happier than they would have been to be idle.

Soon after they began one morning, aunt Phyllis's sweet face peeped in at the door.

"Any admittance, my dears?" she asked.

"Oh, do come in!" said Agnes, springing up to welcome her.

"I have thought of something which I am burning to propose to you," said Miss Headley, coming round to kiss each in turn.

"What is it?" asked Minnie, laying down her pen and pushing back her curls.

Aunt Phyllis did not answer till she had seated herself by the fire, then she said:

"You go out for your 'constitutional' directly after your early dinner, do you not, dears?"

"Yes," said Alice, "and I wish we didn't."

Aunt Phyllis shook her head. "It is quite right, I have not come in to alter that, little puss."

Alice pouted just a very little, and Miss Headley went on:

"You come home about three, do you not?"

"Half past," said Agnes.

"What do you do then?"

"We work, or learn lessons, or gape, or are idle," said Alice, smiling a little.

Aunt Phyllis smiled too. "How should you like to bring your work in with me? I have an interesting book I want to read to you, and if Agnes is busy, or tired, she can stay at home, and I'll see to your work. Eh, Alice and Minnie?"

"Lovely!" answered Minnie.

"Awfully nice!" answered Alice.

And Agnes murmured thanks with a sigh of relief, for that hour in the day had been one of her trials.

"What work have you in hand?" asked their aunt.

"Minnie is making a doll's dress, and I have just finished some horrid white calico."

"It must be real, sensible work," said Miss Headley. "How about stockings?"

"Agnes mends those," answered Minnie; "it nearly made her cry to teach Alice, and she gave it up; and I haven't begun to learn."

Agnes looked rather ashamed.

"Oh, auntie," she explained, "I know I got out of patience, but I would ten times rather do it myself than make Alice."

"I don't believe I was very nice over it," said Alice in a low tone; "but it is nasty work!"

"Very," answered aunt Phyllis, so sympathizingly that Alice looked up amazed. "But only because you do not know how to do it. We will get over that in a little while. So both of you come in this afternoon with all the stockings you can find, and we will begin in good earnest."

"All?" said Minnie.

"Yes; then I can take my choice. I shall not give you bad ones to do first, they are too difficult for

beginners."

"You are too kind, auntie," said Agnes, getting up to kiss her gratefully; then adding, "Didn't I tell you I was good for nothing? Haven't even patience to help Alice mend stockings!"

"You are not going to the looking-glass again, my child?" she whispered, smiling.

Agnes smiled too, though she was crying quietly. She knelt down and poked the fire, and got rid of her tears somehow before anyone but her aunt guessed about them, and then she turned round to the table.

"I am afraid I am hindering," said aunt Phyllis, getting up; "but I am like a child when I have a piece of news—I must tell it."

So she went, and the girls settled down again.

[180]

"Is aunt Phyllis like a child?" asked Minnie.

"I think she is," answered Agnes; "her heart always seems fresh and young."

"I wonder why?" said Alice.

"She reminds me of those words," answered Agnes, "Like a tree planted by the rivers of waters."

"Why?"

"Her soul is always drawing nourishment from Jesus; that's how it is. Like the roots of the tree by the rivers of waters."

"Oh," said Minnie, looking up, "I never thought of that before!"

"What *are* you doing?" exclaimed John, coming into the dining-room after school that morning, and bouncing down in a chair by his little sister's side.

"I'm—, but I shan't let you see, John," exclaimed Minnie, covering her little pink hands over her occupation.

Vainly, however; for she could not hide the large sheet of newspaper over which she leaned, nor the chips of red and blue paper which peeped out in every direction.

"I see," said John, "here's an end of a matchbox, and here's a bit of yellow paper, and here's a star of red, cutout pretty well, Miss Minnie, and here's—"

"John, you are too bad," said Minnie, laying her head down as an extra protection. "I didn't want you to see till it's done, and I should have put it all away by one o'clock. I wish you had not come home so early." Minnie spoke in a grumbling little tone, which made John inclined to tease her more than ever.

[181]



"John, you are too bad," said Minnie, laying her head down as an extra protection."

p. 180.

So he laid hold of one of the long golden curls which fell over the treasures, and went on while he twisted it round his fingers—

"And here's a pair of scissors, and here's the inside of the matchbox, and here's—why, here are at least a dozen babies!"

What with her hair being touched, which she particularly disliked, and what with her secret being found out, as she thought, Minnie burst into tears.

"Hey-day!" said John. "Why, Minnie, you goose, I wasn't really meaning to tease you. Look here, I'll sit still here for as long as you like, and shut my eyes up as close as a mole (if they do), while you put all that precious rubbish away; and what's more, I won't tell a soul about it; no, not if I—suffer for it."

Minnie looked up through her tears to see if John were in earnest, and found him sitting, as he said, with his eyes shut and his hands folded in front of him in a comical manner.

She gave a little laugh, and raised her head; but added, with the remains of a sob, "You're a *dreadful* tease, John, and I did want nobody to know."

[182]

"Nobody to know," echoed John, in a mock tone; "is that a pun?"

"You know it isn't; I don't try to make puns."

"Have you put away yet, Miss Dignity?"

"Nearly. Now, John, *have* you guessed—?"

"Know everything," answered John, "just as well as I knew when I entered the room."

"How much is that?" asked Minnie.

"Everything," answered the boy. "Come, Minnie, my eyes ache with keeping shut so tight."

Minnie found it would be better to hurry her preparations than to answer the brother, who was for ever getting the best of her; so in a minute all was away, and John, with a sigh of profound relief, looked up.

Minnie left the room, and John walked to the comfortable fire and whistled.

It was not long, however, before a little step was heard on the stairs, and Minnie appeared again.

She was walking more slowly than usual, and her head was bent down, while her curls failed to hide the deep flush on her cheeks.

"John," she said slowly, "I am sorry I was cross about those boxes; I'll tell you all about it."

"I don't care to know, Minnie," said John, looking down on her; "it was only to tease you a little bit, but I didn't think you would really mind."

Minnie leaned her head against her brother's arm caressingly, and answered softly:

[183]

"I oughtn't to have minded; especially—"

"Especially what?" asked John kindly, guessing by his little sister's manner that she was very much in earnest.

"I was trying to do something for Him, you know, John, and it seemed so horrid of me to be vexed and cross over that."

"I understand," said John.

"I was making—but I will show you all about it."

Minnie went to the cupboard, and drew out the odds and ends which had attracted John's attention.

"See here," she said, spreading them out on the table, "I have been collecting all the matchboxes for months, and now I have bought these two dozen little china dolls, and Agnes gave me some white wadding; and I am going to cover the boxes with this paper, and put little ornaments at the bottom and top—so; and then—but here is one quite finished."

Minnie opened a bright little box, and there inside, on a bed of whitest, softest wool, a little china doll reposed, clothed in a wrapper of pink silk; under her head a little roll of wadding served as a pillow.

"Doesn't she look cosy?" asked Minnie, patting her complacently.

"And what's it for? How can it be for the Lord Jesus?"

"Why, don't you remember how we mended those toys before Christmas, and sent them to the children's ward of the hospital?"

[184]

John nodded.

"So that's just what I'm going to do now; here will be two dozen little presents, and it will make two dozen little children happy for a whole day, I shouldn't wonder."

"It is a very good thought," said John.

"And that's why I was sorry I'd been cross over *that*."

"Yes," answered John thoughtfully; "but I believe, Minnie, if we were more anxious to please Him, we should be far more careful than we are about *everything*. All that we do is really working for Him, and I do believe—I'm saying it to myself, and not to you, Minnie—that if we watched more, and realized His loving presence more, we should live very differently from what we do."

Minnie slowly shut up her boxes, and when John had finished speaking she said softly, "We must try more than ever."

"And get Him to help us more than ever," added John.



[185]

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE END OF THE JOURNEY.



es, they came home.

The three months did pass away at length, and the last part of it flew much quicker than the beginning.

"We shall arrive, 'God willing,' about the end of March, as we sail by the *Sardinia* on the 15th; but you will get a telegram from Liverpool when we land," wrote their father.

John could understand that "God willing" better now than he did when they went away; for he had taken that "will of God" as the one object of his life.

It might be—it would be—with many failures, but "What wilt Thou?" was now his one question, and to do it his one desire.

Of strong character, with a will which was difficult to curb, he found it an inexpressible comfort to yield to One who was so strong, that there could not be a question of His power; and when once the great surrender had been made, he walked along holding the guiding hand with tender love and reverence.

[186]

One morning, just as Agnes and her sisters were sitting down to lessons, a telegram was brought in by the new maid, whom Agnes had found and installed more than a month before.

"We are in Liverpool, and hope to reach you about five o'clock," it said.

Minnie and Alice got up and jumped round the room as the only suitable expression of their feelings; and as for Agnes, her thankfulness was quiet, but too deep for words.

"May I rush in and tell grandmamma?" exclaimed Alice, when her wild capers had come at last to a stop.

When she saw that Agnes gave permission, she snatched up the telegram and was off in an instant.

"I don't believe she'll wait for her hat and jacket," said Minnie, acting policeman.

"Oh, yes, she will! They are hanging in the hall."

Minnie peeped out of window, and in another moment Alice, dressed in some style, emerged from the door, ran down the steps, and was admitted to the next house.

"Must I go on with school?" asked Minnie rather forlornly.

"No; to-day is too good a day for it not to be a holiday. Clear up the books, Minnie, and surprise Alice." [187]

Minnie did not need twice telling; and then she and Agnes went upstairs to prepare their parents' room, to see that the new Jane made a nice fire, and that everything was well aired and ready.

While they were busy Alice came back from next door with a long, heavy roll in her arms.

"The hearthrug?" questioned Agnes.

"Yes. We are not to lay it down till everything is done and the room perfectly ready. Oh, it *is* a beauty! I never saw such a pretty rug."

Then at one o'clock the boys came home, and great were the laments that the travellers might arrive before they returned from afternoon school; but this had to be endured, and, as Alice suggested. "Perhaps, after all, they *wouldn't*."

Nor did they. The boys closed up with greater speed than they had ever done before, and raced home. As they turned the corner of their street a cab was rattling along in front of them, and, half-fearing and half-hoping, they set off to outstrip it, which they managed to do, and arrived too breathless to speak, but with glowing, happy faces, in time to open the cab door, just as a shout from Minnie at the window announced the fact of the arrival to those inside the house.

"Father," said Hugh, when, late that night, after their parents had come back from visiting their grandmother next door, they all sat together round the fire, as if loth to part, "Father, would you mind telling us all, now we are together, what you said to me upstairs?" [188]

His father gave a quick look at him; for upstairs Hugh had told him all about that episode with Tom on Christmas-day.

"Would you rather, dear boy?" asked his father.

"Yes; I was not brave once, but I'll try to be brave now."

His mother held out one hand to him, the other being clasped by Agnes, while Minnie sat at their feet, leaning against them, though she disdained the idea of being in the least sleepy.

John sat by his father, his eyes shining with a serene light.

"Well, my boy," said Mr. Headley, after a moment, only pausing to draw Alice close to his side, "what I said upstairs was this, I think. Mother and I decided long ago for ourselves, that, seeing the misery which drink brings to thousands in our country, we will not, for our part, take one drop of it except as medicine. We will do our best to prove that men and women can live, and be happy too, without it. If you read the fourteenth of Romans, you will see all the arguments set down which influenced us. Feeling that this is for us a sacred duty, we have brought you up in the same way, expecting you as a matter of obedience to abstain while you are young. By-and-by you will be able to judge more wisely than you can now." [189]

"Then explain to them where I was wrong, father."

"You failed in obedience—and in courage," added his father.

"Yes," answered Hugh very gravely, "I saw that very soon, but not as plainly as you have put it, father."

"I have sometimes felt it a great comfort in the perplexities which arise in our hearts and lives to do as Paul says—'Take the shield of *faith* whereby we may quench the fiery darts of the wicked one'—and I believe it is applicable to you too, Hugh.

"When questions come up which I cannot answer, I say to myself, 'I will take refuge under my faith in my heavenly Father; if I hide under *His* shadow, the fiery darts will have no power. He has said so; He knows best.'

"So you, Hugh, take refuge under your faith in your earthly father, say 'he knows best;' and while you are young it will help you to find an answer, when otherwise you might be tempted to do what you would grieve in after years to have done."

"But you don't think drinking a glass of beer or wine wrong in itself, father?"

"Wrong for me, thinking as I do; wrong for you, because of my convictions, and my commands to you concerning them." [190]

Hugh seemed entirely satisfied; for was he not forgiven? And then they turned to other subjects, though Alice's eyes were looking wonderingly at them all.

"Mother," she said suddenly, as Mrs. Headley's white shawl fell from her shoulders, "you have a different dress on from any you had before you went away, and it—has *crêpe* on it."

"Yes," answered her mother gently; "but my heart is not in mourning."

"But—," said Alice, not liking to ask more.

"Yes," Mrs. Headley went on, "I had a lovely two months with her; 'cheered her heart,' she said. We had time to talk together of all the way we had been led. I learned from her how faith in God can triumph when outward circumstances are anything but prosperous (for she had not let me know all these years what a struggle she had had with poverty); and then I was, through dear father's kindness, able to arrange things a little better for her, and to add several comforts to her lot. Directly I got there, dear father let me buy an invalid chair for her, and many things which eased her exceedingly, and I prepared to leave her with the prospect of her never being so straitened again; for he allowed me to arrange for her to receive that little money I have of my own, which added to her small income would make a great difference.

"But the Lord knew best; and though He let me do all this for my mother, that my heart might be comforted, He took the care of her into His own hands. [191]

"Just a week before we sailed I was sitting with her one evening when she said, as quietly as we are talking now:

"My dear, the Lord's been very good to give you to me—long ago, and now. The journey is almost over, but *He* is at the end.'

"I only clasped her hand in answer; for she looked tired, and I thought she would sleep; and so she did—but it was to wake to find herself at the end of her journey, and with Him."

"Dear mother," said John, coming over to kiss her, "why did you not tell us? We have been too cheerful and noisy for you to-night."

"No," she answered. "I would not have saddened our return to you for anything. I am *not* sad, children. If the dear Lord had asked me I could not have chosen anything I should like better. To have been with her for nearly two months, and then to have watched her go home, what could heart wish more?"

"Then is that why Agnes has been crying since you came?" asked Minnie, turning round to look up in her sister's tearful face.

"Perhaps," said her mother; "for Agnes guessed at once, and it has come as sad news to her; but she will rejoice in my joy soon."

"I'm glad you went," said Hugh, "even though—"

[192]

"Even though what, dear?" asked his mother.

"Even though I've had such a lot to learn while you've been gone."

"So have I," said John humbly; and Mr. Headley added:

"But the lessons learned in our Father's school are golden lessons, and can never fade away."



LONDON:
JOHN F. SHAW AND CO., PATERNOSTER ROW.

John F. Shaw & Co.'s Publications.

STORIES BY CATHARINE SHAW.

ALICK'S HERO. Large Crown 8vo, cloth. Illustrated. 2/6.

"Mrs. Shaw has added to our delight in noble boyhood, as well as to her own reputation, in this most charming of her works."—*The Christian.*

ONLY A COUSIN. Crown 8vo, 2/6.

"In our excavations among heaps of tales we have not come upon a brighter jewel than this."—
Rev. C.H. SPURGEON, in *Sword and Trowel*.

THE GABLED FARM; or, Young Workers for the King. Crown 8vo, 2/6.

"A charming story, wherein the children are described naturally." *Evangelical Magazine*.

IN THE SUNLIGHT AND OUT OF IT. A Year of my Life-story. Crown 8vo,
2/6.

"One of the pleasantest books that a girl could take into her hand, either for Sunday or week-
day reading."—*Daily Review*.

NELLIE ARUNDEL. A Tale of Home-life. Crown 8vo. Illustrated. 2/6.

"We need scarcely say that Mrs. Shaw holds out the light of life to all her readers, and we
know of few better books than those which bear her name." *Record*.

"MOTHER MEG"; or, The Story of Dickie's Attic. New Edition. Crown 8vo,
2/6.

"The prettiest story Mrs. Shaw has yet written."—*The Standard*.

JACK FORRESTER'S FATE. New Edition. Crown 8vo, with Illustrations,
2/-.

CAUGHT BY THE TIDE; or, Prison Bars. New Edition. Crown 8vo, 2/-.

SOMETHING FOR SUNDAY.

SELECTED BY CATHARINE SHAW.

Price ONE SHILLING each.

"With such work there will be no dull Sundays."—*The Presbyterian*.

1st. OUTLINE TEXTS FOR PAINTING. 48 Texts in Packet.

2nd. HAPPY HOURS WITH THE BIBLE. Devices for Bible Searching.

3rd. ECHOES FROM THE BIBLE. Illustrated Papers for Bible Study.

4th. ALPHABET TEXTS for PRICKING or PAINTING. Specially for the Little Ones.

5th. MESSAGES FROM HEAVEN. Small Outline Texts for Painting. (Suitable for Flower
Missions.)

6th. GLEAMS OF GLORY FROM THE GOSPELS. Subjects for Bible Study.

7th. A LARGE THOUGHT IN A LARGE WORD. Outline Texts for Painting.

8th. SCRIPTURE FEAR NOTS. Texts for Painting.

9th. "ALL THINGS ARE YOURS." Outline Texts for Painting, with Hints for Bible Searching.

10th. TEXTS FOR THE CHILDREN. For Pricking or Painting.

STORIES BY E. EVERETT-GREEN.

ARNOLD INGLEHURST. A Story of the Fen Country. Large Crown 8vo,
gilt edges, 5/-.

"It is a very remarkable book, and the descriptions of life in the Fen Country are very life-like
and good.... Altogether it is a fine idea and well penned."—*The Guardian*.

EUSTACE MARCHMONT. A Friend of the People. Large Crown 8vo, gilt
edges, 5/-.

"This is a pleasant and suggestive West Country story. The authoress has written many
graceful tales of high purpose, but we doubt if she has ever turned out a more finished narrative
than this. Eustace is a very well-drawn character, and his cousin bride a delightful
creation."—*Whitehall Review*.

HER HUSBAND'S HOME; or, The Durleys of Linley Castle. Large Crown

8vo, gilt edges, 5/-.

"Some of the scenes are particularly effective."—*The Spectator*.

A SOLDIER'S SON AND THE BATTLE HE FOUGHT. Crown 8vo, with Illustrations, 2/6.

"... We lay it down with a feeling of gratitude that the boys of to-day have the opportunity of reading so inspiring a book."—*The Record*.

PAT, THE LIGHTHOUSE BOY. Crown 8vo, with Illustrations, 2/6.

"A very pleasing story of lighthouse life, with something of the desert island charm."—*The Guardian*.

MARJORIE AND MURIEL; or, Two London Homes. Crown 8vo, with Illustrations, 2/6.

"A capital story, very prettily got up."—*Record*.

HIS MOTHER'S BOOK. Crown 8vo, 2/-.

"Little Bill is so lovable, and meets with such interesting friends, that everybody may read about him with pleasure."—*Spectator*.

LITTLE FREDDIE; or, Friends in Need. Crown 8vo, 2/-.

"There is real pathos in this story."—*Liverpool Courier*.

BERTIE CLIFTON; or, Paul's Little Schoolfellow. Crown 8vo, 2/-.

"Seldom have we perused a tale of the length of this with so much pleasure." *The Schoolmaster*.

FRIENDS OR FOES? A Story for Boys and Girls. Cr. 8vo, 2/6.

"This very pleasant and thoroughly wholesome story."—*Spectator*.

RUTH'S LITTLE LADY. Crown 8vo, with Illustrations, 2/-.

"A delightful study of children, their joys and sorrows."—*Athenæum*.

OUR WINNIE; or, When the Swallows Go. Crown 8vo, with Illustrations, 1/6.

"The beautiful life of little Winnie is one which all children will do well to take as an example."—*Banner*.

SHADOWLAND; or, What Lindis Accomplished. Crown 8vo, with Illustrations, 1/6.

"A charming story for children, very prettily got up."—*Record*.

STORIES BY AGNES GIBERNE.

Author of "Sun, Moon, and Stars," &c.

OLD COMRADES. Large Crown 8vo, with Illustrations, 2/6, gilt edges.

"Dorothy Tracy is one of the most delightful young ladies to whom we have ever been introduced."—*Bookseller*.

"An excellent story for girls by one of their favourite writers." *Pall Mall Gazette*.

LIFE TANGLES; or, The Journal of Dorothea Frith. Large Cr. 8vo, 3/6.

"A most wholesome book for girls."—*Saturday Review*.

"A very well written tale; not sensational, but thoroughly interesting." *Freeman*.

LIFE IN A NUTSHELL: A Story. Crown 8vo, 2/6.

"A very refreshing tale of devotion and care."—*Record*.

"The story of a girl's life and love pleasantly told."—*Athenæum*.

IDA'S SECRET; or, The Towers of Ickledale. Crown 8vo, 2/6.

"Agnes Giberne has never written a prettier tale. The characters are made to live, and there is a refreshing tone running throughout the whole."—*Record*.

WON AT LAST; or, Mrs. Briscoe's Nephews. Large Crown 8vo, with Illustrations, 3/6.

"The treatment is so admirable, we can understand Miss Giberne's book being a help to many."—*Athenæum*.

THE EARLS OF THE VILLAGE. Large Crown 8vo, 2/6.

"A pathetic tale of country life, in which the fortunes of a family are followed out with a skill that never fails to interest."—*Scotsman*.

THE OLD HOUSE IN THE CITY; or, Not Forsaken. Cr. 8vo, 2/6.

"An admirable book for girls. The narrative is simply written, but there is a good deal of quiet force that deserves special notice."—*Teachers' Aid*.

FLOSS SILVERTHORN; or, The Master's Little Handmaid. Crown 8vo, 2/6.

"An admirable study of a simple-hearted, well-reared, and self-sacrificing child."—*Spectator*.

MADGE HARDWICKE; or, The Mists of the Valley. Cr. 8vo, 2/6.

"An extremely interesting book, and one that can be read with profit by all."—*The Schoolmaster*.

WILL FOSTER OF THE FERRY. Crown 8vo, 2/6.

"We are glad to see this capital story in a new shape."—*Record*.

TOO DEARLY BOUGHT. Crown 8vo, with Illustrations, 1/6.

MISS PRIMROSE. Crown 8vo, with Illustrations, 1/6.

STORIES BY EMMA MARSHALL.

A TRUE GENTLEWOMAN. The Story of Dame Margaret Hoby. Large Crown 8vo, with Illustrations, 5/-.

"A charming gift book, especially to girls in their teens."—*The Record*.

"The life-story of a beautiful and high-minded woman."—*The Christian*.

THE END CROWNS ALL. A Story of Life. Large Cr. 8vo, 5/-.

"A most exciting story of modern life, pervaded, as Mrs. Marshall's tales always are, by a thoroughly wholesome tone."—*Record*.

"Lively and light; as nearly a novelette as need be."—*Times*.

BISHOP'S CRANWORTH; or, Rosamund's Lamp. Large Cr. 8vo. Illustrated, 5/-.

"This is a delightful story, with a considerable flavour of romance."—*Baptist*.

"A delightful tale for girls."—*Record*.

LITTLE QUEENIE. A Story of Child-life Sixty Years Ago. Large Crown 8vo, with Illustrations, 3/6, gilt edges.

"Little Queenie is particularly pleasing."—*Saturday Review*.

DEAN'S COURT; or, Lady-bird and her Friends. Large Crown 8vo, with Illustrations, 3/6.

"A bright story of child-life."—*Scotsman*.

"Lady-bird is one of the most charming of Mrs. Marshall's child heroines." *Bookseller*.

BLUEBELL. A Story of Child-life Nowadays. Large Crown 8vo, with

Illustrations, 3/6.

"... Children will be captivated with it."—*Footsteps of Truth*.

"One of Mrs. Marshall's best stories."—*British Weekly*.

"Charming in style and high in tone."—*Guardian*.

LITTLE MISS JOY. Crown 8vo, Illustrated, 2/6.

"A pretty picture of childish influence."—*Brighton Gazette*.

HURLY-BURLY; or, After a Storm comes a Calm. Crown 8vo, with Illustrations, 2/-.

"Simply and touchingly told."—*Aberdeen Journal*.

"A bright attractive story."—*Alliance News*.

CURLEY'S CRYSTAL; or, a Light Heart Lives Long. Crown 8vo. Illustrated, 1/6.

"The vehicle of good thought as to life and its duties."—*The Christian*.

ROBERT'S RACE; or, More Haste Less Speed. Crown 8vo. Illustrated, 1/6.

"A capital little book for boys."—*English Churchman*.

PETER'S PROMISES; or, Look before you Leap. Crown 8vo. Illustrated, 1/6.

"A pleasing story told with much pathetic power."—*Record*.

CLEMENT AND GEORGIE; or, Manners makyth Man. Cr. 8vo. Illustrated, 1/6.

A LITTLE CURIOSITY. With Illustrations. Crown 8vo, 1/6.

LONDON: JOHN F SHAW & Co., 48, PATERNOSTER ROW,
E.C.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES:

Obvious spelling and punctuation errors repaired.

Page 103: "any-rate" changed to "anyrate"

Page 138: "spellbound" changed to "spell-bound"

Numerous mismatched quotes and end quote missing punctuation errors ignored.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LEFT TO OURSELVES; OR, JOHN HEADLEY'S PROMISE ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of

the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE

THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and

it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.